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Eva Schmidt

# Modest Nonconceptualism

## Epistemology, Phenomenology, and Content

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## Epistemology, Phenomenology, and Content

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# Chapter 1
# Introduction

The purpose of this book is to defend the claim that experience has nonconceptual content. This claim can be understood as stating that one can have a certain experience even if one neither possesses nor exercises the concepts that would specify its content. By contrast, to say that experience has conceptual content is to say that in order to have an experience, one needs to possess and exercise the concepts that characterize its content. The debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists concerns the question of whether the content of experience is conceptual or nonconceptual; underlying the debate are conflicting intuitions about how cognitively sophisticated subjects have to be to have genuine, phenomenally conscious experiences.

There has been a heated debate on this topic over the last 20 years or so. The central proponent of nonconceptualism is Christopher Peacocke, most notably in his *A Study of Concepts* (Peacocke 1992), other important nonconceptualists are Michael Tye, Sean Kelly, Richard Heck, José Bermúdez, Adina Roskies, and Tim Crane. The most influential conceptualist is John McDowell; the central *locus* of his views is his *Mind and World* (McDowell 1994a). Conceptualism is also defended by philosophers such as Bill Brewer, Jeff Speaks, Rocco Gennaro, and, with qualifications, Alex Byrne. The historical roots of the debate date back to the likes of Kant, who famously held that "intuitions without concepts are blind" (Kant 1787/1970, A51/B75)—a claim that is echoed by the conceptualist view that a subject cannot undergo genuine content-bearing experiences unless she possesses the corresponding concepts. Influential predecessors of the current debate in the twentieth century are Sellars (1956) on the conceptualist side and Evans (1982) on the nonconceptualist side. In addition to offering a sustained defense of a version of nonconceptualism I call 'Modest Nonconceptualism,' this book provides an overview over some of the central controversies in this rather complex debate.

The debate over nonconceptual content is, fundamentally, a debate about the relation between experience and thought and, in particular, between perceptual



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experience and belief. It can be seen as one strand in the currently thriving field of philosophy of perception. A presupposition shared by all sides is that both perceptual experiences and beliefs have intentional content—it is a debate that is relevant for proponents of the content view.[1] Here are some worries underlying the debate. For one, philosophers who take both experience and thought to be intentional try to account for the differences between them. For instance, Tye (1995) has appealed to the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual content to explain why, even according to his representationalist view, the (conceptual) content of thought is not phenomenally conscious, whereas the (nonconceptual) content of experience gives rise to the phenomenal character of experience.

For another, epistemologists aim to give an account of how we can have knowledge, justified beliefs, or, in general, thoughts about the external world. From this epistemological standpoint, the notion of nonconceptual content can be seen as problematic. Foundationalists assume that, since the world has an impact on us via perceptual experience, perceptual content must play a central role in the justification of our empirical beliefs. But postulating two different kinds of content for perceptual experience and belief makes it harder to see how perception can play a justificatory role. Consequently, epistemologists tend to defend the claim that experience and belief have the same kind of content. Perceptual experience can exert rational constraints on my beliefs about the external world (i.e., it can make it rational for me to have some beliefs, and irrational to have others). So one should suppose that perceptual experience must have the same kind of content as those beliefs. By this line of reasoning, my visual experience of the cat sitting on the couch has the same kind of content as my belief that the cat is sitting on the couch, and it simply passes this content on to the belief. The belief endorses the content of the experience, and thereby, the experience justifies the belief.

There are other, related considerations that are more in favor of nonconceptual content for experience: An account of concept acquisition might require that we introduce a kind of nonconceptual content for experience that is prior to our concepts, as is suggested by Roskies (2008, 2010).

Further, there are phenomenological considerations according to which we cannot plausibly ascribe just any kind of content to perceptual experience. Contents that are limited by the conceptual repertoire of the subject might be too limited to do justice to the finely grained, detailed contents of perceptual experience.

Finally, the participants in the debate disagree about how cognitively sophisticated individuals have to be to have genuine, content-bearing and phenomenally conscious experiences. Some philosophers are motivated by the intuition that experience is prior to and independent of thought, so that infants and non-human animals incapable of thought can have full-fledged experience. Others are guided by the opposing intuition that a subject needs to be able to appreciate things in thought in order for them to enter the content of her experiences.

[1] The term ‘content view’ is due to Brewer (2006, 165).

Mostly, the debate contrasts *perceptual* experience with *belief*. This is probably not just owed to the fact that it is led by philosophers with an eye to philosophy of perception. What lends special significance to perceptual experience and belief is that they both purport to represent the world to be a certain way. By comparison, some types of experiences (e.g. moods) are not so uncontroversially representational, and some kinds of thought do not purport to represent the world as it is, but as it should be (e.g. my hope that it will get warmer). For the epistemological question, the main issue is how perception can play a role in justifying belief, so the focus on these types of mental states is clearly appropriate.

I think it is a worthwhile further question whether all types of experience and thought have nonconceptual or, respectively, conceptual content. Ideally, the conceptualist would have to show that *all* experience, to the extent that it has any content at all, is necessarily conceptual. I will not press him[2] on this issue, however. Instead, I will follow the customs in the debate and compare perceptual experience and belief; when I use the term 'experience', I will refer to perceptual experience in the following chapters.[3]

The book is structured as follows. In Chaps. 2 and 3, I clarify the notion of nonconceptual content. I begin, in Chap. 2, with an explication of the notions of content, of concepts, and of conceptual abilities. In Chap. 3, I defend the participants in the debate over nonconceptual content against the allegation that they misconceive their own notions of conceptual and nonconceptual content. I argue that conceptual states indeed have conceptual content, and nonconceptual states nonconceptual content.

In Chap. 4 through 8, I examine some of the most popular and central arguments for and objections against nonconceptualism.

First, I discuss and evaluate several arguments in support of nonconceptualism, viz. the arguments from fineness of grain and from situation-dependence and inextricability (Chap. 4), the argument from contradictory contents (Chap. 5), and the arguments from memory experience, from animal and infant perception, and from concept acquisition (Chap. 6).

The arguments in Chap. 4 point out advantages of nonconceptualism over conceptualism with respect to how well each theory can accommodate phenomenological data. First, our visual experiences present us with contents that are more finely grained than our conceptual repertoires can account for (Sect. 4.1). Second, phenomena such as the constancy of color perception are problematic for the claim

[2] In the hope that this will make my argumentation easier to follow, especially where I directly contrast the two views, I will assign the male pronoun to the conceptualist and the female pronoun to the nonconceptualist throughout the book.

[3] A note on terminology: It is more precise to speak of 'perceptual experience' and of 'undergoing a perceptual experience' rather than speaking of 'perception' and 'perceiving'. For I am trying to defend claims about perceptual experience in general, independent of whether it is veridical or not, while 'perception' and 'perceiving' are often taken to be *factive*. To keep things shorter, I will sometimes ignore this terminological issue here and use the expressions 'perception'/'perceptual state'/'perceptual experience' and 'perceive'/'undergo a perceptual experience' interchangeably.

that the content of visual experience is constituted by the perceiver's concepts. For the content of an experience, which simultaneously has constant and situation-dependent aspects, cannot be fully accounted for in terms of concepts (Sect. 4.2).

The argument from contradictory contents in Chap. 5 takes as its starting point the claim that contradictions cannot be believed, due to the conceptual and propositional content of belief, but that there are de facto cases of contradictory experiences. It is concluded that perceptual experiences do not have conceptual or propositional content.

In Chap. 6, I discuss the argument that a perceiver can remember experiences of things for which she did not possess any concepts at the time, and that the experience therefore must have been nonconceptual (Sect. 6.1). Next, I argue that some animals and infants who are not possessors of concepts plausibly have experiences which are partly the same as those of adults. This goes to show that the experiences of adults must have (partly) nonconceptual content, for so do animal and infant experiences (Sect. 6.2). The last argument explored in this chapter shows that the conceptualist, but not the nonconceptualist, has problems accounting for the acquisition of some of our demonstrative concepts (Sect. 6.3).

Then, I defend nonconceptualism against the two main objections that have been leveled against it, one starting from epistemological considerations, the other from considerations concerning the objectivity of genuine content. In Chap. 7, I relate the epistemological objection to Sellars's 'myth of the given' (Sect. 7.1) and reply to three different versions of the conceptualist claim that we need to conceive of experience content as conceptual or propositional in order to grant perceptual experience a role in the justification of empirical belief. The first version of the epistemological objection is that perceptual content cannot be placed in the logical space of reasons if it is nonconceptual, which is to say that it cannot play a role in justification (Sect. 7.2). The second version presupposes that justification is always inferential and points out that nonconceptual and non-propositional content is not fit to enter inferential relations (Sect. 7.3). The third version argues that justification requires the subject's cognitive access to her reasons, but that nonconceptual experiences cannot plausibly be accessed cognitively (Sect. 7.4).

In Chap. 8, I reject the conceptualist's contention that only he can account for the objective import of perceptual experience. I provide my own account of how nonconceptual content can be concerned with the mind-independent world and thus be objective.

In Chap. 9, I will briefly present the results: My version of nonconceptualism—'Modest Nonconceptualism'—is victorious against the opposing conceptualism.[4] Let me now provide a brief sketch of my view's central characteristics to give the reader a better idea of it.

[4]Nonetheless, my defense will be relevant for the success of nonconceptualism generally. Where my arguments concern my particular proposal, I will make this clear by speaking of Modest Nonconceptualism; otherwise, I will pit nonconceptualism (more broadly) against conceptualism.

According to Modest Nonconceptualism, all perceptual experiences are at least partly nonconceptual, i.e., every perceptual experience has some nonconceptual content, and it is possible to undergo a perceptual experience without exercising all the concepts characterizing its content.[5] As this last claim indicates, I maintain that perceptual experience is a nonconceptual mental state (as captured by the "state view") and also that perceptual content is nonconceptual (as captured by the "content view").[6] My view explicitly confronts the issue—which has been raised by critics such as Byrne (2005), Speaks (2005), or Crowther (2006)—of how claims about nonconceptual states relate to claims about nonconceptual contents. It presupposes the so-called 'state-to-content principle' ((S2C) for short), which I defend in Sect. 3.4.2. According to this principle, a mental content is conceptual if and only if undergoing a state with this content requires the subject to exercise all the concepts needed to specify the content.

As to the employment or exercise of *concepts*, 'concept' talk is here taken to be anchored in the idea that concepts are ascribed to subjects on the basis of conceptual abilities that they possess and exercise. My elucidation of this claim (in Sect. 2.2.1.3) focuses on the subject's ability to re-identify that of which she possesses a concept, as well as on her ability to draw inferences involving the concept and on her meeting the Generality Constraint introduced by Evans (1982).

As to the nature of nonconceptual *content*, I will argue that it consists in scenario content (see Peacocke 1992), which is both nonconceptual and non-propositional.[7] However, I will also insist that the content of perceptual experience, *externally* conceived, consists in the worldly states of affairs represented by an experience. This external content of perceptual experience is crucial to my account of perceptual justification in Chap. 7.

A final point is that Modest Nonconceptualism holds that the Autonomy Thesis is correct: The capacity of perceptual experience to present the perceiver with a section of the world is not derived from the perceiver's ability to appreciate, by way of an additional conceptual mental state, what she is confronted with. Rather, an account of how perceptual experience can have genuine representational content has to look to the subpersonal-level organization of the underlying representational states.

Now, let me turn to an elucidation of the notion of nonconceptual content.

[5] This corresponds to (General NC-ism$_{min}$) in Sect. 3.3.

[6] See Heck (2000) for this terminology. The two views will be elucidated in Chap. 3.

[7] Note that the debate is usually framed as being concerned with the (non)conceptuality of perceptual content only, but that some of the arguments exchanged in the debate also raise the question of whether it is propositional or non-propositional.

# Chapter 2
# Content, Concepts, Concept Possession

In this chapter, I will try to clarify the notions of *mental content* and of *concept*. For either one, there are competing views, which I will outline before stating my own position on content and concepts. The chapter provides an important background to the following chapter, where I will elucidate the Modest Nonconceptualist's notion of nonconceptual content.

## 2.1 Content: Correctness Conditions, Propositions, Internal Perspective

What is the content of a mental state? What might count as the content of my belief that it is raining outside, or as the content of my visual experience of the rain outside my window? I am not sure that ordinary ways of talking, or common sense, provide much of an answer to such questions. Non-philosophers might be more likely do ask questions such as, 'What (exactly) is it that I believe?' or 'What (exactly) is it that you see?' Ordinary answers to such questions might be, e.g., 'that it is raining outside', or, 'the rain outside my window'.

Correspondingly, in case I believe that it is raining outside, the standard philosophical claim will be that the content of my belief is just whatever is picked out by the sentence part starting with 'that', in my example, *that it is raining outside*. Similar things might be said about my seeing that it is raining outside my window: the content of my seeing is expressed by the phrase starting with 'that', viz. *that it is raining outside my window*.

A more committed answer to the question *what is mental content?* is presented by Crane: "To say that any state has content is just to say that it represents the world as being a certain way." (Crane 1992b, 139) Mental content is thus tied to a certain



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representation of the world. As I will discuss in more detail later, an essential feature of representation is that it can go wrong, that there can be accurate and inaccurate representations of the world.

With respect to perceptual experience in particular, it seems that common sense does not commit us to its having a representational content in this sense. Look at the original example of my visual experience of the rain outside my window (note the 'of'-construction). It does not contain a 'that' clause that might suggest that a content is ascribed to the experience. Rather, it is immediately concerned with the objects that I see. Our ordinary thought about perceptual experience, then, is easily compatible with a naïve or direct realism, according to which the objects perceived themselves (in my example, the rain outside my window) partly constitute the perceiver's conscious experience.[1] Direct realism, together with metaphysical disjunctivism (which denies that veridical and hallucinatory perceptual experiences are fundamentally of the same kind) has gained some support in recent years. There is an ongoing discussion about whether we should conceive of perceptual experience as content-bearing or as a content-less direct confrontation with our surroundings.[2] This book will not be concerned with that discussion. Instead, I take it, both conceptualists and nonconceptualists presuppose that perceptual experience has a content. I will, for the most part, assume that this is correct and not question the tenability of the content view.

### *2.1.1 Correctness Conditions*

The standard philosophical understanding of 'content' is based on truth conditions, or, in the case of experience, on *correctness* conditions. That a mental state has a content is to say that it is true (or correct) under certain conditions, and false (or incorrect) under other conditions.

For most philosophers, the distinction between correctness conditions for experience and truth conditions for belief seems to be no more than a terminological issue. According to them, the distinction implies no more than that experience content corresponds to the facts under different conditions than belief content. If the content of my belief that there is a cat on the couch consists in a Fregean proposition, but the content of my experience of the cat on the couch consists in a Russellian proposition, there will be a systematic difference between the content of both mental states. (For example, the ascription of content to the belief might not allow for substitution of expressions with the same reference *salva veritate*, but the ascription of content to the experience might.) A motive to speak of correctness conditions here might be simply that it would sound odd to say that an experience is true.

[1] See, for instance, Martin (1997/2009).

[2] See, among others, Brewer (2011); Siegel (2012), and some of the contributions to Nanay (2010). Interestingly, Brewer, who used to be a major proponent of the view that perceptual experience has conceptual content, has abandoned what he calls the 'content view'.

Hutto (1998), on the other hand, seems to mean something more substantial by this distinction. He thinks that nonconceptual content is not truth-conditional and that it can be explained on the basis of Millikan's biosemantics. Hutto thinks that nonconceptual content does not represent the world to be objective (or independent of the perceiver) and that it does not presuppose notions such as *truth* or *reference*. Nonconceptual content does not involve modes of presentation, so there are no senses involved which would determine the reference of experience. Also, this kind of content is not included in a holistic network of belief contents, and it is not propositional. Hutto tries to explain nonconceptual content by appeal to biosemantics and evolution; this kind of content is correct insofar as it furthers the evolutionary success of a creature. Conceptual content, on the other hand, relies on the notion of objective truth, which is created, à la Davidson, by a sophisticated language one shares with other speakers.

As is common in the debate, I will speak of truth conditions for belief and of correctness conditions for experience in the following. I think that at least one of the following features of a content should lead us to conceive of it as having truth, rather than mere correctness conditions: A mental content has a subject-predicate, propositional structure and manages (or fails) to correspond to the facts because its elements are tied together in a quasi-sentential way by this propositional structure. It has the kind of structure that allows for inferential or logical relations between distinct such contents. (There is the possibility of truth-preserving transitions between such contents.) We should speak of correctness or incorrectness when a mental content does not have any of these features, and then we should also say that it is not a propositional content.[3] Scenario content, which I will talk about below, is one example of a mental content with correctness conditions.

The idea behind correctness or truth conditions is that something can only count as content if there are conditions under which it is correct (true), and other conditions under which it is incorrect (false). When I visually experience that it is raining, this experience is correct if it is raining in my vicinity, and incorrect if it is not. As McDowell (1994a, 25) says, what we need for a mental state to have empirical content is an "external rational constraint" on it—there are certain ways the world can be that are consistent, and other ways that are inconsistent with the correctness (truth) of its content. That it can be correct or incorrect (true or false) is an essential feature of content. Perception purports that the world is a certain way in representing it to be that way. But it can do its job only if there are ways that it could misrepresent the world, if it can fail to do its job correctly.[4] If we know under which conditions an experience represents the world correctly, and under which

[3]Crane (2009, 458,462) argues that the content of experience is non-propositional for the related considerations that it cannot stand in logical relations and that truth-functional operators cannot operate on it. He distinguishes between truth conditions and accuracy conditions, where the latter are more inclusive than the former.

[4]This is part of what is meant when philosophers claim that belief or perception is *normative*—more on this in Sect. 7.2.

conditions it does not, we will know a lot, or maybe even everything there is to know, about its content. The content of this experience, then, can either be seen to consist in the conditions themselves that would make the experience correct (on an extensional understanding of content) or in a function that determines the conditions under which it would be correct (on an intensional understanding of content).

### *2.1.2 Propositions and Other Abstract Objects*

Related to this understanding of content, there is the notion of content as a kind of *abstract object*, typically a proposition. It is widely accepted that the content of beliefs, desires, and the other attitudes consists in propositions. These are abstract objects that we grasp when we think a thought. One argument for this claim is that different people can think a thought with the *same* content (e.g., both me and you can think that it is raining). But this would not be possible if the contents of both our thoughts were literally in our minds; if this were the case, they might be similar contents, but not the same. So, contents or propositions must be mind-independent. Since they are not concrete objects like rocks or trees either, (following Frege) there must be a 'third realm', the realm of abstract objects, to which propositions and mental contents in general belong. Philosophers who believe in propositions think that they are the primary bearers of truth (or falsity).[5]

All philosophers involved in the debate over nonconceptual content subscribe to the view that belief content consists in some sort of proposition; in addition, they all seem to locate experience contents in the realms of abstract objects even though not all of them agree that they are propositions. Here are the different kinds of abstract object that experience content is typically identified with: Fregean propositions, Russellian propositions, sets of possible worlds, and scenario content.[6] I will provide a brief characterization of the mentioned propositional contents, which most readers should be familiar with. I will give more details on scenario contents, which are probably less familiar and might therefore need more of an introduction.

[5]This is as a good a place as any to clarify how I am planning to indicate whether I am talking about an object or property itself, a content or proposition (or an element thereof) that is about the object or property, or a linguistic expression referring to either one. I will refer to the object or property itself by using normal script, to the content or proposition by using italics, and the expression by using single quotation marks. So I will refer to the orange cat, *the orange cat*, and 'the orange cat', respectively. In using italics in the described way, I follow, e.g., Peacocke (1992) and Tye (2000). I am aware that this may not be ideal—for instance, it does not do justice to the fact that I can express the same proposition in different languages. Sometimes, italics will be used to emphasize an issue. I will sometimes employ single quotes to indicate that I do not endorse the implications of an expression that I use—as, e.g., a qualia eliminativist who writes about 'qualia' to stress that he does not believe in their existence. I use double quotes to mark shorter quotations; longer quotations will be indented.

[6]I leave out two further kinds of abstract objects, viz. Chalmers's Edenic content and Peacocke's protopropositional content; both of them are varieties of Russellian propositions. (Chalmers 2006; Peacocke 1992)

#### 2.1.2.1 Fregean Propositions

Fregean propositions are constituted by Fregean senses or modes of presentation (cf. Sect. 2.2.1.2 below). So, to hold that experience content consists in Fregean propositions is to say that the content of experiences consists of a string of Fregean senses. This gives us an intensional understanding of experience content—the content is an abstract object which determines the conditions that have to obtain in the world for it to be true. On the Fregean view, experience content has a subject-predicate structure and is fine-grained: Substituting co-referential terms in an experience ascription may change the truth value of the sentence ascribing the experience. For example, the Fregean proposition *the cat is sitting on the couch* consists of the Fregean senses *the cat*, *the couch*, and *is sitting on*. When combined to form the proposition *the cat is sitting on the couch*, they determine the circumstances under which this proposition is true, namely those in which the cat is sitting on the couch.

#### 2.1.2.2 Russellian Propositions

There are two kinds of Russellian propositions that one might identify with the content of an experience, object-involving and existential ones. Object-involving Russellian propositions are structured complexes of particular objects, properties, and relations. Existential Russellian propositions are also structured complexes, but they involve only properties and relations, no particular objects. The perceptual content *the cat Charlie is sitting on the couch* can be analyzed as an object-involving proposition constituted by the objects *the cat Charlie, the couch,* and the relation *is sitting on*, or as an existential proposition that does not include any particular object, but involves only the claims that *there is an object picked out uniquely by 'the cat Charlie', there is a couch*, and the relation *is sitting on*.

When I see that the cat is sitting on the couch, I bear a two-place relation to the proposition *the cat is sitting on the couch*. When I *hallucinate* the cat sitting on the couch, the content of my experience will still be a proposition involving a cat, a couch, and the relation between them. According to Tye, it will be a structured complex consisting of these entities even though they might not actually exist or not be related in the way the proposition specifies. Tye defines a Russellian proposition as "a possible state of affairs built out of worldly entities." (Tye 2005, 224)[7]

For the Russellian, content is an *extensional* matter. It is identified not with entities that determine under which circumstances a content is correct, but with the objects, relations and/or properties themselves that are constitutive of the

[7]How can a mental content be constituted by entities that do not actually exist? The way to make sense of this is to think of Russellian propositions (at least of those that are identified with the contents of hallucinations) not as sets of complete possible worlds, but as states of affairs constituted by possible objects and non-instantiated properties and relations.

circumstances under which it is correct. A Russellian proposition is true iff the objects, properties, and/or relations really are as specified in a sentence expressing the proposition. Consequently, Russellian propositions are less finely grained than Fregean ones.

#### 2.1.2.3 Sets of Possible Worlds

If we analyze experience content as sets of possible worlds, we will end up with propositions à la Stalnaker and Lewis.[8] The content of an experience will consist in those possible circumstances under which the experience is accurate. The content of my perception of the cat sitting on the couch consists of the set of possible worlds in which there is a cat sitting on the couch in front of me. For these are all the possible situations in which my experience would be correct; all the other possible worlds, in which the cat is not sitting on the couch before me, are excluded by the content of this experience. This is also an extensional understanding of content, since content is understood here as the set of (possible) circumstances itself that would make an experience correct (and not as the function that determines which circumstances these are). Again, we are dealing here with a coarse-grained notion of content.

#### 2.1.2.4 Scenario Content

All of the above contents are familiar propositional contents. By contrast, to say that experience content consists in *scenario content*, as defended by Peacocke (1992), is to deny that it is propositional. I will give more detail on this notion of content because I expect it to be less familiar to the reader.[9]

To get a grip on scenario content, we can start by thinking about how a visual experience presents the subject with her environment.[10] For instance, right now, my visual experience informs me that there is a computer screen right in front of me, that the computer screen is sitting on a desk with papers, a keyboard, books, and a teacup on it; it conveys that there is a window to my left, behind which university buildings are visible, that there is a wall to my right, on which a calendar is hanging,

[8] The view is summed up in Stalnaker (1998), for instance.

[9] Peacocke's exact view is that experience content is made up from scenario content and from what he calls 'protopropositional content'. This sort of content is supposed to account for more finely-grained distinctions in experience content than scenario content alone can allow for. In his newer papers, Peacocke does not mention protopropositional content as such, but talks about *ways* of perceiving. I will ignore this kind of content in the current list.

[10] I am leaving out some of the detail of Peacocke's presentation of these ideas on pp. 61–67, e.g. with respect to different spatial types we need to include in one scenario content because of perceivers' lack of acuity, non-visual sensory modalities, the temporal dimension of perceptual experience and movement.

etc. All these things are present to me in my visual experience, and scenario contents capture their experienced presence at the level of content.

A *scenario* is a conglomerate of spatial properties, more specifically, a way in which surfaces, objects, their properties, and the like can be located in the space around the perceiving subject. Peacocke (1992, 61) calls this a "spatial type". To specify a scenario content, we have to start by fixing an origin (normally in the perceiver's body, e.g. her center of gravity) and axes along which the specified surfaces, properties, etc. are to be arranged. These axes will typically given by directions from left to right of the perceiver, plus up and down, and back and front. As Peacocke often puts it, we have to specify how every point in the space around the perceiver is to be *filled out* with the help of these axes and their origin. Matching the phenomenology of the subject's experience, we need to specify where along the axes which kinds of objects or surfaces with which properties are located. This provides us with a spatially structured property type.

For instance, to specify the scenario content of my visual experience right now, we would have to start by giving an origin, say, in my chest, specify axes, viz. left-right, up-down, forward/backward. With this framework, we are able to say where in relation to the axes the computer screen, the keyboard, the university buildings, walls, etc. (or their surfaces) are located, and what colors, texture, and so forth these things (or their surfaces) have. We can also specify the location and brightness of the relevant light sources.

A perceptual experience whose content consists in a spatial type as described has a correctness condition—the experience is correct if the spatial type is actually instantiated in the subject's immediate environment, if things are located in the space around the perceiver in the way that is specified by the content. The way that things are actually arranged in the space around the perceiver is a *scene*; if the actual scene in front of the perceiver falls under the spatial type constituting the perceptual content, then the experience is correct. If there is no scene in front of the perceiver that falls under the spatial type given in the perceptual experience, then the experience is a hallucination (or if it is just some of the properties involved in the scenario fail to be instantiated, an illusion). We might call this *correctness by instantiation*.

So, my visual experience has as its content the described spatial type, or arrangement of objects/surfaces in a volume of space organized around an origin and certain axes, which are marked as center of the chest, up/down, etc. If the actual world—obviously, we have to look at the actual volume of space around me, and have to match the origin and the axes exactly—is an instance of the spatial type, if there is a computer screen, a keyboard, university buildings, and the like in the right locations, then my perceptual experience is correct.[11]

[11]Note that it is important to Peacocke that scenario contents are evaluable for correctness or incorrectness "outright" (Peacocke 1992, 64). We should be able to determine immediately whether a scenario content is correct, and not have to assign a certain place and orientation as part of the process of evaluating its correctness. To make this possible, he introduces the notion of a *positioned*

As I see it, scenario content aims to reflect as closely as possible the way in which perceivers are directly immersed in their environments, including the objects, properties, etc. that surround them. The objects (or surfaces) and their properties involved in a scenario content should be taken immediately to reflect the objects and properties present to the subject of the experience. It tries to respect the three-dimensional spatial character of the perceived world. A scenario content is not propositional and does not have a subject-predicate structure, but rather a spatial structure. Peacocke's scenario content is closely related to what Hanna (2008, n.d.) calls "essentially nonconceptual content", a kind of content that is "*inherently* non-conceptual in formal constitution or structure." (Hanna n.d., 83)

Still, there are some interesting parallels between scenario content and possible-worlds propositions. According to Tim Crane,

> Peacocke's conception of the correctness condition for scenarios may be usefully compared with the idea of truth conditions for propositions, conceived of as sets of possible worlds. (This is an analogy only: Peacocke's theory should not be seen as a version of possible worlds semantics for perceptual content.) Consider the set of worlds *S* that is the proposition expressed by the sentence 'Pigs fly'. *S* contains all those worlds in which pigs fly. For the belief that pigs fly to be correct, the actual world must be in that set. The correctness of the belief's content therefore amounts to the actual world's membership of *S*. Similarly, the correctness of an experience's scenario content amounts to the scene's membership of the set of ways of filling out the space around the perceiver that constitutes the scenario. (Crane 1992a, 10/11)

For those who claim that the content of belief consists in sets of possible worlds, the content of the belief that pigs fly consists in a proposition, viz., in the set of all possible worlds in which pigs fly. This belief is true in case the actual world is a member of this set of possible worlds. Paralleling this, the scenario content of a perceptual experience consists in a spatial type, in a way for things and properties to be located around the perceiver. This type has as its tokens different instantiations of the relevant spatial arrangement, i.e., different scenes. The experience is correct in case the actual scene in front of the perceiver is an instantiation of the spatial type. I hope the similarities are clear—belief content in terms of the set of all possible worlds in which something is the case is paralleled by perceptual content in terms of a set of instances of filling out the space around the perceiver (of the same spatial type); truth in terms of the actual world's being a member of the set of possible worlds is paralleled by correctness in terms of the actual scene's being a token of the relevant spatial type.

Mental contents, conceived of as possible-worlds contents, can be true or false—this is just a matter of the actual world's being a member of the set of possible worlds that is the content of the mental state in question. Similarly, perceptual contents as scenario contents can be correct or incorrect. If the actual scene around the perceiver is an instantiation of the spatial type that constitutes the scenario content in question, then this content is correct.

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scenario, which is a scenario combined with a fixed place (including origin and orientation) and a fixed time.

Note that the notion of scenario content plausibly provides an intensional understanding of content: The spatial property type fixes under which circumstances an experience is correct, viz. under those circumstances in which the spatial properties constituting the spatial type are *instantiated* in the perceiver's environment. At the same time, this gives us a coarse-grained view of experience content: There is no distinction to be made between different modes of presentation of the same object or property that is experienced.

To my mind, scenario contents provide the best account for experience content.[12] I do think that, for visual experience at least, they need to be amended so that, rather than merely involving surfaces with certain features (as is Peacocke's original view), they include three-dimensional objects and their features. For it visually appears to me that there are certain objects surrounding me, not certain surfaces. This amendment should be unproblematic. Note that this is not to say that *particular* objects could be included in a scenario content, since we are talking about spatial *types*.[13]

These are some of the main options for experience content. The participants in the debate typically ascribe Fregean propositions as *belief* content—the motivation for this will become clearer below.[14] Conceptualists are typically Fregeans with respect to experience content as well. The nonconceptualist camp is not unified in this regard. Tye (2005), for instance, suggests that we go with a Russellian view of experience content; Heck (2000); Peacocke (1992) and, with qualifications, Bermúdez (1998) endorse scenario content for perceptual experience. Stalnaker (1998)—who may or may not be described as a nonconceptualist, see below—identifies perceptual content with possible-worlds propositions. Importantly, the nonconceptualist's choice of perceptual content will also determine whether she will thereby endorse propositionalism or non-propositionalism for perceptual experience.

### 2.1.3 Internal Perspective

At this point, it should be clear that mental content is standardly identified with certain kinds of propositions or non-propositional abstract entities. Looking at the different options available, one might wonder *which* type of proposition or non-propositional entity one ought to pick. What kinds of considerations can we, as

[12]For this reason, Modest Nonconceptualism will incorporate the claim that the nonconceptual content of perceptual experience consists in scenario content.

[13]The issue is mentioned in Peacocke (1992, 241). Peacocke (2015) allows that scenario contents may involve objects. Bermúdez (1998) has a detailed account of how to think of the objects involved in a scenario content.

[14]See, e.g., Peacocke (1992, 67), McDowell (1994a, 107), Brewer (1999, 25). As far as I can tell, they are all deeply influenced by the discussion of Frege's views in Evans (1982).

theorists, turn to that might constrain our ascription of a certain kind of proposition (or non-propositional entity) to a certain kind of mental state? I will present two different answers to such questions in this section.

Let me start by taking a brief detour. Some philosophers of mind raise the question of why humans generally make reference to mental states, in particular propositional attitudes, and their contents. Further, they question whether they are justified to do so, or whether this practice ought to be abandoned. Some doubt that propositional attitude ascriptions are ever true. The issue is sometimes framed as the question of whether folk psychology—our ordinary practice of explaining and predicting others' behavior by reference to their mental states—commits us to the existence of mental states and their contents, and if so, whether the theory is correct.[15] Folk psychology is treated as a kind of folk theory, which tries to interpret and predict observable phenomena (viz. people's behavior) by appeal to theoretical, unobserved entities (viz. their mental states). This kind of view is called the "theory theory" (Gopnik and Wellman 1992, 146).

Discussions in this area sometimes emphasize the instrumental value of propositional attitude ascriptions. Our practice of ascribing particular mental states with particular contents to the people we interact with is quite useful, maybe even indispensable, when it comes to understanding and predicting their actions. My friend says that she will pick me up tomorrow at noon. I need to understand her as expressing her honest intention to do so in order to anticipate and to appropriately react to her actions (i.e., in order to get ready on time). In light of this, it seems natural to treat mental states and their contents as intimately tied to behavior we try to predict and understand. It might seem that the only justification we have for ascribing mental states and their contents is their use for predicting and interpreting the behavior of others. Also, it might look like, in ascribing certain mental states and contents to someone, we are only answerable to the actions that are thereby explained and predicted.

I will call views motivated by such considerations 'third-person views' of mental states and mental content. On the views I have in mind, which mental states and contents are correctly ascribed to a subject depends solely on the predictive and interpretative purposes of an outside observer who tries to make sense of the subject's behavior from the third-person perspective. Views in this family are defended by Dennett (1971, 90), who holds that we should adopt the "intentional stance" towards systems if we can best predict their behavior this way, or by Davidson (1980, 221/222), according to whom our attempts of interpreting another person in the most rational way are what fixes her propositional attitudes and contents.

[15]Helpful overviews of debates in the vicinity can be found in Botterill and Carruthers (1999), Goldman (2006), and Ravenscroft (2010). For discussion of belief in particular, see Schwitzgebel (2014). My 'third-person views' introduced below correspond to interpretationism/instrumentalism in Schwitzgebel and to anti-realism in Botterill & Carruthers, for instance.

With this, we might contrast the 'naïve' view that a subject is immediately confronted with her own mental states and their contents from the first-person perspective. They are not theoretical entities ascribed for explanatory or interpretive purposes as part of an overarching theory, but things the subject naturally encounters as she believes, perceives, desires. As such, we need to make room for them in an adequate account of the mind. They are used to predict and explain the behavior of others only in the second instance. I will call such views 'first-person views' of mental states and mental content. According to views of this sort, which kinds of mental states or mental contents a subject is appropriately said to have is (partly) constrained by her own internal perspective on her mental states, by the subjective character that her mental states have.[16]

Why is the debate over the status of folk psychology relevant to my question? When deciding which kind of proposition (or non-propositional entity) we ought to ascribe as the content of a subject's experiences or thoughts, we need to be clear on whether we should be guided only by instrumental considerations that come into view from the third-person perspective, or whether we need to do justice to the subject's first-person perspective as well. This distinction is especially significant to the extent that a proponent of a third-person view does not take the subject's reports of her mental states into account or at face value.

As Duhau (2011) argues, such reports may be irrelevant, and taking them into account counterproductive with respect to some theoretical purposes. In presenting the so-called "Publicity Constraint", Duhau points out that mental content is often appealed to in accounts of "successful linguistic communication" (p. 7) and understanding of others, and in unified explanations of human action. The respective explanatory purposes rely on the ascription of extensional, coarse-grained mental contents that ignore how different subjects conceive of things. For, plausibly, different subjects will conceive of things in very many, slightly different ways. If these differences were to enter one's theory of mental content, they would preclude subjects' full linguistic understanding of one another. Also, they would make it impossible to provide one and the same action explanation for different agents.

On the other hand, the proponent of a third-person view may emphasize that the observable behavior that constrains content ascription involves the subject's honest verbal reports of her mental states and their contents and respects other kinds of behavior that closely reflect the subject's first-person perspective. If this is the case, there may well be "harmony between the two approaches" (Peacocke 1992, 37).[17]

[16] As far as I can see, such views fit quite well with the competitor of theory theory, viz. simulation theory. Defenders of simulation theory—such as Goldman (2006)—hold that we predict and interpret the behavior of others by putting ourselves in their shoes, by simulating what we would believe or desire in their situation. This naturally presupposes that we have a prior first-person familiarity with mental states in our own case, which we put to use in gaining an understanding of others. (See, for instance, Gopnik and Wellman 1992, 145/146.)

[17] Note that Peacocke is concerned with harmony between Davidson's radical interpretation view and his own view of concept possession.

The relevant contrast, then, is between the first-person view and the third-person view that indirectly respects the first-person perspective, on the one hand, and a third-person view that does not respect the subject's perspective, on the other.

Both third-person and first-person views surface at certain points in the debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists. Third-person considerations are used by some[18] to motivate a Fregean view of belief content—this will play a bigger role in Chap. 5. In the current context, it is more important to note that philosophy of perception usually works on the presumption of a first-person view, and that this is reflected in the debate over nonconceptual content.

Focusing for now on the content of perceptual experience, it is typically assumed that our ascriptions of perceptual content have to be *phenomenally adequate* (Chalmers 2006; Siegel 2013). That is, they ought to respect the phenomenal character of perceptual experience, how the world strikes the perceiver in conscious experience. Not only does perceptual experience represent things as being a certain way, it presents things as being a certain way to *the perceiver*. The content of a perceptual experience is "what is conveyed *to the subject* by her perceptual experience" (Siegel 2013, my emphasis). When I look out my window and see that it is raining, I can focus on or attend to the content of my experience. The content of the experience consists of the things that I appear to be confronted with while I look out my window. Intuitively, then, the content of my visual experience consists of, for instance, raindrops falling down, the dirt on the window, the houses across the street, the color of the houses, etc.

According to first-person views of perceptual experience, we should try to stay as true as possible to how the world strikes the perceiver in perceptual experience in our ascriptions of perceptual content. This requirement backs ideas such as that perceptual experience is transparent, that perception is our openness to the world, or that perceptual content is best captured in terms of the objects and their properties that we are apparently confronted with in experience.[19]

The transparency claim states that when a subject tries to focus on the phenomenal character of, say, her visual experience of the clear blue sky, all she finds is the property of being blue of the sky *out there*. Try as she might, she will not be able to pin down any intrinsic qualitative properties of her visual experience itself, instead she will see right through these purported qualities to the apparent properties of things out there. (Hence "transparency"—see Tye 2000, 46/47.)

Relatedly, that experience is our "openness to the world" (McDowell 1994a, 111) is the claim that experience puts us right in touch with the world, without intermediaries, such that we appear to interact with our environments directly. Experience puts us right in the middle of things. The relevance of phenomenal character here is that the phenomenal qualities we are confronted with in experience seem to be the properties of the objects out there themselves. For any particular color

[18]Gunther (2001) and Heck (2007) accept such considerations. Peacocke (1992, 36/37) takes them to be compatible with his view of conceptual thought content.

[19]For a good overview of these ideas, see Crane (2011).

experience, Chalmers puts this by saying that intuitively, it "seems to *relate* us to a specific property." (Chalmers 2006, 61/62, my emphasis) That is, in perceptual experience, we seem to be related directly to things out in the world and their properties. Correspondingly, philosophers sometimes speak of the *phenomenal* content of an experience as its "representational content that is determined by the experience's phenomenal character." (Chalmers 2006, 50)[20]

Strawson (1981, 43/44) holds that we cannot give an accurate description of the character of a visual experience except by reference to the external objects and their properties apparently involved in the experience. According to him, "talking about lights and colours, patches and patterns [instead of independently existing objects and their qualities] ... would be to falsify the character of the experience". This, again, highlights the tight connection between phenomenal character and external objects (and their properties) represented.

Participants in the nonconceptualism debate aim to respect such intuitions about perceptual experience.[21] Their ascriptions of content to experience are constrained by the described phenomenological considerations, thus tying content ascription to the phenomenal character of experience. That this is so will be especially prominent in Chaps. 4, 5, and 8.

How about ascriptions of belief content? It is often thought that belief (and thought generally) has no phenomenal character.[22] I will not take a stand on this issue here, but allow that this may be so. In this case, there is no phenomenal character that a proponent of a first-person view needs to (or indeed *can*) take into account in her content ascriptions.

Nonetheless, there is room for a first-person view of thought content. For instance, one might argue for Fregeanism with respect to thought content on the basis of the subject's perspective. For if we were to take into account only truth conditions, as on an object-involving Russellian account of mental content, we would not be able to capture some distinctions between different belief contents that we should plausibly make. For instance, assuming that Peter Parker/Spiderman exists, the Russellian has to hold that Mary Jane's belief that

($B_1$) Spiderman is a superhero

as well as her belief that

($B_2$) Peter Parker is a superhero

have the same content. For each of these beliefs is true if and only if one and the same person is a superhero—they have the same truth-conditions.

The proponent of a first-person view will point out that, from Mary Jane's perspective, these beliefs seem to have *different* contents. If she introspects her

[20] Also, see Siewert (1998).

[21] This will be brought out in my discussion of the phenomenological worry in the following chapter.

[22] For the current debate on cognitive phenomenology, see Bayne and Montague (2011).

beliefs, she will take them to be different beliefs about different states of affairs; according to her, they have different contents, as indicated by the fact that she could plausibly agree with ($B_1$) but disagree with ($B_2$). Even if we do not trust Mary Jane's judgment that these are beliefs about different states of affairs (since they are both really just about one and the same person being a superhero), it might be argued that we should trust her judgment about her own beliefs. If she thinks that these are two different beliefs with two different contents, our theory of content should reflect this difference. It should ascribe two different contents, as the Fregean view does.[23]

Let me put it this way: Even if belief has no phenomenal character, it seems clear that it has some sort of subjective, introspectible character. (This is meant to be the very weak claim that there is something to a belief in virtue of which the believer can tell whether two belief instances have the same content or not.) According to first-person views, this character constrains which kinds of content we can appropriately ascribe to a subject's mental states.

To wrap up this section, I have presented two families of views which propose different standards for determining which kind of proposition (or non-propositional abstract object) to ascribe to a subject's mental states: third-person views and first-person views. In the debate, the content of perceptual experience is usually fixed by appeal to the perceiver's perspective directly. It is a presumption universally shared by conceptualists and nonconceptualists that the subject's perspective needs to be respected in this context.

Ascriptions of *belief* content are more often based on interpretative purposes with respect to observable behavior. Third-person views, then, play a bigger role in this context. Note, however, that the subject's internal perspective is usually brought in even here, for behavior that reflects finely grained differences in mental contents, including reports of belief contents, is taken into account. A subject's behavior can often best be interpreted and predicted by ascribing finely-grained contents to her mental states,[24] which in turn seems to sit nicely with her own judgments concerning her belief contents. Note that some of my arguments against the critics, to be presented in the following chapter, rely on a first-person view with respect to both perceptual experience and belief.

[23] Similar arguments can be produced against possible-worlds views of belief content. For subjects will judge many of their beliefs involving necessary truths to have distinct contents, whereas the possible-worlds account will have to ascribe identical content to them.

Those adherents of third-person views who take into account behavior that reflects fine-grained distinctions between mental states will have similar objections against Russellianism and possible-worlds views. They can point to differences in behavior—think of who Mary Jane will turn to for help when fighting a super-villain—that can only be accounted for by introducing Fregean propositions.

[24] Again, see Heck (2007) on this.

## 2.2 Concepts and Concept Possession

After these clarifications of the notion of content, let us now turn to a discussion of *concepts*. What do we talk about when we talk about concepts, or when we say that someone 'possesses a concept'? An intuitive understanding of 'concept' might be that a certain concept is what I grasp, or understand, when I know what a word means. What it is to *possess* a concept might be elucidated—rather non-committally—by saying that "[s]omeone possesses the concept *F* iff she believes that ... F ... (for some filling of the dots)." (Byrne 2005, 232) Byrne's suggestion ties concept possession to believing with the concept in question. As Speaks (2005, 377) suggests, such a "thought-based understanding" of concept-possession moves the focus from what it is to possess an individual concept to what it takes to entertain a certain thought. This move side-steps hairy issues about whether full mastery of the involved concepts is required to entertain a thought, or whether one can think thoughts without fully mastering the concepts involved, as in deference-dependent thought.[25]

Such worries will become relevant in Sect. 6.2. For now, I will set them aside. I take it that ordinary locutions such as 'she has no concept of numbers' or 'he has finally grasped the concept of time', are an acceptable starting point for thinking about concepts and concept possession as related to *understanding* the meanings of particular expressions, and to fully grasping their implications.

### *2.2.1 Three Conceptions of Concepts*

With this in mind, let us turn to the debate over nonconceptual content, where a concept is typically taken to be either a mental representation, as in a Language of Thought, or a Fregean sense, or identified with a specific set of cognitive abilities. I will discuss these options in turn.

#### 2.2.1.1 The Representationalist View

The representationalist view and the Fregean view have in common that, according to them, concepts are *constituents* of thoughts, or, respectively, thought contents. Let's take the thought *that the cat is sitting on the couch* as an example. It is made up from the concepts *cat*, *couch*, and *is sitting on*. According to the representationalist, we have to identify these concepts with vehicles or symbols in a computational mind; put together in the right way, these concepts form whole thoughts; these

[25]Think of Putnam's famous claim that his beech thoughts are distinct from his elm thoughts even though he cannot distinguish (and therefore does not have full mastery of two distinct concepts of) the trees in question.

thoughts are simply combinations of vehicles, then. Concepts are psychological entities, such as words in a Language of Thought. So, the expression 'concept' refers to mental, mind-dependent entities.

Note that, if this claim is combined with the idea that thought *content* consists in mind-independent abstract objects, then concepts and content are situated at two different levels. On such a view, concepts will be symbols within the mind, computational units at a (narrow) functional level. Content, by contrast, will be an abstract entity, which is mind-independent. It is also possible (although maybe not terribly plausible) to hold that content should be captured at the same narrow functional level as concepts—this would have the advantage that a content itself could be constituted by concepts.

#### 2.2.1.2 The (Neo-)Fregean View

On the Fregean view, concepts are Fregean senses or modes of presentation, graspable elements of Fregean propositions.[26] For instance, there is a sense *cat*, a sense *is sitting on*, and a sense *couch*. These Fregean senses can be combined to form whole Fregean Thoughts (or propositions), which are 'longer' abstract entities composed of Fregean senses, such as *the cat is sitting on the couch*. These are the contents of thoughts, when we take thoughts to be mental states. Fregean senses are not psychological, but mind-independent entities.

According to the Fregean, we need to assume that there are such abstract, mind-independent entities in order to explain why different people can possess the *same* concepts. For instance, it is plausible to hold that both me and my brother possess the same concept of a circle. I understand what my brother says when he talks about circles, and *vice versa*. If concepts were mind-dependent, on the other hand, we would each have our own concept of a circle. But how could we then be said to possess the same concept? This problem is supposed to be solved by the mind-independence of concepts—different people can be related to the very same concepts. Obviously, concepts are not concrete entities like trees or cats. So, we should assume that they are *abstract*, according to the Fregean.

For the Fregean, concepts can also be identified with the semantic values of linguistic expressions. The Fregean might accept that there are mental vehicles like those that the representationalist identifies with concepts; but she would claim that these vehicles are not the concepts themselves; the concepts are instead to be identified with the meanings of these vehicles.

[26] In the debate over nonconceptual content, this view is usually called 'Fregean', and it is supposedly in Frege's spirit. By adopting this label for the position, I do not want to suggest that Frege himself would have agreed with it; nowhere do I intend to make claims about Frege's own views. To name just one difference to the neo-Fregeans, Frege distinguished senses ('Sinne') from concepts ('Begriffe'); the neo-Fregeans take the expressions 'concept' and 'sense' to mean the same thing.

#### 2.2.1.3 The Ability View and Conceptual Abilities

The ability view, by contrast with both representationalism and Fregeanism, states that concepts are not objects that constitute certain mental states or their contents. There is nothing (at least, there are no objects in the ordinary sense of the word) that the expression 'concept' refers to. If we feel the need to talk about concepts at all, we should identify concepts with certain kinds of abilities that humans have.[27] There are several abilities that are typically identified with concepts. In the following discussion, I will present the standard conceptual abilities—the abilities to re-identify, to draw certain inferences, and for general thought—and discuss which conditions have to be met for a subject to possess these conceptual abilities.[28] Note that, on my Modest Nonconceptualist account, one important way to think of concepts is indeed in terms of conceptual abilities; the suggestion I make here about which conceptual abilities are important and about how they relate to one another will be relevant later, especially in Sects. 4.1 and 6.2.

One ability that a subject has to possess to possess a concept *a* is the ability to identify and re-identify a. (See, for instance, Kelly (2001a) and Gennaro (2012, 144).) To possess the concept *Angela Merkel*, I have to be able to identify (and re-identify on different occasions) Angela Merkel as Angela Merkel. Similarly, to possess the concept *green*, I must be able to perceptually and/or cognitively distinguish green objects from objects that are not green (Dummett 1993, 98).

Another prominent conceptual ability is what one might call the ability for general thought. To have this ability is to meet Gareth Evans's *Generality Constraint*, which (in one version) states that

> 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. (Evans 1982, 104)

In other words, in order to possess a concept *a*, I have to be able to think certain thoughts, namely all the thoughts that involve *a* (plus any other concepts I possess that can be combined in thought with *a*). This condition is closely related to the systematicity and productivity of thought. It is important to realize that it entails that, in order to possess *a*, I must be able to know what it is for a to have all those properties G for which I possess concepts. To possess the concept *Angela Merkel*, I have to know what it would be for Angela Merkel to be green, to be chancellor, to be tall, to be short, etc.

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[27] A very useful discussion of the pros and cons of the ability view is provided by Glock (2010).

[28] This view is closely related to a 'pleonastic' view that takes our talk of concepts to be nothing but a *façon de parler* and which attempts to reduce concepts to their possession conditions. The purpose of concept possession conditions is to provide requirements that a person has to meet in order for us to legitimately ascribe possession of a concept to her. Generally, these requirements turn out to be possession of certain cognitive abilities. Minimally, on the thought-based conception of concept possession mentioned above, the subject has to be able to think thoughts involving the concept in order to possess it. Similarly, one might say that to possess certain concepts, a subject has to have (the ability) to have corresponding beliefs. Again, see Byrne (2005) and Speaks (2005).

The point of this condition on concept possession is that, in order to meet the condition, the subject has to know what an a or a G is. To possess the concept *a*, she has to be able to understand what it would be for a to have any property that she can think of. She cannot have this understanding if she does not really know what (or who) a is. If I do not know what it would be for Angela Merkel to have four arms, to be a grandmother, or to be made of stone, then there has to be something about Angela Merkel that I do not grasp; so I do not have (full) possession of the respective concept.[29]

Finally, there is the ability to draw certain inferences. Only the fact that thought contents are structured by concepts explains that we can draw inferences, e.g. from $Fa \wedge Gb$ and $Fa \rightarrow Ga$ to $Ga \wedge Gb$. Among other things, the fact that concept *F* makes an appearance in both premises is essential for the entailment. We would not be able to explain why $Ga \wedge Gb$ follows if thought contents were not structured by concepts in this way.

This conceptual ability implies a holism with respect to thoughts, as Crane (1992b) points out. To account for the fact that a person can have any one thought with a certain content, we have to assume that she can have all kinds of other thoughts whose contents are inferentially related to it. Otherwise, it would not be clear what the thought is about. Therefore, Crane holds that to possess a concept *F* is (potentially) to have all those beliefs that it takes to have *any one* belief involving *F* to begin with.

There may be two ways to understand this condition on concept possession. First, it might be hardly more than a different phrasing of the Generality Constraint, which emphasizes the logical relations between different thought contents. If I can think that $Fa \wedge Gb$ and $Fa \rightarrow Ga$, then I have to be able to think that $Ga \wedge Gb$ as well (i.e., I have to *understand* what this thought is about). This means that I have to have some (albeit basic and intuitive) understanding of the logical or syntactic relations between these thoughts; in addition, to possess the concept *F*, I have to understand sentences involving 'F' and all the sentences that logically follow from these sentences (as long as they involve only expressions that correspond to concepts that I possess).

Second, the condition could be seen to be more substantial, i.e., as involving not just syntactic relations between thoughts and their contents, but also their semantic relations, and as requiring the subject to have not merely an ability to entertain the related thoughts, but to have a certain amount of beliefs whose contents are inferentially related. This is how Crane understands the condition. For instance, to possess the concept *cheese*, I have to have the belief that cheese is nutritious or the

[29]One may wonder whether the Generality Constraint could not also successfully be applied to mental imagery or to perceptual experience: E.g., my imaginative ability to picture Angela Merkel with two arms seems to be related to my ability to picture her with four arms; I have both the ability to have a perceptual experience of a two-armed creature and the ability to have a perceptual experience of a four-armed creature. Correspondingly, one could formulate the Generality Constraint more neutrally as involving an ability to have (and to produce new) systematically related mental states.

related belief that it is edible, among many other beliefs. This is so because one aspect of what it is to be nutritious just is to be edible. This results in a holism because the content of one belief is determined by its position in a whole network of other, related belief contents. Similarly, a specific concept can be individuated by the beliefs that I have involving the concept.[30]

It might be tempting to draw a similar distinction with respect to the Generality Constraint: On a first understanding, I have to be able to think all the *thoughts* involving a certain concept to possess the concept; on a second reading, I have to have all the *beliefs* that are pertinent to a full understanding of the concept. Obviously, the second understanding of the Generality Constraint cannot be what is intended by Evans and other proponents of the constraint; it is too demanding by far. If I have to have *all* the beliefs that are relevant to what a certain concept is of in order to possess it, then I do not possess any concepts. There is *always* something one does not believe or know about an object or property; still, it is often plausible to ascribe the respective concept to a subject.

To clear up the confusion, we need strictly to distinguish thoughts from beliefs. What the Generality Constraint does is demand of a subject to be able to *think certain thoughts*. If she can think all thoughts involving a certain concept (i.e., contemplate all states of affairs involving a certain object or property), then it is guaranteed that she knows what the concept is a concept of. If she cannot, it is questionable whether she really knows what she is thinking about. At any rate, she certainly does not have to believe all those things she can contemplate!

With certain reservations,[31] I find the Generality Constraint rather plausible as a condition on concept possession. However, it leaves me wondering how we can have the ability to think all those thoughts necessary to possess a concept in the first place. What is going on when I contemplate (and fully understand) the thought that Angela Merkel is green? My complaint is that the Generality Constraint does not seem to explain how I can understand what I am thinking and therefore is not completely illuminating as a possession condition for concepts. (This is worrisome to the extent that possessing a concept has something to do with understanding what the concept is a concept of.)

[30] You may have noticed that, in describing Crane's conditions, I sometimes slip between concepts being involved in thought or belief and their being involved in a thought or belief *content*. This is so because Crane's view takes us (at least implicitly) from talk of concepts as conceptual abilities to talk of concepts as components of mental contents. This is actually a good thing, as I shall argue in Sect. 3.4.

[31] For example, there are some thoughts involving concepts I possess that are just too *long* for me to have a chance to think them all the way through. Another problem could be caused by a certain interpretation of the Generality Constraint: It might be argued that, even though a subject possesses the concepts *green* and *justice*, she cannot possibly understand what it would be for justice to be green. The Generality Constraint might be taken to entail that she should understand this thought. A more plausible version of the constraint, I think, is to say that part of knowing what a concept is about is knowing with which other concepts it cannot be combined. So to possess the concepts *green* and *justice* is to be able to think all kinds of thoughts involving these concepts, *but also to know what combinations involving these concepts do not amount to real thoughts*.

There are (at least) two answers to my question. One of them is given by Crane's conceptual ability to draw the relevant inferences. I think what I think when I contemplate *Angela Merkel is green* because this thought content is embedded in a whole net of other, related thought contents; what my concepts are of is determined by this network. My thought is a thought of Merkel because its content is related to contents of other beliefs that I have about her, which constitute the concept. I believe that she is a woman, that she is the current chancellor of Germany, that she is a physicist, etc. These beliefs and their contents determine what my concept is about, and they thereby determine what I contemplate when I think that Angela Merkel is green. Therefore, the ability to draw certain inferences should be seen as an ability that requires the thinker to have a certain number of *beliefs* whose contents are relevant to the concept; their contents determine what any one thought involving the concept is about.

The other answer is that what my concept is a concept of is determined by its causal relations to external states of affairs. Basically, it is a concept of Angela Merkel because it is ultimately caused by her. Both answers have a certain plausibility; I am not going to decide here which one is more convincing, or whether they should be combined in a certain way.

Peacocke's view of concept possession has the potential to accommodate both answers. His account allows us to distinguish inferentially-based concepts from perceptual concepts. The concept *conjunction*, for instance, is defined by the fact that the possessor of the concept finds the standard logical transitions involved in conjunction, such as the step from *p and q* to *p*,"primitively compelling" (Peacocke 1992, 6). It is fully defined by the inferential transitions a thinker accepts.

By contrast, the concept *red* is the concept that a subject possesses if she finds it primitively compelling to believe that *that's red* when an area of her visual field is apparently taken up by a red object (and when she is entitled to take her experience at face value). If the scenario content of her visual experience represents the presence of something red and she takes her experience at face value, the subject who possesses the concept *red* will have a tendency to believe that the perceived object is red. Given that our account of the content of experience involves a causal component—that, under normal circumstances, an experience represents what causes it—a perceptual concept like *red* is indirectly determined by its causal relations to the subject's environment.

To sum up, on the ability view, concepts are identified with conceptual abilities, viz. the ability to re-identify what her concept is about, the ability for general thought with respect to the concept, and the ability to draw inferences pertaining to the concept. But how are we to understand the claim that a concept is to be identified with these three kinds of conceptual abilities? I will have more to say about this in Sect. 3.4 and in the following chapters (especially in Sects. 4.1 and 6.2). To complete my exposition of the ability view, let me briefly anticipate the relevant Modest Nonconceptualist claims I will argue there.

The first point is that, for possession of some kinds of concepts, it is not necessary to possess all three conceptual abilities. In Sect. 4.1, I argue that a subject may

possess a perceptual-demonstrative concept for a certain shade that she is confronted with in perceptual experience even though she does not have the ability to re-identify the shade later.

Second, possession of just any one of the described abilities is not sufficient to possess a concept. Possession of the ability to re-identify something, for instance, is not sufficient for concept possession by itself, for it might be nothing more than a perceptual ability. Plausibly, if a subject consistently displays appropriate reactions to b, and different reactions to non-bs, she can identify and re-identify a. If this was sufficient for concept possession, even frogs or ants might possess concepts. On my view, more demanding requirements on concept possession are needed. Moreover, in Sect. 3.4, I will argue that meeting the Generality Constraint is not by itself sufficient for concept possession.

This leads to the third point. In Sect. 6.2, I will motivate the claim that concept possessors have their *conceptual* abilities for re-identification and for having systematically related thoughts *in virtue of* their possession of the relevant inferential abilities.[32] I argue that it is only the possession of the latter abilities which guarantees that the subject can employ her concepts fully independently of context and of specific instances and thus meet the Generality Constraint and the re-identification condition. Thus, I hold that the inferential ability is the most basic of the three conceptual abilities, possession of which is necessary for possession of the other two.

Fourth, in Sect. 3.3, I will argue that conceptualism and nonconceptualism should be concerned with the question whether a subject has to *exercise*, or employ, the relevant concepts in undergoing a mental state, and that this (not mere concept *possession*) makes its content conceptual or nonconceptual. Correspondingly, we may wonder whether the subject has to exercise all three kinds of conceptual *abilities* in order to exercise a *concept*. The Modest Nonconceptualist claim is that, to exercise a concept, it is sufficient to exercise just one of the corresponding conceptual abilities. For instance, imagine that I see Angela Merkel on TV. I believe *this is Angela Merkel*. Plausibly, I exercise my concept *Angela Merkel* even though I do not draw any inferences (and thus do not exercise my conceptual ability to draw inferences) involving my concept *Angela Merkel*. The conceptual ability I exercise in this case is my ability to re-identify Merkel, and maybe my ability to freely recombine my concepts to form the belief (and thus my ability for general thought).

Finally (and paralleling the second point about possession), to exercise a concept it is not good enough to exercise just any old ability to re-identify something. What is required is an exercise of a conceptual ability for re-identification, which is an

[32] I think it is natural to say that a subject possesses a certain ability in virtue of another ability. For instance, I may have the ability to predict tomorrow's weather in virtue of my ability to read tarot cards or in virtue of my ability to interpret satellite images of cloud configurations. I have the ability to read a book in virtue of my ability to read standard Latin script; a blind person has the same ability in virtue of his ability to read Braille.

ability that the subject possesses in virtue of her possession of the relevant inferential abilities. The same could be said about the ability captured by the Generality Constraint, which is a conceptual ability only if the subject has this ability in virtue of possessing the corresponding inferential abilities.[33]

### 2.2.2 The Relation Between Concepts and Conceptual Abilities

Concerns similar to the ones discussed in the previous paragraphs arise for the Fregean view and the representationalist view, but in a more serious form. Theories of concepts as mental symbols or as abstract entities are not very interesting in and of themselves. A theory of concepts should be able to explain why it is that we can think about things under concepts at all, how come we have the power to refer to objects and properties in the world or to gain an understanding of them through concepts. It has to explain how we can have concepts *of* something. Putnam, in his famous paper "Brains in a Vat", argues that a theory that takes concepts to be mental images cannot thereby explain this ability. Coming up with a theory of mental images (or something similar) without saying how they can be images *of* the things that they are supposed to be concepts of, is completely beside the point when we try to account for our conceptual abilities (Putnam 2000).

In addition to explaining our cognitive ability to refer to things via concepts, a theory of concepts should explain how we can think about things with their help in a way that is *characteristic* of concepts. For instance, such a theory has to explain what it is for me to *possess* a concept—why I am able to apply the same concept again and again, why my concepts allow for me to draw inferences from one belief to another, and why I am able to recombine the concepts I possess to form new thoughts. (These are just the abilities required for concept possession listed above.)

The representationalist and the Fregean therefore *have to* construe concepts in such a way that they can account for these abilities. They must guarantee a strong connection between concepts, concept possession and exercise, and conceptual abilities. Ideally, their understanding of concepts should *explain* why possessing a concept provides the subject with certain cognitive abilities. They have to maintain that possessing a concept (as they understand the term) is sufficient and necessary for having the relevant abilities.[34]

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[33] A related point I will argue in Sect. 3.4 is that it is only when the subject exercises her relevant inferential abilities (or abilities for re-identification and general thought she has in virtue of these inferential abilities) in undergoing a mental state that we should say that it has conceptual content. That the mental state meets the Generality Constraint is not good enough by itself.

[34] Concept possession has to be sufficient for having conceptual abilities because, both on the representationalist and the Fregean view, the subject's possessing the concept (i.e., having the representation stored or standing in a relation to a Fregean sense) is all that is needed for her to have the respective abilities. *Vice versa*, possessing the concept is necessary for having the conceptual abilities because neither of the views can allow that there could be an explanation of a

The representationalist has to claim that the fact that I have a certain mental representation stored in my mind accounts fully for my ability to think certain thoughts, to draw certain inferences, and to identify and re-identify objects and properties in the world.

A representational theory such as Fodor's theory of a Language of Thought might be able to provide the link between concepts and conceptual abilities: Intentional states, including their contents, are realized by mental representations that are processed in a computational mind. These mental representations have a linguistic structure. A specific mental representation can be stored in the mind and be used at different times—this accounts for the fact that we can exercise concepts over and over again. (Together with a causal, teleological, or informational theory of content, this claim can be seen to explain how we can have a concept *of* an object, which enables us to re-identify the object at different times.)

Mental symbols are like words in a language, so they can be recombined to form new mental representations, basically indefinitely. This explains why thought is productive, why there is no limit in principle to the thoughts we can think; also, it explains the systematicity of thought (which is mirrored by the Generality Constraint) and our ability to draw inferences. They are due to the fact that the underlying mental symbols can be recombined in a systematic way; this recombination follows the rules of syntax and logic. Once a certain representation is stored in my 'belief box', all representations that can be derived from this original representation, following the rules of syntax, will (potentially) also be stored in the belief box. Therefore, if I have a certain belief, I will also (potentially) have all the beliefs that can be inferred from it. (See Fodor 1987.)

The Fregean faces a similar problem—how can my relation to certain abstract objects be responsible for my conceptual abilities? According to the Fregean, I possess a concept if I grasp it (i.e., a Fregean sense). Fregeans claim the following: Grasping a Fregean sense *consists in* having the cognitive abilities listed above.

One example of such a view is that of Peacocke (1992). He holds that concepts are mind-independent modes of presentation or Fregean senses. Yet they are individuated by cognitive significance. That is, two concepts $F$ and $G$ are distinct concepts if replacing $F$ for $G$ in a given thought results in a new thought, which is potentially informative for the thinker. If I replace *Hesperus* with *Phosphorus* in *Venus is Hesperus*, the new thought *Venus is Phosphorus* carries new information for a subject who did not know that Venus is Phosphorus. Peacocke thinks that concepts really are nothing over and above their possession conditions. There is nothing more to a concept than my ability, after I have mastered the concept, to have thoughts or other propositional attitudes with contents containing the concept. Concepts are

subject's conceptual abilities that does not appeal to her possession of the relevant concepts (mental representations or Fregean senses, respectively). In the current context, I find the fact that concept possession is sufficient for conceptual abilities more interesting, for it is related to the question of how storing a mental representation or grasping a Fregean sense could account for our conceptual abilities. In what follows, I will focus on this issue.

individuated by their possession conditions—a particular concept is identical with that concept which is possessed by a thinker under conditions XYZ (which would have to be specified for each concept in particular). (See Peacocke 1992, 6.)

Since for him there is nothing more to a concept than (a) my ability to think certain thoughts once I possess the concept and (b) its cognitive significance, Peacocke can easily account for the link between concepts (as Fregean senses) and conceptual abilities. Possessing a concept (or standing in a certain relation to a certain abstract object) just *is* being able to have the relevant thoughts.

Similarly, I will argue in the next chapter that Fregean propositions ought to be ascribed to a mental state only because of the conceptual abilities that are exercised by the subject in undergoing the mental state.

I have now introduced different options concerning the notions of *content* and *concept*. The notion of content is tied to correctness conditions; different kinds of propositions or non-propositional entities are used to fix the contents of our mental states. Which kind of proposition or non-propositional entity we should choose for the job will be determined by first-person or third-person considerations. I have tied the notion of *concept* to a subject's understanding of a certain matter and presented three different concepts of concept. On any of them, we will additionally need an account of the subject's conceptual abilities to re-identify things, to draw inferences, and to have systematically related thoughts.

This background will be needed in order to avoid confusions in the discussion of the notion of nonconceptual content that will take up the following chapter. Let me anticipate at this point that Modest Nonconceptualism identifies conceptual content with Fregean propositions and nonconceptual content with scenario content. The view is not in the business of pronouncing one of the positions on concepts—representationalism, Fregeanism, and the ability view—to be *the* correct one. Rather, I will assume that concepts can be of theoretical use on each of these readings. In my defense of the state-to-content principle in the next chapter, however, I will mainly focus on the connections between concepts, understood as abilities, and concepts, conceived as Fregean senses.

# Chapter 3
# Nonconceptual Content

In this chapter, I will defend both conceptualists and nonconceptualists against an attack which has been leveled at both sides alike by Byrne (2005), Speaks (2005), and Crowther (2006) (henceforth, 'the critics').[1] According to these critics, participants in the debate equivocate on the terms 'conceptual content' and 'nonconceptual content'. For these terms allow of a 'state' reading and of a 'content' reading. Once the equivocation is dissolved, we can see that many of the arguments on either side of the debate are unsuccessful, or so the critics claim.

In order to discuss and rebut this line of argument, I will first present the standard distinction between the state view and the content view and the criticism that attaches to it. I will then argue for a different understanding of the state view, which appeals to concept exercise rather than to concept possession and provide an overview over versions of conceptualism and nonconceptualism (including the stance of Modest Nonconceptualism). Finally, backed by my improved understanding of the state view, I shall argue that conceptualists and nonconceptualists tacitly accept a so-called 'state-to-content' principle, show that existing defenses of this principle fail, and provide a new defense of it.

## 3.1 The State View and the Content View

I will start by elucidating the equivocation charge for theories of conceptual and nonconceptual content. It arises from the distinction between a so-called *content view* and a so-called *state view* of conceptual and nonconceptual content.[2] One

[1] Defenses against such criticisms can be found in Bermúdez (2007), Toribio (2008), Toribio (2011), Heck (2007), and Van Cleve (2012); a comeback to such replies is provided by Duhau (2011). The issue is also discussed in Laurier (2004).

[2] The distinction was first clearly stated by Heck (2000).



E. Schmidt, *Modest Nonconceptualism*, Studies in Brain and Mind 8,
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way to think about conceptual and nonconceptual content sticks with what the term 'content' suggests. It is concerned with the structure of mental content: Is it conceptual, i.e., is the mental content in question a Fregean proposition and thus constituted by concepts in the Fregean sense? Or is it nonconceptual, i.e., does it consist in one of the other kinds of proposition or, respectively, in a non-propositional scenario content? On this dimension, conceptualists typically hold that experiences have Fregean contents, and nonconceptualists deny this. Conceptualists and nonconceptualists typically agree that the content of belief consists in Fregean propositions. I presuppose this in my presentation of conceptualism and nonconceptualism below.

The other way to capture the distinction is by addressing the mental states in question rather than their contents. A subject's mental state, and by extension, its content, is taken to be conceptual just in case the subject has to possess all the concepts needed to specify the content in order to undergo this mental state.[3] Vice versa, the mental state (as well as its content) is nonconceptual if its subject does not need to possess all of the relevant concepts. Byrne (2005, 233) puts this thought as follows:

> Mental state M has nonconceptual content p iff it is possible to be in M without possessing all the concepts that characterize p, where the concept *F characterizes* the proposition p iff p = that . . . F . . ..

This second understanding of 'conceptual' and 'nonconceptual' goes very naturally with a view that identifies concepts with abilities. There are some mental states that I can only undergo if I have cognitive abilities such as those discussed above. I have to be able to draw certain inferences, to re-identify relevant things, to think a certain range of thoughts. Other mental states do not require such cognitive sophistication. However, this understanding is also compatible with the Fregean and the representationalist view. On a Fregean reading, I have to stand in the grasping relation to certain Fregean senses in order to undergo a conceptual mental state, but not in order to undergo a nonconceptual mental state. On the representationalist view, the relevant language-like representational vehicles have to be stored in my mind for me to undergo conceptual mental states, but not to undergo nonconceptual mental states.

Conceptualists and nonconceptualists agree that subjects have to possess the relevant concepts in order to have beliefs or thoughts—these are conceptual mental states. I will assume this as well in the following. The conflict between both parties is over whether subjects have to possess concepts in order to undergo experiences as well, as the conceptualist says, or whether they are not required to do so, as the nonconceptualist says.

I have been using expressions such as 'the concepts that characterize a mental content', or 'the concepts needed to specify a mental content'. What do I mean by

[3]Traditionally, the state view is framed in terms of concept *possession*. I will stick with this for now, for the critics also start from this understanding of the state view. As will become apparent below, their arguments lose some plausibility if we conceive the state view in terms of concept *exercise* instead.

this? Van Cleve (2012, 421) points out that we can give this a constitutive and a non-constitutive reading. Turning to the first of these, 'characterizing' or 'specifying' might be equivalent to 'being a constitutive element of a mental content'. In this case, concepts that characterize or specify (i.e., constitute) a content would be Fregean senses that are building blocks of the Fregean content of the mental state in question. I take this to be a commitment to the Fregean view of concepts. Combined with conceptualism, this gives us the claim that the subject has to possess each of the Fregean senses that constitute the mental content in question.

If we read 'characterizing' and 'specifying' non-constitutively, the elements of the mental content to be characterized or specified may well not be Fregean senses, but, for instance, objects, properties, and relations. But such entities can be *specified* by using certain concepts we possess. If this is so, the result obviously should not be that I have to possess *all conceivable* concepts characterizing a certain content in order to have a conceptual mental state (which I do not). This would render all my mental states nonconceptual. Rather, we have to limit the concepts I have to possess by appeal to a "canonical specification" (Cussins 2003, 135). To undergo a conceptual state, the subject has to possess all the concepts that "capture the distinctive way in which some aspect of the world is given to the subject of the state" (ibid.)—this is what is meant by 'canonical specification' in this context. The idea here is that undergoing a conceptual mental state requires the subject to possess a concept for each element of its content, such that the concepts together reflect how the world is presented to the subject in undergoing the mental state.

According to the second understanding of the conceptual/nonconceptual distinction, then, conceptualists hold that the subject has to possess a concept pertaining to each element of her perceptual contents. Nonconceptualists deny this.

This gives us two distinct ways of conceiving of the conceptual/nonconceptual distinction, one concerned with the structure of mental content immediately (on the content view) and one with the cognitive requirements that subjects have to meet in order to undergo certain mental states (on the state view).[4]

## 3.2 The Relation Between the State View and the Content View

Before Richard Heck brought up this distinction, philosophers in the debate payed no attention to it. They dealt with different kinds of mental content and different cognitive requirements for subjects to undergo different mental states as *one* issue.[5] Hence the equivocation charge.

[4]In my characterization of these views, I follow Byrne (2005). Authors such as Toribio (2008), Bermúdez (2007), and Heck (2000) set up the issue differently. They call 'state view' a version of nonconceptualism that combines *my* 'state nonconceptualism' with *my* 'content conceptualism'.

[5]Crane (1992b, 141) is an exception, although his distinctions are not very clear. He discusses an unsatisfactory version of the content view before suggesting an understanding of 'conceptual' that seems to involve both state and content view elements. He proposes to define conceptual content "in terms of whether its *constituent* concepts need to be possessed in order for something to be in

On a charitable interpretation, we can maybe say that conceptualists implicitly presuppose that, by showing that one needs to possess concepts in order to have an experience, they can show that experience has conceptual content. That is to say, they assume that state conceptualism entails content conceptualism. By the same lights, we can say that nonconceptualists implicitly assume that one does not have to possess (all) the relevant concepts in order to have an experience and that therefore, experience has nonconceptual content.[6]

Let's grant that this is so. While this charitable way of describing the situation avoids the problem of equivocation, it still leaves room for critics such as Byrne, Speaks, Crowther, and Duhau to argue that whether a subject possesses concepts or not is completely irrelevant to the kind of content her mental states (particularly her experiences) have. That is, they can, and do, reject the implicit presupposition made by both conceptualists and nonconceptualists.[7]

Byrne argues that, if a philosopher merely adopts the *state* version of nonconceptualism, she cannot thereby exclude the possibility that experience and thought have the same kind of content, for instance, a Fregean proposition; all a proponent of the state view can demand is that different kinds of mental *states* are involved in the subject's entertaining the content, viz. conceptual and nonconceptual states. This is to say, she can claim that there is a psychological difference, e.g. between the abilities or mental representations involved in having a mental state. She can even insist that there is a difference with respect to whether the subject has to possess the relevant concepts. But she has to remain silent on what kind of content the mental states have. (This should be clear on the ability view and the representationalist view. On the Fregean view, it is conceivable that the content of a mental state which does not require the subject to grasp the relevant Fregean senses is still constituted by these senses.) So, the proponent of state nonconceptualism does not get content nonconceptualism for free.[8]

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that state." (my emphasis). I will return to Crane's rather helpful suggestions in Sect. 3.4 and in Chap. 5.

[6]Note that I will only be concerned with the question of how to arrive at the content view from the state view. This is reasonable because, as discussed in Sect. 2.1.3, I take the issue to be how ascriptions of mental content should be constrained. The most natural way to proceed is to start from the subject's psychology and then to investigate whether, or how, it limits the kinds of mental content we can ascribe to her.

[7]Note that Byrne criticizes only the transition from state nonconceptualism to content nonconceptualism. (See Byrne 2005, 235.) He defines content nonconceptualism in such a way that it is incompatible with state conceptualism. So he guarantees that state conceptualism entails content conceptualism by *fiat*. Speaks's and Duhau's criticism are focused on nonconceptualism also. However, the critics of nonconceptualism defend the *general claim* that concept possession requirements on mental states have no impact on the structure of their contents. If this works against nonconceptualism, it also works against conceptualism.

[8]That this is true is especially clear on Byrne's particular version of content nonconceptualism, which states merely that experience and thought have two different kinds of content: "nonconceptual content is *not* conceptual content, where the latter is characterized [...] as belief content" (Byrne 2005, 233).

Crowther (2006, 253–258) argues that combinations both of state conceptualism with content nonconceptualism (called "P3") and of state nonconceptualism with content conceptualism (called "P4") can be motivated.[9] Position P3 can seem plausible if we think about Evans's point that perceptual content can be phenomenal content or conscious content *for* the subject only if it can be accessed by her "*thinking, concept-applying, and reasoning system*" (Evans 1982, 158). If this is correct, it is natural to require the subject to possess concepts corresponding to any element of a conscious perceptual content. But this is important only for the subject's access to the content; it has no impact on the structure of the perceptual content, which is nonconceptual on Evans's view.

P4 is the view that combines state nonconceptualism with content conceptualism. This view combines a McDowellian view of the world as composed of perceptible, but also *thinkable* facts (which are true Fregean propositions) with the idea that the perceptual sensitivity of human infants and non-human animals to these facts does not require them to possess the relevant concepts. Their perceptual capacities are nonconceptual, but the contents they are perceptually sensitive to are nonetheless Fregean propositions.

As elaborated above in Sect. 2.1.3, Duhau (2011) argues that there are good reasons to accept the Publicity Constraint and to reject the Fregean view even for thought. She ascribes one and the same kind of coarse-grained content to both experience and thought. This runs counter to the received view on all sides of the nonconceptualism debate. But Duhau holds that her view is compatible with state nonconceptualism: The language-like mental representations involved in thought differ from the non-linguistic representations in play in experience. Once again, this is a psychological difference with no consequences for the contents of these mental representations.

At this point, both conceptualists and nonconceptualists might concede that there is no entailment from their respective state views to their respective content views. Still, they might insist that they simply intend to hold state and content conceptualism together, or to combine state with content nonconceptualism. This stance is not threatened by the possibilities of different combinations. If they adopt this strategy, however, both parties face the problem that some of their central arguments support only the state versions of their views.

For instance, the nonconceptualist's argument from the fineness of grain, which I will discuss in Sect. 4.1, starts from the premise that the phenomenal/representational distinctions made by our visual experiences—e.g. between different shades of a color—are much more fine-grained than the range of concepts we *possess* for these shades. This premise is supposed to support conclusions about the nonconceptual *structure* of the content of visual experience. If the critics are right, it is irrelevant for the kind of content experience has that we cannot possess concepts corresponding to every aspect represented by visual experience.

[9] In his terms, experience content can be conceptual in the possessional sense, yet nonconceptual in the compositional sense, and vice versa.

Similar things go for the argument from animal and infant perception which is the topic of Sect. 6.2. One of the presuppositions in the argument is that animals and infants are not concept possessors, yet have content-bearing perceptual experiences. Even if the presupposition supports state nonconceptualism, it does not entail anything for the prospects of content nonconceptualism. As Crowther's position P4 demonstrates, a combinations of state nonconceptualism with content conceptualism can be motivated.

The conceptualist runs into the same difficulties: As I shall discuss in detail in Sect. 7.4, conceptualists take perceptual experience to provide the subject with reasons for her empirical beliefs. They argue that this is possible only if she grasps her reasons, i.e., if she possesses the concepts characterizing them; that her concepts characterize these perceptual reasons is supposed to entail that they consist in contents that are constituted by these concepts. However, if the critics are right, it may well be that the reasoner needs to possess concepts for each aspect of her perceptual experience, but this tells us nothing about the kind of content her experience has.[10]

The conceptualist's objection from objectivity does not fare much better. (See Chap. 8.) It requires the subject to have a conception of an objective world in order to have objective perceptual experience with genuine content. But even if the subject has to possess concepts as of a mind-independent world, this does not tell us anything about which kind of content we ought to ascribe to her perceptual experiences.

So far so bad. But at this point in the dialectic, the conceptualist's and the nonconceptualist's ways part. For, as the critics point out, there are *independent* considerations in favor of content conceptualism. So, as long as the conceptualist can support her state view, she will still be able to achieve her goal of holding a combined state and content view.

Here is the independent argument for content conceptualism, which is based on what Laurier (2004, 28) has dubbed the "principle of believability". According to this principle, "one can always believe what one experiences." Let me illustrate this point with an example.

Compare Suzie's belief *B* that the cat is sitting on the couch with her visual experience *E* of the cat's sitting on the couch. Let's grant that, in having *B*, Suzie needs to possess the concepts characterizing her belief content—the concepts *cat*, *is sitting on*, and *couch*. Moreover, let's grant that she need not possess these concepts in order for her to undergo *E*. Still, it is plausible that Suzie is related to the very same content in having *B* and in having *E*. She can believe what she sees.

This line of argument can be further supported by imagining that Suzie's experience is her epistemic reason for her having *B*. The easiest way to explain how Suzie's experience could justify her belief is by assuming that both have the

[10] See Speaks (2005, fn. 21).

same kind of content; positing different kinds of content just complicates the issue unnecessarily. (Cf. Byrne (2005, 245). Also, see Sect. 7.3 below.) To accept this argument is to accept what Heck (2007, 117) calls the " 'importation' model of perceptual justification".

*Prima facie*, it might seem that the critics are exactly right—why should our ascription of scenario contents, Fregean or Russellian propositions, or what have you, to a subject's mental states be in any way contingent upon the relation of the subject to the content of her mental states? There seems to be no reason to ascribe a specific kind of content to the subject's mental states just because she is or is not required to possess certain cognitive abilities to undergo them, or just because she stands in a perceptual relation to the content in the first case, and in a belief relation to the content in the second. Instead, what bears on the content of experience are the considerations expressed by the principle of believability and the importation model of perceptual justification. They support the truth of content *conceptualism*.[11]

Note that these considerations support Byrne's version of content conceptualism, where belief and experience have the same kind of content, but it is not fixed what kind of content this is. According to Byrne, even Stalnaker (1998), who ascribes possible-world contents to belief and experience, counts as a conceptualist. Such views gain further support from the Publicity Constraint, which requires mental states to have extensional contents (Russellian propositions or possible-worlds propositions).

Should the conceptualist really be happy with this result? I think not. For while conceptualists such as Brewer and McDowell are Fregeans, the critics' independent argument for content 'conceptualism' equally supports views that identify conceptual contents with *non*-Fregean propositions. Even worse, the principle of believability all by itself is compatible with the assumption that the content of both belief and experience consists in scenario content. This is very far away from the conceptualist's desired result. (Admittedly, if supplied with the requirement of a simple account of perceptual reasons, scenario content is out of the picture. It is non-propositional, so a simple account of perceptual justification based on this kind of content is not to be expected.)

As a more general diagnosis, I believe that both conceptualists and nonconceptualists should be dissatisfied with the critics' claim because both parties tacitly accept the *state-to-content* principle (S2C). According to this principle, if the subject is required to exercise each of the concepts needed to specify a mental state's content in order to undergo it, then this mental state has a conceptual (in the sense of *Fregean*) content. But also, if the subject is not required to exercise each of the requisite concepts to undergo the mental state, then this mental state has some variety of nonconceptual content.

[11] The same points are argued in Speaks (2005, 375/376).

**(S2C)** For any subject *S*, any mental state *M*, and any mental content *p*: The content *p* of *S*'s mental state *M* is a conceptual content iff *S* has to exercise all the concepts needed to specify *M*'s content *p* in order to undergo *M*.[12]

I will clarify why I say 'exercise' rather than 'possess' in a moment. As will also become clear below, I understand 'conceptual content' as 'exclusively Fregean content' and 'nonconceptual content' as 'content that is not (exclusively) Fregean', where this allows that a content may have some, but not all, Fregean elements. Let me make explicit that this is how I think nonconceptualists *generally* should delineate the notion of nonconceptual content. One particular way to spell out the details of nonconceptual content, understood in this way, is to identify it with scenario content, as the Modest Nonconceptualist does.

Note that a further assumption shared by conceptualists and nonconceptualists is that belief—and thought generally—is conceptual, both state-wise and content-wise. The only respect in which they differ concerns perceptual experience. Conceptualists maintain that the relevant concepts must be exercised to undergo a perceptual experience. By the state-to-content principle, they take its content to be conceptual. Nonconceptualists deny that these concepts need to be exercised in experience, so by the state-to-content principle, they also deny that perceptual content is conceptual.

With this tentative intermediate result (the critics stand counter to a principle endorsed by all the debate's participants) in mind, let's get a better idea of how the logical space of conceptualist and nonconceptualist positions might be carved up. To better understand the conflict between the two views, it will be helpful to be absolutely clear on what they involve. More importantly for the defense against the critics, an accurate understanding of these views is needed to mount a proper defense.

## 3.3 Even More Varieties of Nonconceptualism

As I have shown, the conceptualist—and even more so, the nonconceptualist—is in trouble, for some of their central arguments only have a bearing on the state view. In the next section, I will defend both conceptualists and nonconceptualists by arguing that their move from the state view to the content view (and thus the (S2C) principle)

[12]The conceptualist has no quarrel with the following consequences of (S2C): if a content-bearing mental state does not require the exercise of all the requisite concepts, then its content is nonconceptual; if a mental content is nonconceptual, then it is the content of a mental state that does not necessarily involve the exercise of all the relevant concepts. For he simply denies that there are content-bearing nonconceptual mental states, and also that there are nonconceptual mental contents.

Again "*all* the concepts needed to specify" is tied to a canonical description. The subject is not required to exercise all imaginable concepts that specify a content, but only one for each element of the content, corresponding to her perspective on the world.

is warranted. First, however, let us get clearer on the claims of conceptualism and nonconceptualism.

Here is how I wish to understand the claim that a certain mental state is conceptual or, respectively, nonconceptual:

**(S-C)** For any subject *S*, any mental state *M*, and any mental content *p*: *S*'s mental state *M* with content *p* is conceptual iff *S* has to exercise all the concepts needed to specify *p* in order to undergo *M*.

**(S-NC)** For any subject *S*, any mental state *M*, and any mental content *p*: *S*'s mental state *M* with content *p* is nonconceptual iff it is possible for S to undergo *M* without exercising all the concepts needed to specify *p*.[13]

There are several noteworthy features about these definitions. First off, most standard definitions of the conceptual/nonconceptual divide require that the concepts be possessed, not *exercised*, in order for a subject to have a conceptual state. This is unfortunate, in my view, for it is essential for a state to be itself conceptual that the subject not only possess the relevant concepts, but that the concepts actually be used in undergoing the state, that the mental state just is a joint exercise of the concepts that characterize its content. For my thought that the cat is sitting on the couch to be a conceptual state, what is relevant is not that I need to possess the concept *cat*, for instance, but that I have to *employ* this concept in my thinking this thought.

One motive for this claim is that we should leave open the possibility that a subject has to *possess* the concepts needed to specify the content of a certain mental state, yet that this state is nonconceptual, for she is not required to employ these concepts in undergoing it.[14] For instance, a philosopher might defend the view that we can only perceive things that we possess concepts for. A subject can only see the cat sitting on the couch after she has acquired the relevant concepts. Nonetheless, this philosopher might insist that these concepts are not immediately involved in her undergoing the visual experience, as they are merely presupposed (for her to be able to cognitively *access* its content, say). A belief with the same content will plausibly require her to *exercise* the concepts, however. So, the belief is a conceptual state, but the visual experience is not.[15]

Interestingly, this understanding renders toothless Gennaro's recent argument from higher-order thought theories to the claim that perceptual experiences have conceptual content. His claim is that each conscious perceptual experience is

[13] As to which concepts exactly are needed to specify *p*, these are limited by the need for a *canonical* specification, as suggested by Cussins (2003), see above.

[14] This possibility is excluded on Byrne's definition above: According to him, if it is not possible to be in a mental state without possessing all the relevant concepts, then its content is conceptual.

[15] Chuard (2007) defines conceptual states via concept exercise as well. Roskies (2008, 635) requires concept deployment. McDowell holds that concepts are not exercised, but "drawn on" (McDowell 1994a, 9) or "actualized" (McDowell 2009c, 11) in experience. This terminology is supposed to accommodate the intuition that we do not actively put together our perceptual experiences, but that we are settled with them. I complain about this obscure talk of actualizing conceptual abilities in Chap. 5 and Sect. 7.3.

accompanied by a higher-order thought directed at it, such that the concepts employed in undergoing the thought determine the content of the experience. The experience content, then "is fully specifiable in terms of concepts possessed by S." (Gennaro 2012, 148) If I am correct, his argument is compatible with the claim that the subject has to exercise the relevant concepts to undergo a certain thought, but that they are not immediately involved in and required to be exercised in undergoing the experience, even though all experiences are accompanied by thoughts. So, while the experience content is thereby fully specifiable in terms of concepts possessed by the subject, it may still be the case that the experience is a nonconceptual mental state.[16]

Another motive is that the critics' victory is too easily won if all they criticize is the step from concept possession to kind of content. It is plausible that a concept (which specifies a certain mental content) that a subject needs to possess, but that she does not have to put to use in undergoing the mental state in question, is irrelevant for which particular Fregean senses constitute the mental state's content. The problem posed by the critics becomes interesting and challenging once we conceive it as an attack on (S2C), or as the question of whether the fact that the subject has to exercise (or respectively, does not have to exercise) the relevant concepts in undergoing a mental state entails that its content is conceptual (or, respectively, nonconceptual). Even with this change, the challenge for the nonconceptualist is still to get from claims about mental states and abilities to claims about mental content.

One problematic consequence of my move to concept exercise instead of possession is that (S-C) and (S-NC) seem to give the wrong results for dispositional mental states.[17] Plausibly, I now have the dispositional belief that Angela Merkel is the current chancellor of Germany, but I do not have to exercise any of the concepts characterizing its content. Still, it is a belief and therefore a paradigmatic conceptual mental state. (S-NC) seems to entail the opposite—since I do not have to exercise any concepts to have a dispositional belief, it is a nonconceptual mental state. To see that this does not follow, note that the definitions are concerned with what it takes to *undergo* certain mental states. It is not possible to undergo a dispositional belief—rather, I can undergo an occurrent belief, or *occurrently manifest* a dispositional belief. This is what the definitions are aimed at: Conceptual mental states are those whose occurrent manifestations require the subject to exercise the relevant concepts. Nonconceptual mental states are those whose occurrent manifestations do not require the subject to exercise them.

[16]Things are complicated by the fact that Gennaro himself (p. 55) takes experiences to be complex mental states that themselves involve unconscious higher-order thoughts. His argument for conceptualism is not phrased in terms of his own view, but in terms of higher-order thought theory generally.

As a side note, Gennaro (2012, 138/139) claims that he endorses content conceptualism, but as a matter of fact his conceptualism falls on the side of *state* conceptualism. It is concerned with the concepts the subject has to possess, not with the kind of content her experience has.

[17]Thanks to Susanne Mantel for helping me to get clearer on this point.

Next, note that there is a modal claim involved here: The question at issue is whether it is necessary that a subject exercise all the relevant concepts in order to undergo a certain mental state. If one and the same mental state can be undergone with or without exercising these concepts, it will be classified as nonconceptual. My motivation for this is that we can imagine that the subject has an experience and an occurrent belief that the cat is sitting on the couch at the same time. Plausibly, she has to exercise her concepts in order to have the belief; but this is not sufficient to make her co-occurrent experience a conceptual state as well. If (S-C) did not involve the modal claim, however, it would render this experience conceptual.[18]

Further, (S-NC) covers two distinct ways for a mental state to be nonconceptual.[19] On the one hand, a mental state *M* can be nonconceptual in virtue of merely not meeting the standards of a conceptual state: It is not the case that the subject *S* has to exercise all the relevant concepts to undergo this state. *M* counts as nonconceptual as soon as there is even one concept needed to specify *M*'s content that *S* is not required to exercise in order to undergo *M*. On the other hand, *M* can be nonconceptual in virtue of *S*'s having to exercise *none* of the relevant concepts in order to be in it. This understanding of nonconceptual states is more demanding than the previous one. According to it, *M* is no longer nonconceptual as soon as undergoing it requires S to exercise even one of the relevant concepts. In other words, (S-NC) is ambiguous as to whether M is nonconceptual as soon as *S* can undergo *M* without exercising *every single one* of the relevant concepts, or whether *M* is nonconceptual only in case *S* can undergo *M* without exercising *any* of them. Call these options the *minimal* and the *maximal* understanding of 'nonconceptual state'.[20] To be exact then, we can distinguish the following varieties of nonconceptual states:

**(S-NC$_{min}$)** For any subject *S*, any mental state *M*, and any mental content *p*: *S*'s mental state *M* with content *p* is *minimally* nonconceptual iff it is possible for S to undergo *M* without exercising every single concept needed to specify *p*.

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[18]This way of demarcating the views has the following added advantage: It avoids Hanna's worry that "the conceptualist can *always* win" by weakening his claim so much that any mental state or content will be conceptual, for

> [n]o mental states can represent the world without *some possible* (i.e., not necessarily any contemporary or conspecific actual) cognizer's *dispositional* (i.e., not necessarily manifest or occurrent) possession of the concepts required to . . . specify their content. (Hanna 2008, 49/50)

It thereby also avoids Hanna's extreme requirement on the nonconceptualist to show that experience has an *essentially* nonconceptual content, which is not even in principle conceptualizable. Generally speaking, to defend (S2C), we want a more committed starting point on the state side (the subject's requirement to exercise rather than the possibility that some cognizer's possibly possesses the concept) to facilitate taking the step to the content side.

[19]My thanks go to Niko Strobach for pressing me on this point.

[20]A similar distinction is presented as a distinction between total and partial nonconceptualism by Byrne (2005).

and

**(S-NC$_{max}$)** For any subject *S*, any mental state *M*, and any mental content *p*: *S*'s mental state *M* with content *p* is *maximally* nonconceptual iff it is possible for S to undergo *M* without exercising any of the concepts needed to specify *p*.

Now, let me propose an understanding of conceptual and nonconceptual content.

**(C-C)** A mental content is conceptual iff it is constituted exclusively by Fregean senses.

**(C-NC$_{min}$)** A mental content is minimally nonconceptual iff it is not constituted exclusively by Fregean senses.[21]

**(C-NC$_{max}$)** A mental content is maximally nonconceptual iff it is constituted exclusively by non-Fregean elements.

The attentive reader will have noticed that (C-C), (C-NC$_{min}$) and (C-NC$_{max}$) remain silent on whether the contents in question are propositional. As a consequence, the content conceptualist is not automatically committed to the view that the content of perceptual experience consists in Fregean *propositions*. Also, the content nonconceptualist is free to identify perceptual contents with non-Fregean propositions.[22]

The debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists does not involve a lot of explicit reflections on the issue of propositional vs. non-propositional content. Thought content is widely accepted to be conceptual and propositional, but perceptual content is sometimes taken to be *non*conceptual and propositional. For example, Tye (2005) holds that perceptual contents are possible states of affairs, that is, Russellian propositions. On the conceptualist side, it is almost always taken for granted that perceptual content is conceptual and propositional, with the interesting exception of McDowell's recent writings. Driven by phenomenology-based objections, McDowell (2009a) argues that while perceptual content is Fregean, it is nonetheless not propositionally structured. He holds that it has a Kantian "intuitional unity" (p. 261) instead.[23]

Paralleling the distinction between minimally and maximally nonconceptual states, I have here drawn a distinction between minimally and maximally nonconceptual contents. This is necessary because I do not want to exclude the possibility

[21]This allows that some mental contents may be constituted by both Fregean senses and Russellian components, say. They would thereby already be counted as (minimally) nonconceptual contents. More on this below.

[22]I have made some suggestions as to what is required for a content to be propositional above in Sect. 2.1.1.

[23]The critics' attack, discussed in the previous Sect. 3.2, might in principle be relevant to propositionalism and non-propositionalism as well. Maybe the fact that the subject has to exercise (or does not have to exercise) the relevant concepts in order to be in a certain mental state has an impact on whether its content is propositional or not. The critics' requirement for a simple account of perceptual reasons lends support to propositionalism. Non-propositional contents cannot easily stand in justificatory relations to the propositional contents of belief. See Chap. 7.

of mixed contents, which contain elements both at the level of Fregean sense and at the level of reference. Seeing as such contents are not *fully* conceptual, I classify them as a kind of nonconceptual content.

This gives me all the material I need to define the different versions of conceptualism and nonconceptualism. The options for conceptualism are pretty clear-cut. By contrast, there is a range of nonconceptualist views of different strengths, both on the state and the content version of the views. Rather than presenting each single option, I will focus on the ones that are theoretically most interesting and that will play a role in the later chapters. Note that both conceptualism and nonconceptualism are concerned with *content-bearing* perceptual experiences only. This corresponds to the fact that (S-C) and (S-NC), my definitions of conceptual and nonconceptual states, are applicable only to mental states that have a content *p*.[24] To be exact, you should therefore read 'content-bearing perceptual experience' where I say 'perceptual experience'. Also, keep in mind that, as before, I take both conceptualists and nonconceptualists to maintain that all thoughts are conceptual states with conceptual, i.e., exclusively Fregean content. So here are the different state views:

**(S-C-ism)** Necessarily, all perceptual experiences are conceptual mental states.

**(Weak S-NC-ism$_{min}$)** It is not the case that all perceptual experiences are conceptual mental states. That is, there is at least one perceptual experience that is minimally nonconceptual.

**(General S-NC-ism$_{min}$)** All perceptual experiences are minimally nonconceptual mental states.

**(General S-NC-ism$_{max}$)** All perceptual experiences are maximally nonconceptual mental states.[25]

State conceptualism (S-C-ism) tells us that it is impossible to undergo any perceptual experience without exercising all the concepts needed to specify its content. I include necessity in the conceptualist's claim because, to my understanding, this claim is supposed to be of a conceptual nature. There simply could not be a mental state that deserves the title of 'content-bearing perceptual experience' which does not presuppose the perceiver's exercise of the relevant concepts.[26]

Any denial of this claim will be a version of state nonconceptualism. The weakest of these would be the claim that, *possibly*, there is at least one minimally nonconceptual perceptual experience. However, I take it that nonconceptualists are in the business of characterizing the nature of actual perceptual experience. This is

[24]The same goes for (S2C), which is concerned only with content-bearing mental states.

[25]For a similar way of dividing logical space with respect to these views, see Van Cleve (2012, 426). Analogous distinctions for content views are on Van Cleve's p. 425. Van Cleve distinguishes between different strengths of conceptualist views as well. This is not in line with the conceptualist's intentions.

[26]That this is so will become evident in Sect. 7.2 and Chap. 8. Note that McDowell (1994a, 64) allows that animals and infants who possess no concepts have perceptual experiences that involve no content, but only "perceptual sensitivity". This is why it is important to restrict the state view claims to content-bearing mental states.

why the weakest version of state nonconceptualism I list is (Weak S-NC-ism$_{min}$). It is true as soon as some experiences are minimally nonconceptual states. As we will see in later chapters, some arguments for nonconceptualism support only this weak view, for they take some particular experience type as their starting point and fail to extend their claims beyond this one experience type. Moreover, they show only that *some* of the relevant concepts need not be exercised by the subject undergoing the experience. As a matter of fact, I will argue that all of the discussed arguments for nonconceptualism (except one) support this weak view.

A stronger version of state nonconceptualism, such as (General S-NC-ism$_{min}$), might be more plausible: The claim that *all* perceptual experiences are minimally nonconceptual gives voice to the idea that no content-bearing perceptual experience requires the perceiver to exercise all the concepts characterizing its content. Every experience has some of its content independently of the concepts the subject exercises. On this view, it may well be that the subject has to exercise some of the relevant concepts for each (or some) of her perceptual experiences. Consequently, (General S-NC-ism$_{max}$) is even stronger, for it denies that the subject has to exercise any of the relevant concepts in order to undergo any of her perceptual experiences. Each of her experiences is maximally nonconceptual.

At this end of the spectrum, should I include the view that, *necessarily*, all perceptual experiences are minimally (or maximally) nonconceptual states? While there is some reason to think that such views are attractive for the nonconceptualist,[27] I suspect that they are beyond her argumentative reach. The majority of the arguments for nonconceptualism are based on observations about our actual experiences and concepts. The project of arguing from the corresponding actual facts to what is true of experience in all possible worlds is far from trivial. This is why the strongest view in my list does not involve this modal claim.

There is a content view corresponding in strength to each of the state views.

**(C-C-ism)** Necessarily, all perceptual experiences have conceptual content.

**(Weak C-NC-ism$_{min}$)** It is not the case that all perceptual experiences have conceptual content. That is, there is at least one perceptual experience that has minimally nonconceptual content.

**(General C-NC-ism$_{min}$)** All perceptual experiences have minimally nonconceptual content.

**(General C-NC-ism$_{max}$)** All perceptual experiences have only maximally nonconceptual content.

The content conceptualist holds that, necessarily, no perceptual experiences have nonconceptual content. This is so because, according to him, by conceptual neces-

[27]Think back to the features of perceptual transparency and openness to the world. The nonconceptualist might think that perceptual experiences necessarily exhibit these features; she might believe that, necessarily, perceptual experience has them only to the extent that it does *not* involve the exercise of the relevant concepts. (For belief lacks transparency and openness to the world—this might well be blamed on its being a conceptual state.) It would follow that all perceptual experiences are necessarily minimally nonconceptual.

sity, an entity that is not conceptual, and therefore neither normatively constrained nor objective, simply is not a content.[28] The weak minimalist content nonconceptualist view (Weak C-NC-ism$_{min}$) is that at least some perceptual experiences have minimally nonconceptual content. Just one perceptual experience that has a content that is not exclusively constituted by Fregean senses is sufficient to make it true. By contrast, (General C-NC-ism$_{min}$) requires that *all* perceptual experiences have minimally nonconceptual content. Finally, (General C-NC-ism$_{max}$), the strongest of the nonconceptualist views, claims that all perceptual experiences have only nonconceptual content. No perceptual experience has a content involving even one Fregean sense.

Two comments before I turn to the next section. First, what exactly does C-NC-ism$_{min}$ amount to? On the one hand, it might be that a mental state has two independent contents, such as a Fregean proposition and, additionally, a Russellian proposition (that is, both a conceptual content and a maximally nonconceptual content). This option is not available to the nonconceptualist, as I will argue Sect. 3.4. I will only take into account the other option of understanding this view: Perceptual experiences have one content only, which is constituted by both conceptual and nonconceptual constituents, such as Fregean and Russellian elements.

An example of such a content is a singular proposition of which the object referred to is an immediate element, but which involves a property that is ascribed to the object under a mode of presentation. Another conceivable variety of minimally nonconceptual content is a scenario content that involves not only an arrangement of surfaces and objects, but also modes of presentation of some of these surfaces or objects as part of the scenario.

Second, concerning the step from a particular state view to a particular content view, it would seem plausible that, *if* such a step is defensible, it will take us from a state view to a content view of the same strength. Recall the state-to-content principle from the previous section:

**(S2C)** For any subject *S*, any mental state *M*, and any mental content *p*: The content *p* of *S*'s mental state *M* is a conceptual content iff *S* has to exercise all the concepts needed to specify *M*'s content *p* in order to undergo *M*.

Assume that (S2C) is correct. Then if *M* can only have a content *p* such that *S* has to exercise a characterizing concept for *each* element of *p*, we should expect that each of *p*'s elements is a Fregean sense, and that *M*'s content is conceptual. (So, (S-C-ism) together with (S2C) gives us (C-C-ism).) Now allow that *M* has a content that is such that *S* is not required to exercise a concept pertaining to *each* element of this content in order to undergo *M*. If so, then the corresponding elements of *M*'s content will plausibly be non-Fregean. The result will be that *M* has a minimally nonconceptual content. (Correspondingly, (Weak S-NC-ism$_{min}$) and (S2C) will give us (Weak C-NC-ism$_{min}$), and (General S-NC-ism$_{min}$) and (S2C) will give us (General C-NC-ism$_{min}$).) If no relevant concepts have to be exercised to undergo *M*, its content will

[28] Again, see Sect. 7.2 and Chap. 8.

plausibly be maximally nonconceptual and involve no Fregean senses at all. (So (General S-NC-ism$_{max}$) and (S2C) will lead to (General C-NC-ism$_{max}$).)

Consequently, after defending (S2C) in the following section, I will not distinguish between state and content versions of these different views unless necessary. In particular, (General NC-ism$_{min}$)—including the state view and the content view of this strength—will sometimes play a role. For Modest Nonconceptualism incorporates this combination of claims.

So, (S2C) really just states that a mental state has conceptual content if and only if it is a conceptual mental state,[29] and that a mental state has nonconceptual content if and only if it is a nonconceptual mental state.[30] In the following, I will often refer to (S2C) in this slogan form. I will also speak of (S2C)'s left-to-right direction, the claim that if a mental state is nonconceptual, then it has nonconceptual content, and (S2C)'s right-to-left direction: If a mental state is conceptual, then it has conceptual content.

With this, let's turn to the next section and my defense against the critics' allegations. The sophisticated distinctions made here between minimal, maximal, weak, and general versions of nonconceptualism will not play a big role in that discussion. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that the arguments put forth by other philosophers that I discuss do not make such distinctions. On the other hand, the discussion will be very complex as it is, so I am trying to avoid introducing unnecessary extra complexity. There is no hindrance, however, to questioning whether any of the 'mixed' state versions of nonconceptualism commit us to a corresponding 'mixed' content nonconceptualism. Also, my defense that the state view *does* commit us to the content view is equally applicable to the 'mixed' positions.

What I will claim in the following is that, *given the shared presuppositions that define this particular debate*, state conceptualism entails content conceptualism and state nonconceptualism entails content nonconceptualism. That is to say, I will argue for the truth of (S2C), given certain background presuppositions that need to be made in order to make the debate intelligible in the first place.

## 3.4 Defending the State-to-Content Principle

In this section, I will defend the state-to-content principle (S2C) that is presupposed by both conceptualism and nonconceptualism (and particularly, by Modest Nonconceptualism). First, however, I will show that arguments to this effect presented by Heck (2007), Bermúdez (2007), Toribio (2008, 2011), and Van Cleve (2012) are not

[29] Where conceptual mental states are understood in terms of exercise of all the relevant concepts, and conceptual content in terms of Fregean content.

[30] Where nonconceptual states include minimally nonconceptual states, and nonconceptual contents minimally nonconceptual contents.

fully convincing. After showing the weaknesses of their arguments, I will try give a systematic presentation of the dialectic and then present my own novel defense of (S2C).[31]

### 3.4.1 Existing Defenses of the State-to-Content Principle

Here is where we stand: The conceptualists' and nonconceptualists' views involve two distinct claims, one about mental states and one about mental contents. Of the central arguments in favor of these views, many are arguments only for the respective state version. But both parties want to make claims about the content of experience too, and they presuppose that they can legitimately do so. I take it that this presupposition rests on the fact that they tacitly endorse (S2C), which states that conceptual states have conceptual contents, and nonconceptual states nonconceptual contents, or more accurately, that *M*'s content *p* is a conceptual (i.e., an exclusively Fregean) content if and only if the subject who has *M* has to exercise each of the concepts needed to specify *p* in order to undergo *M*.

Doubt has been cast on (S2C) by the suggestion that state nonconceptualism can be combined with content conceptualism, and state conceptualism with content nonconceptualism. More generally, the critics claim that whether or not the subject has to exercise the relevant concepts in order to undergo a certain mental state has no consequences for the kind of content we can legitimately ascribe to this mental state. The first anti-(S2C) combination gives us nonconceptual perceptual states that have conceptual content nonetheless.[32] The second gives us conceptual perceptual states with nonconceptual content. A further threat to (S2C) comes from positions that ascribe Russellian or possible-worlds propositions to belief. Such positions combine conceptual belief states with nonconceptual content.[33] The defenses of (S2C) I will present in the following try to show that these combinations are not feasible, contrary to first appearance.

There are three broad defense strategies against the critics' attempt to block the step from the state view to the content view that is made explicit in (S2C). The first defense strategy focuses on considerations from the first-person perspective, the second on the need to explain cognitive and perceptual-discriminative abilities, and the third on intentional explanations of action.[34] Proponents of each strategy try to show that the step from state view to content view is well-motivated, and some of them make the stronger claim that it is unavoidable (and thereby, that (S2C), which embodies this step, is true).

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[31] Similar considerations appear in Crane (1992b, 144–148), but are there not aimed at a defense of (S2C) or the step from a state view to a content view.

[32] Contrary to (S2C)'s left-to-right direction.

[33] These last two views are contrary to (S2C)'s right-to-left direction.

[34] The following relates to my discussion in Sect. 2.1.3. There, I distinguished between first-person and third-person views of mental content ascription.

#### 3.4.1.1 The First-Person Strategy

I will first discuss the first-person strategy, which is pursued by Bermúdez (2007) and Van Cleve (2012). According to its proponents, the state nonconceptualism/content conceptualism combination is unintelligible. It is motivated by the insight that we cannot appeal to contents just as "a matter of theoretical convenience" (Bermúdez 2007, 67), for we have to make it intelligible how the subject can be related to, or entertain, a mental content, conceived as an abstract object. For ascriptions of perceptual content, this can be achieved only if they reflect how the world perceptually appears to the subject.

Relatedly, as Van Cleve (2012, 419) points out, it is a conceptual truth about *propositional attitudes* that whoever has one of them with a certain content $p$ possesses all the concepts involved in $p$. This is just the standard notion of a propositional attitude. For, having a propositional attitude involves entertaining the proposition in question, and entertaining a proposition requires grasp of its constituent concepts. So you cannot have a propositional attitude towards a content without grasping each of the involved concepts. Even for Speaks (2005, 377), the subject's having a *thought* or propositional attitude whose content involves a certain concept guarantees that she possesses the concept.[35]

Now in nonconceptual perceptual experience, where the subject does not possess the concepts that are constitutive of the Fregean perceptual content, we have an attitude towards a Fregean proposition that the subject is not able to entertain. Nor is there a sense in which its being constituted by these concepts reflects how the world appears to the subject. So, if the first-person defense works, the critics' position is incoherent, in particular if we take perceptual experiences to be propositional attitudes. We have to say for experiences what we say for thoughts: In either case, possession of the concepts involved is a necessary condition for entertaining a proposition.

The critics might object that an experience has conceptual content $p$ not in the way of an attitude, but as its informational content, by way of being a "nomologically reliable indicator of p's being the case." (Van Cleve 2012, 420) Van Cleve replies that nomological indication individuates content less finely than desired. For one experience, which is supposed to have only one content, will represent many nomologically equivalent, yet distinct Fregean propositions. Nomological indication only gives us coarse-grained extensional content, where the view the critics are trying to defend ascribes fine-grained Fregean propositions to experience. Since this option fails, then, the critics are stuck with perceptual experience as a propositional attitude.

[35]That grasp of the concepts constituting a proposition is standardly taken to be essential to having an attitude towards it is also apparent from the fact that just this is claimed in a standard introductory textbook to the philosophy of language. In response to the objection that propositions, as abstract objects, cannot help us understand what sentence meanings are, Lycan (2003, 84) quotes Moore, who points out that entertaining a proposition is nothing more fanciful than apprehending a sentence's meaning.

While the first-person defense has some obvious appeal, I do not think that it is detrimental to the critics' case. To begin with, it seems to me that we ascribe abstract objects of particular kinds as the contents of mental states for theoretical purposes only. Propositions, as well as non-propositional contents, were introduced by philosophers to help explain certain phenomena, e.g. linguistic meaning or human behavior. As such, they can be appealed to with different theoretical purposes in mind, not all of which are obviously incoherent.

To make this point, there is no need to go as far as Dennett (1971) and treat intentional states and their propositional contents as merely useful fictions that help predict and explain the behavior of highly complex systems. It is sufficient to appeal to the principle of believability and to the importation model of perceptual justification, according to which we should ascribe the same kinds of propositions to both belief and perceptual experience. If we accept these two principles as well as the claim that belief content consists in Fregean propositions, we arrive at content conceptualism. I do not think that it is conceptually confused to combine this with the view that experience is cognitively less demanding than belief and does not require the possession or exercise of all the relevant conceptual abilities.

I think it is correct that the very notion of a *propositional attitude* involves the presupposition that we cannot have such an attitude towards a Fregean proposition without grasping its constituent concepts. However, it seems that the critics could easily assert that perceptual experience can take propositions as their contents without being themselves propositional attitudes. They might say that perceptual experiences, although they are not propositional attitudes, are nonetheless intentional states with a representational content.

But what about Van Cleve's worry that perceptual contents, as individuated by nomologically reliable indication, will be too coarse-grained to match the intended Fregean propositions? Here I think that the critics could, first, insist that the world is a world of facts, where facts are true Fregean propositions. Secondly, they could reject the idea that they have to explain perceptual representation in terms of nomologically reliable indication. Instead, they could point out that what a perceptual experience represents is determined by the worldly conditions under which it would be correct. As a consequence, they could allow that experience represents the true Fregean proposition that provides its correctness condition.

As to Bermúdez's concern that we have to make sense of how a subject can stand in the entertaining relation to an abstract object, I am not sure that he is in a better position than his opponents here. It indeed seems quite intuitive that mental content (the way we think about it more or less pre-theoretically) should be tied to how the subject takes the world to be. However, this does not help with the more general issue—how can abstract objects, such as propositions, explain anything about our causal engagement with the world? How can a subject stand in a particular relation to such entities? His point really only comes down to the claim that the theoretical role *he* has for propositions and other abstract objects is tied to the subject's perspective, without an explanation how they can fill this role. But I do not think that this tells against other ways to employ the notion of a proposition in philosophical theories.

A further point made by Bermúdez is that (for neo-Fregeans in the debate), Fregean propositions talk is really just shorthand for talk about the conceptual abilities employed by the subject. So it is not mysterious, on his view, how such propositions can play a role in our understanding of the subject's mental life. That this assumption is part of the neo-Fregean position defended by the participants in the debate is emphasized by Toribio (2008, 360). But it seems to me that this still does not add to the explanatory significance of Fregean propositions. Certainly, their introduction can be motivated by the desire to find a place for the different ways in which a subject may conceive of one and the same thing. Still, it remains to be explained how these abstract objects can be grasped and how such entities can *really* help with our understanding of the mental life of a subject.[36] As far as I can see, it does not improve the situation to claim that Fregean propositions are complexes of conceptual ability types, as Toribio suggests. For that a complex of certain ability types can be a graspable content of a mental state is no clearer than the competing suggestions.

Overall then, the first defense strategy of (S2C) is not fully successful. Depending on a philosopher's theoretical interests, which might not involve the desire to gain clarity on the subject's first-person perspective on the world, it seems that a coherent position is possible according to which, even though the relevant concepts are not exercised in undergoing a mental state, its content is conceptual.

#### 3.4.1.2 The Mental Abilities Strategy

This takes me to the second defense strategy, according to which our mental content ascriptions are constrained by our need to explain perceptual-discriminative and conceptual abilities with their help.

An initial argument from mental abilities insists that we need an *explanation* of the subject's perceptual-discriminative abilities, but that this cannot be achieved on the state nonconceptualism/content conceptualism combination. The subject's discriminative abilities ought to be explained by appeal to how the world appears to her in experience, that is, by her perceptual content. But perceptual content, if identified with Fregean propositions, cannot give an enlightening explanation of her ability for perceptual discrimination.[37] For the subject's perceptual content can only explain her discriminative abilities if it captures her first-person perceptual take on the world. On the proposed combination of views, the content ascription does not capture how the world perceptually appears to the subject: the finely-grained distinctions made in Fregean propositions find no echo in different ways of conceiving that *S* employs in undergoing her experience (since on state nonconceptualism, no differ-

[36]Note that I am *not* requiring Bermúdez to provide an account of how propositions can do any serious explanatory work. Rather, I am suggesting that we should just waive such a requirement for everyone involved in the debate.

[37]The same goes for perceptual content as sets of possible worlds.

ent ways of conceiving are involved in experience). So, an appeal to Fregean content does not help us gain an understanding of how the subject discriminates objects and properties in perception. (See Bermúdez (2007, 68) and Toribio (2008, 353).)

I am not fully convinced by this initial argument. It may well be that the fineness of grain of Fregean propositions is explanatorily idle with respect to the perceptual-discriminative capacities of the perceiver. But, as we have seen, Fregeanism with respect to perceptual experience can be motivated by other considerations, viz. by the principle of believability and by the importation model of perceptual justification. Given that a theory of mental content has to explain how we can sometimes believe our eyes and how we can have justified perception-based beliefs, a case can be made for ascribing Fregean propositions to perceptual experience.[38]

Further, the critics can provide a different explanation of our perceptual-discriminative abilities. As Duhau (2011, 11) suggests, these can be explained by appeal to the representations involved in perceptual experience. What exactly a subject can discriminate is determined by the structure of her perceptual representations. For instance, Fodor (2007) claims that the structure of such representations is iconic, whereas the structure of the representations involved in belief is discursive. Why not explain the difference between how the subject perceptually discriminates the world and how she grasps the world in belief by appeal to these representational differences, without bringing in content as well? With this move, the critics can explain the subject's distinct perceptual-discriminative and conceptual abilities with the help of distinct representational vehicles, while blocking the step to distinct kinds of mental content.

The mental abilities strategy can be strengthened, however, by focusing on an explanation of our conceptual abilities and on the fact that thought meets the Generality Constraint, as done by Heck (2007). His argument lends support to the right-to-left direction of (S2C), according to which exercise of all relevant conceptual abilities guarantees conceptual content.

Particularly, Heck objects to the suggestion that thought (in which conceptual abilities are exercised), has unstructured possible-worlds propositions as its content.[39] He starts from the observation that thought is productive and systematic. That is, a subject who can think that *a* is *F* is thereby able to think many other thoughts, such as that *a* is *G*. She meets the Generality Constraint.[40] Heck's claim is that to best explain the subject's ability for general thought, we have to assume that her cognitive ability to think a whole thought is itself structured by individual conceptual abilities she possesses (Heck 2007, 123). No such assumptions need to be made for perceptual experience, for experience does not meet the Generality Constraint.

[38] Obviously, this is true provided one holds that thought content consists in Fregean propositions. And it conflicts with (S2C) only if one also holds that perceptual experience does not involve the exercise of all the relevant conceptual abilities.

[39] A very clear statement of his argument and a criticism can be found in Duhau (2009).

[40] See Sect. 2.2.1.3 above.

Heck's next step is to argue that our ascriptions of significantly structured content (i.e., Fregean or Russellian propositions) to the subject's mental states ought to be contingent on whether these mental states meet the Generality Constraint or not. Since the subject's thoughts meet the Generality Constraint, we had better ascribe structured propositional contents to them; since, as he argues, her experiences do not meet the Generality Constraint, we should ascribe contents to them that are not so structured. The underlying idea is that the structural features of the mental abilities involved in thought ought to be reflected in the kind of content we ascribe to thought. We ought to ascribe the kind of content to thought that can best explain these structural features. (Analogously, we ought to ascribe to experience the kind of content that can best explain *its* structural features.)

Possible-worlds propositions cannot as easily account for the systematicity and productivity of thought—which is reflected in the Generality Constraint—as structured propositions. Assume that the content of a belief consists of, say, the set of possible worlds in which Swiss cheese is tasty—not of *Swiss cheese* and the property of *being tasty*. It is not immediately obvious, from the view-point of possible worlds, why the subject now also has the ability to think that Swiss cheese is dry, or that cats are tasty. It may be that we can imitate the relations between such systematically related thoughts (the ones that the subject is able to have because she meets the Generality Constraint) with the help of the relevant possible worlds. But the relations that hold between the relevant thoughts are not *naturally* reflected by the relations that hold between the different sets of possible worlds that are, purportedly, the propositions that Swiss cheese is tasty, that Swiss cheese is dry, or that cats are tasty. Rather, these relations are quite arbitrary if imposed on these sets of possible worlds. If we think of thought content in terms of structured propositions, by contrast, we do not encounter such problems. The systematic relations between thoughts that are captured by the Generality Constraint can quite easily be explained by appeal to the structured contents of the relevant thoughts, which are related in a parallel fashion.

Next, Heck argues that the Generality Constraint fails for perceptual experience.[41] He likens perceptual experience to cognitive maps and argues that their content consists in spatial distributions and is not sentence-like. He concedes that it is possible to give propositional descriptions of perceptual experiences; but since the experience's content lacks propositional structure, there will be no unique proposition that gives its content.

He then moves on to give a case, involving color constancy, in which perceptual experience fails to meet the Generality Constraint. I find his example less than fully convincing,[42] so let me present an example from Peacocke (2003, 321): I can have a perceptual experience of a green object; I can have a perceptual experience of an

[41] Heck (2007, 128; 132).

[42] Heck holds that, when seeing two disconnected patches of the same shade of blue, I can still wonder whether they are the same shade. He thinks that this cannot happen when I employ the same concept twice. See Sect. 4.2 below.

object in an almost completely dark room; but I cannot have a perceptual experience of a green object in an almost completely dark room. (For I cannot see color in the dark.) Now, if the Generality Constraint were to hold for perceptual experience, I should be able to experience this. Note that I can entertain the thought that there is a green object in an almost completely dark room.

It is not impossible to ascribe structured propositional contents to perceptual experience despite the fact that it does not meet the Generality Constraint. But, says Heck, doing so is at best unmotivated. For, the specific structure of Fregean or Russellian propositions is irrelevant to how perceptual experiences causally interact with other mental states; since we introduce perceptual content for explanatory purposes, we should find a kind of mental content that serves our purposes better.

Overall, then, the argument from conceptual abilities supports the claim that structured propositions should be introduced as the content of a kind of mental state if and only if it meets the Generality Constraint. For only in this case will structured propositional content be able to provide a natural explanation of the structural features of this kind of mental state. Since thought, but not experience, meets the Generality Constraint, thought, but not experience, has a structured propositional content.

The main problem of this argument is that something like the Generality Constraint seems to hold for perceptual experience as well. First off, the examples of the Generality Constraint's failing for perceptual experience are few and far between, if they are convincing at all. It has to be conceded that we cannot see colors in the dark. There may be similar cases, for instance, most of us cannot detect a particular flavor or smell when it is mixed in with too many other flavors or smells. But without additional argument, it is not clear that such exceptional cases are significant for the structure of perceptual states and contents generally.

Instead, it seems that the Generality Constraint largely holds for perceptual experience: My ability to have visual experiences of orange cats, say, decomposes into my ability to have visual experiences of orange things and visual experiences of cats. Colorblind subjects lack perceptual abilities with respect to red and green *generally*, they do not just lack such abilities with respect to one particular situation. The same goes for mental imagery, which is phenomenologically very similar to perceptual experience. For instance, my ability to picture Angela Merkel with four arms goes along with my ability visually to imagine her with ten arms or to call up a visual image of Barack Obama with four arms.

Moreover, the Generality Constraint has some limits with respect to thought as well. Just as perceivers may have trouble tasting the distinct elements of a very complex flavor, so thinkers may have difficulties in distinctly thinking very complex thoughts. Nonetheless, it is acceptable to idealize thinkers and hold that the Generality Constraint holds for them. And the same, I think, can be said for the Generality Constraint with respect to perceptual experience. So, going by this criterion, we should ascribe structured propositions to experience after all.

Heck could reply in at least two ways. First, the Generality Constraint corresponds to the systematicity and *productivity* of thought—a subject can think, in principle, unlimited numbers of new thoughts with the help of her conceptual repertoire. By contrast, which perceptual experiences she can have is limited by her

surroundings, not by her repertoire of perceptual-discriminative abilities. So there is a relevant difference between how thought meets the Generality Constraint and how perceptual experience does so.

I believe that this reply fails. The subject, in virtue of having the relevant perceptual-discriminative abilities, *can* have all the perceptual experiences provided by them, if given the opportunity. In other words, I do not think that the ability to entertain thoughts at will, where we have no voluntary control over our perceptual experiences, can plausibly make a difference for which kind of content we ought to ascribe to these mental states. Similarly, *belief* can be said to meet the Generality Constraint despite the fact that we typically cannot believe random propositions at will. For on the basis of our conceptual repertoire, we could believe a great number of things, if we were in the right circumstances.

The second reply Heck could make is that the Generality Constraint is not just about mental abilities generally, or about our capability to jointly exercise some of them. Rather, it reflects particular features of our conceptual abilities.

What is distinct about conceptual abilities is that there are different kinds of them, which play different roles in thought. For instance, there are some conceptual abilities that enable us to think of individuals and other conceptual abilities that enable us to attribute certain properties to individuals. The systematic connections between different thoughts that involve application of the same conceptual abilities reflect the different roles (say, the subject-role or the predicate-role) played by these abilities. My thought that Angela Merkel has four arms is, on the one hand, systematically related to other thoughts that involve my subject-role ability to think of Angela Merkel. On the other hand, it is systematically related to thoughts that involve my predicate-role ability to ascribe to individuals the property of having four arms. This particularity of conceptual abilities is explicitly mentioned in the Generality Constraint (see Sect. 2.2.1.3) and should not be overlooked.

By contrast, perceptual experience plausibly does not involve subject-role or predicate-role discriminative abilities. Correspondingly, while structured propositions (which have a subject-predicate structure) help explain structural features of and the systematic relations between thoughts, they are explanatorily idle with respect to the structural features of and systematic relations between perceptual experiences.[43]

I think that this is an important insight about the difference between systematic relations between thoughts as compared to those between experiences. However, it appears that it is still possible to motivate an ascription of structured Fregean propositions to perceptual experiences, if the same is done for thoughts. On the one hand, this can be done as before by appeal to the principle of believability and the importation model of perceptual justification. On the other hand, structured propo-

[43] I think that Toribio (2011, 179) has the same in mind when she insists that only thoughts have a "*canonical* decomposition", even though she is talking about the mental representations involved in thought. (She takes this expression from Fodor (2007), who is also concerned with mental representations.)

sitions *do* reflect the systematic relations between perceptual experiences at least up to a certain point. In this respect, they are explanatorily superior to completely unstructured propositions when it comes to perceptual-discriminative abilities.

This brings us to the end of my discussion of the mental abilities strategy in defense of (S2C). I have argued that it is not fully convincing, for both perceptual-discriminative and conceptual abilities may be explained by appeal to representational vehicles, not particular kinds of content. Moreover, tying ascriptions of structured propositional contents to the issue of whether a mental state meets the Generality Constraint does not give the nonconceptualist her desired result.

#### 3.4.1.3 The Action Explanation Strategy

The third strategy to defend the (S2C) principle, finally, appeals to our need for certain kinds of mental contents to make intentional explanations of a subject's behavior possible. In particular, proponents of this strategy call our attention to the rationality and to the fine-grained mental contents presupposed in action explanations.

Toribio (2008, 356–358) argues that cutting mental content attributions generally loose from the subject's first-person perspective renders intentional explanations of behavior obsolete and disconnects mental content from reasons for action. Her target is a view that ascribes Russellian propositions to all mental states and thus violates (S2C)'s right-to-left direction. On this view, belief requires the exercise of all the relevant concepts, but has a nonconceptual content. Admittedly, I find Toribio's argument somewhat obscure. Let me provide an argument from action explanation which is based on the argument that I take her to propose, but keep in mind that this might not be exactly what she is driving at.

Plausibly, rationalizing explanations of intentional behavior require reference to mental states and their contents in the explanans—they are the reasons for which the agent acts. (Why did the agent enter the building? Because he believed that it was a bank and he wanted to withdraw money from his bank account.) Nonconceptual content for belief threatens our ability to meet this requirement, for Russellian propositions include entities at the level of reference, but not the way the subject conceives of the world. We need to ascribe contents to mental states that reflect how the world is grasped by the subject in order to allow for true mental-content-based, rationalizing explanations of intentional behavior.

Let me elaborate on this a bit more. The question is how the agent's beliefs (and so forth) and their contents can have an impact on his intentional behavior, how they can rationalize his behavior, and how they can thus be used to explain it, if the contents are disconnected from his perspective on the world (if they are not really *his* contents). To act rationally, the subject is required to have a minimal grasp of whether his behavior is rational in the light of his beliefs and desires. If his belief contents are identified with Fregean propositions, which reflect the way he takes things to be, it is easy to see that he can have such a grasp of the rationality of his actions. However, if the belief contents we ascribe do not reflect how he grasps

the world to be, then it seems that he cannot tell which actions are rational in light of these contents (since they are not available to him). Think of a Dennett-style instrumentalism, according to which the observer comes up with an explanatorily useful belief content to ascribe to the agent, without caring about whether the agent really believes anything of the sort. Consequently, we as theorists cannot use these contents that are disconnected from his subjective perspective in true rationalizing explanations of his actions. As a matter of fact, Russellian contents do not reflect how he grasps the world to be, as they involve no modes of presentation. Therefore, Russellian belief contents threaten explanations of intentional action in terms of the agent's mental states. They are not a viable option for the critics.

But do we really need access to our belief contents to allow for intentional action explanations? Toribio's following suggestion might be used as a comeback by the critics:

> One possible way out would be to appeal to some suitable form of externalist epistemology—based e.g. on facts about reliable empirical connections between the creatures' responsive dispositions and the content of their experiences—to try to explain just how the content of perceptual experiences informs these subjects' intentional behaviour. But, again, the notion of content favoured by T1 [the state nonconceptualism/blanket Russellianism combination] just doesn't seem to be an adequate explanatory tool for connecting such creatures' perceptual grasp of the world to their perceptual discriminations. (Toribio 2008, 358)[44]

So, rationalizing explanations of intentional behavior might be supplied with an (analogue of) an externalist, reliabilist epistemologist notion of justification. Accordingly, the rationality of the subject's behavior, which intentional explanations rely on, can be had without his being aware of what rationalizes his actions. As long as his perceptual input system including his discriminative abilities, his cognitive system including his conceptual abilities, and his behavioral output system are wired up in the right way—so that his perceptual inputs lead, reliably, to actions appropriate to his situation—he will be able to act rationally. We will be able to provide rationalizing explanations of his actions in terms of Russellian mental contents we ascribe to him (or maybe, rather, to his perceptual input system, his cognitive system, and his behavioral output system). Against the reply, Toribio responds that it leaves out how the subject himself is struck perceptually by the world around him (and, I take it, how he grasps the world to be in belief), and how this drives his intentional actions. So we still cannot give true rationalizing explanations of his behavior that rely on what the agent took to be the rational thing to do in the light of his mental states.

An additional defense of (S2C) is that fine-grained Fregean distinctions at the level of mental states and content are needed for a satisfactory explanation of the full

[44]Note that Toribio here claims that Russellian contents are problematic for *perceptual experiences* as well because they cause trouble for intentional action explanations. In the same article, (p. 359, fn. 10), she declares that she is not arguing for content conceptualism either, even though the passage just quoted seems to suggest just this. I will gloss over these issues in my own interpretation of her argument.

range of human behavior. For "[b]eliefs that have the same truth-value need not play the same role in the production of behavior." (Heck 2007, 121) That is, extensional belief contents will sometimes make it impossible to explain why an agent acted the way she did. Since we introduce talk of mental content for the purposes of action explanation, we need to make sure that we introduce enough distinct contents to make those explanations fully possible. Hence, we need Fregean propositions as belief contents, not Russellian or possible-world propositions.

Think, for example, of a case in which Mary Jane, when threatened by a super-villain, will run into a building because she believes that Spiderman is inside, but not because she believes that Peter Parker is inside.[45] Both beliefs are indistinguishable with respect to reference. The difference in the resulting behavior can easily be explained if we individuate belief contents as Fregean propositions, not as Russellian propositions. This corresponds nicely to the fact that Mary Jane employs distinct conceptual abilities in entertaining these distinct Fregean propositions, and takes the world to be different in them.

The third defense of (S2C) raises important issues concerning the constraints placed on content ascriptions by intentional action explanation. But once again, I do not think that the discussed arguments are decisive.

First off, the critics can use the strategy from Duhau (2011) and retain coarse-grained extensional contents, but take into account the representational vehicles of these mental contents, and thereby achieve satisfying explanations of a subject's intentional behavior. As before, the idea is to concede that different conceptual abilities are involved in Mary Jane's *Spiderman* and *Peter Parker* beliefs, and also that these beliefs have different underlying representations. Nonetheless, there is no need to move from this to Fregean contents, for Mary Jane simply has two different ways to think of Peter Parker, to pick out the same content, which is to be located at the level of reference.

So how to explain that she runs into the building only if she employs her *Spiderman* way to think of Peter Parker, not if she employs her *Peter Parker* way to think of him? Only in the first case is the extensional content of her belief represented in a way that lets her make a connection to the belief that she will find help inside the building. The critics have to claim that, by combining Russellian propositions as belief contents with different representations that have these contents, which have distinct syntactic structures and/or distinct narrow functional roles, we will be able to give a full explanation of the broad range of subjects' actions.

The same goes for Toribio's claim that only finely grained Fregean contents can allow for the subject's perspective to be reflected in the mental contents we ascribe, and thus for these contents to play a part in true *rationalizing* explanations of the subject's action. The critics can say the following: To *explain* the subject's action, we make reference to his mental *states* as his motivating reasons. Mental states

[45] I brought up a similar case above in Sect. 2.1.3. Again, assume for the example that Peter Parker exists.

such as beliefs can be individuated finely enough, either via the conceptual abilities involved in them or via the conceptual representational vehicles underlying them. So there is no reason whatsoever to draw any conclusions about the content's structure from explaining an agent's action.

While Toribio focuses on rationalizing action *explanations*, her arguments suggest that she may also be concerned with the reasons *in the light of which* the agent acts, his deliberative reasons. For she wants the subject's reasons for acting to reflect his grasp of the world. Deliberative reasons are typically taken to be the (propositional) contents of his mental states.[46] Here it is *prima facie* more problematic to insist on Russellian propositions as belief contents, for the reasons in the light of which an agent acts seem to be more fine-grained than this. Mary Jane decides to enter the building in the light of her belief that it is *Spiderman*, not Peter Parker, who is inside. To deflect this response, the critics might argue that Russellian propositions can provide the considerations in the light of which Mary Jane enters the building, for her beliefs also include the way in which this content is given to her, or the way in which she conceives it. They will then have to insist that these ways of conceiving a content do not have to be factored in to the content itself, but can be seen as a feature of her mental representations (or the conceptual abilities she employs).[47]

So, in the end, the third defense strategy against the critics, according to which we need Fregean contents for belief to match the way the subject takes the world to be, and thus to be able to explain her actions in terms of her reasons for action, provides no knock-down argument against the critics' claim either. This takes me to my own defense of the (S2C) principle, which I will provide in the following section.

### *3.4.2 A Better Defense of the State-to-Content Principle*

In this section, I will first review the various theoretical purposes of introducing propositions that motivate both defenders and critics of (S2C). I will then present a methodological claim (MC) that connects such theoretical purposes with the kind of content that mental states *do* have. I will distinguish between instrumentalist challenges to (S2C) and the challenge provided by what I call 'the opposing views'. Next, I will bring out the three sources of the nonconceptualism debate and argue that these—the content worry, the epistemological worry, and the phenomenological worry—can be used, together with (MC), to provide a novel and better defense of (S2C). Given the theoretical purposes shaping the nonconceptualism debate, conceptual states have conceptual contents, and nonconceptual states nonconceptual contents.

[46] See, for instance, Olson and Svensson (2005, 205) for this terminology.

[47] However, I will strengthen this defense against the critics with respect to epistemic reasons in the next section.

My discussion of existing defenses of (S2C) brought out some worthwhile considerations.[48] First of all, it brought up the question of what motivates ascribing certain contents to mental states in the first place.[49] Theoretical requirements that came up were the need to capture the subject's take on the world; the need to explain her perceptual-discriminative and conceptual abilities; and the need to give (rationalizing) explanations of her behavior. It appeared that some varieties of content are better suited to meet these needs than others. However, and this is the second result of the discussion in the previous section, it can be argued that some of these theoretical purposes can be met by appeal to differing representational vehicles alone, with no consequence for their contents. Moreover, a view that ascribes Fregean contents to perceptual experience, while insisting that the concepts constituting these contents need not be possessed or exercised by the subject, is coherent as long as perceptual experience is not a propositional attitude.

Third, I have tried to make explicit the theoretical purposes of introducing mental contents emphasized by the critics. On the extreme end, a Dennett-style instrumentalist might be willing to introduce whatever kind of mental content explains or predicts a subject's behavior best from a given observer's standpoint. The instrumentalist, I take it, would not take seriously the worry about how to make sense of the subject's perspective or her mental abilities or the worry about *true* rationalizing explanations of a subject's behavior. As far as explaining or predicting the subject's behavior, anything goes that is useful, at the time, to the observer taking the intentional stance towards the subject.

Less extreme, there is the worry that Fregean propositions individuate subjects' mental contents too finely, so that our linguistic understanding of one another is threatened, as is our ability to give general intentional explanations of subjects' behavior. These worries have been brought to the debate by Duhau (2011) under the header of the 'Publicity Constraint'. Further, philosophers trying to make sense of our intuition that we can believe our eyes and that our perceptual experiences naturally justify our beliefs about the world have reason to insist that, whichever kind of proposition or non-propositional abstract object we pick, we have to assign the same kind to experience and belief. These other theoretical purposes lend support to views that, on the one hand, ascribe extensional (Russellian or possible-worlds) contents to all mental states, and on the other, ascribe the same kind of content to both thought and experience, no matter whether it is Fregean, Russellian, or possible-worlds propositions.[50]

[48] Recall that (S2C), in slogan form, says that mental states have conceptual content if and only if they are conceptual mental states, and that they have nonconceptual content if and only if they are nonconceptual mental states. Conceptual mental states are ones that require the subject to exercise all the relevant conceptual abilities; conceptual contents are exclusively Fregean contents.

[49] See Sect. 2.1.3.

[50] Scenario contents can respect the believability principle, but are problematic when it comes to providing a simple (importation) account of perceptual justification.

What these results imply for the truth or falsity of (S2C) depends on further background assumptions, which I will now try to bring to the surface. First off, the fact that ascribing conceptual content to belief and nonconceptual content to experience facilitates the satisfaction of some (viz. the nonconceptualist's) theoretical purposes does not by itself give us an argument for (S2C). What we need is something like the following line of thought: Philosophers ascribe particular kinds of abstract objects, either propositional or non-propositional, as mental state contents for purely theoretical purposes. They try to explain or understand certain things about subjects with their help. I think we should understand their ascriptions of particular kinds of propositions (or non-propositional contents) to be backed by an inference to the best explanation: Theorists construct hypotheses about the kind of content that mental states have. The hypothesis that best explains the relevant facts about subjects is the correct one. This line of thought motivates the methodological claim:

**(MC)** Mental states have exactly *that* kind of content which best suits the theorists' theoretical purposes.

With this methodological claim in hand, it becomes clear that the fact that there are conflicting theoretical purposes makes it very hard to determine which kind or kinds of content we should say our mental states really have. To the extent that the critics rely on the believability principle, the importation model, or the Publicity Constraint, I think we should conceive of them as accepting the methodological claim: mental states have that content which best respects these principles and constraints. Unlike instrumentalists, who, I take it, do not take seriously the question of which kind of content mental states have, these critics make substantial claims about the contents of our mental states. They insist that *their* theoretical purposes are the ones that mental contents should satisfy, not the ones that conceptualists and nonconceptualists call our attention to. Moreover, they claim, the theoretical purposes adduced by conceptualists and nonconceptualists can be met by appeal to representational vehicles. So, these theoretical purposes are neutral with respect to the kind of content we should ascribe to belief or perceptual experience, and therefore cannot count in favor of (S2C).

In this way, a family of views opposing (S2C) emerges. First, we get state nonconceptualism combined with blanket Russellianism (this gives us conceptual belief with nonconceptual content); second, there is state nonconceptualism combined with content conceptualism/blanket Fregeanism (this gives us nonconceptual perceptual experience with conceptual content); finally, there is the option of state conceptualism combined with blanket Russellianism (this gives us conceptual perceptual experience and belief, both with nonconceptual content).[51]

[51] Note that only the blanket Russellianism views gain support from the Publicity Constraint.

I leave out the corresponding views that posit possible-worlds contents, for Heck's arguments, together with (MC), indeed throw a bad light on this option. Also, the theoretical need for extensional contents can be met by Russellian propositions—discussing the possible-worlds option would unnecessarily increase the confusing amount of different possibilities.

So, instrumentalism and the opposing views just introduced provide two distinct challenges against which (S2C) will have to be defended. To do so, I will first present the theoretical purposes that shape the nonconceptualism debate. The *existing* defenses of (S2C) relate to these purposes to a certain extent, but, as will become clear, they have not been fully brought out yet. I will then defend (S2C) by taking these original theoretical purposes as my starting point.

To my understanding, the content worry, the epistemological worry, and the phenomenological worry are the main sources of the nonconceptualism debate. The first of these leads to the question, coming from Evans (1982, 65;121–124; ch. 6) and even farther back from Kant (1787/1970),[52] of how our thoughts can have empirical content, how they can be directed at the world at all. This is the background to why McDowell (1994a, xi–xvii), Brewer (1999, 26/27), and Peacocke (1992, 85) started thinking about conceptual and nonconceptual content. The (empiricist) theme here is that we need content-bearing experience to allow for content-bearing thought about the world. Even stronger, it is that we need direct touch, acquaintance with the world, and direct reference to particulars in the world, to be able to think of anything at all. For instance, to have a observation-based, demonstrative thought about *that* cat, I have to be perceptually aware of that very cat.

Here is one way to make this concern vivid: If it were true that perceptual experience provides a subject with its own phenomenal qualities only, and if these were not directed at the world beyond the subject and its experience, then there would not be a mind-independent world *for* the subject initially—it would not be for her as though experience puts her in touch with a mind-independent environment. She would have to construct the external world out of, or abductively infer to it from the phenomenal qualities of her experiences. The content worry is that this kind of construction or inference is impossible. For our empirical thought to be directed at the world, it has to be rationally constrained by the make-up of the external world. It has to be possible for a belief to be true or false, depending on how the world really is. But rational constraint from the world can only be had via rational constraint from perceptual experience, i.e., if it is possible for experience to represent the world correctly or incorrectly. So we need to conceive of experience as content-bearing all by itself.

Secondly, related to this, there is the epistemological worry of how empirical belief can be justified. In the debate between foundationalists and coherentists, both conceptualists and nonconceptualists tend to take the foundationalist side and insist that we need rational constraint from the world on our beliefs for their justification,

A further option that is not part of these opposing views is the combination of state conceptualism with content nonconceptualism, which would result in conceptual perceptual states with nonconceptual content. This view is not motivated by the principle of believability, the importation model of perceptual justification, or the Publicity Principle.

[52]Here the other part of Kant's slogan from the introduction is relevant: "Thoughts without content are empty." Kant (1787/1970, A51/B75)

which has to go through perceptual experience.[53] Experience needs a kind of content that allows for the world to constrain our beliefs in this way.

The third, phenomenological, source is the intentionalist (or representationalist) attempt to reduce the phenomenal character of (perceptual) experience to its representational content, as pursued, e.g., by Tye (1995, 2000) and Dretske (1995). The intentionalist relies on the transparency intuition introduced above in Sect. 2.1.3. According to this intuition, when I try to focus on the phenomenal qualities of my perceptual experience itself, I end up with the content that the experience presents me with. In this context, theorists try to find a notion of content that stays as true as possible to the phenomenal character of experience.

This last concern is not independent of the two previous ones. The content worry and the epistemological worry both call for a notion of perceptual experience that conceives of experience not just as a bearer of phenomenal qualities, but as itself intentional. Moreover, they call for an intimate connection between the phenomenal character and the intentional content of experience—if the subject is to think about the world and to justify her beliefs about the world, she must be perceptually conscious of the world. It would be very odd to divorce what the experience presents the subject with from what it is like for her to undergo this experience, especially given such phenomena as the transparency of experience or our perceptual openness to the world. Therefore, our ascriptions of perceptual content have to be phenomenally adequate.[54]

The three worries have immediate consequences for perceptual experience—they are concerned with the question of how to conceive the content of experience so as to allow for empirical thought and justified belief, and to do justice to perceptual experience as it naïvely appears to perceivers. They can also be seen to affect the kind of content we ought to ascribe to thought. On the one hand, the epistemological worry and the internalist foundationalist assumptions it presupposes impact which kind of content we can ascribe to thought. On the other hand, the phenomenological worry has an analogue for thought, viz. the question of how best to make sense of the subject's perspective on her own thoughts, of what she takes herself to think. This can motivate theorists to ascribe contents to her thoughts that reflect her own take on the world in belief or thought generally.[55]

These considerations give us the resources to deal with the instrumentalist challenge. Instrumentalist views of mental states and their contents have no place in the debate. Mental states and contents that are ascribed for the predictive purposes of an observer only, without commitment to (MC), may be legitimate tools in other philosophical debates. In the context of the nonconceptualism debate, however, a philosopher with this kind of theoretical background is not even addressing the content, epistemological, and phenomenological worries that shape this debate.

[53] This will be my starting point in Chap. 7. This worry looms large in McDowell's and Brewer's thought.

[54] This terminology is from Siegel (2013). See Sect. 2.1.3.

[55] See Sect. 2.1.3.

Taking this position vis-à-vis the nonconceptualism debate is changing the topic. This is not to say that the instrumentalist project is incoherent or philosophically uninteresting,[56] but merely that it cannot help pursue the questions that interest the philosophers invested in the debate.

To defend (S2C) against critics who endorse one of the opposing views, more work has to be done. They are engaged in the same project as conceptualists and nonconceptualists, but emphasize different theoretical purposes. (For instance, they worry about perceptual justification, action explanations, and about how it can be the case that the world perceptually appears as we believe it to be.) I will pursue a two-pronged strategy against them that is similar to the strategy these critics employ against conceptualists and nonconceptualists. The first prong consists in my argument that their theoretical purposes can be met without casting doubt on (S2C). What is correct about the principle of believability, the importation model of perceptual justification, and the Publicity Constraint will be captured by the view I will present in this book. I will do justice to the principle of believability by paying attention to the states of affairs that both perceptual experience and thought represent, blanking out their distinct nonconceptual and conceptual contents. This gives us something like an extensional content which meets the Publicity Constraint. The importation model will be rendered irrelevant by my presentation of an alternative model of perceptual justification. I ask the reader to bear with me until Sect. 7.3, where I present this view.

This prong of my strategy will take away the critics' positive motivation to endorse views that deny (S2C). The second prong is what I present now: An argument against the critics' claim that the conceptualists' and nonconceptualists' theoretical purposes can be satisfied by appeal to the representational vehicles, without any need to bring these vehicles' contents into the picture. I will show that, to the contrary, the conceptualist's and nonconceptualist's theoretical purposes can only be properly addressed by ascribing conceptual contents to our conceptual states, and nonconceptual contents to our nonconceptual states. Together with (MC), the claim that mental states have those contents which best satisfy our theoretical purposes, the result will be that our mental states, if nonconceptual, indeed have nonconceptual content, and if conceptual, conceptual content.

Let's start with the concern about the justification of empirical belief, relating to the second source of the nonconceptualism debate. The central proponents of conceptualism and nonconceptualism tend to be epistemological internalists and foundationalists.[57] They tend to hold that a subject has to have epistemic reasons

[56]For instance, in debates between realists and anti-realists about mental states and contents, or about our theory of mind. It may be demanded of nonconceptualists and conceptualists that they also engage in such debates; but this is clearly a distinct project.

[57]They tend to be foundationalists to the extent that they assign immediate justificatory relevance to perceptual experience. They tend to be internalists in that they demand or at least allow that the subject has to be aware of her perceptual reasons. See Brewer (1999), McDowell (1994a), Tye (1995), Peacocke (2001a), Bermúdez and MacPherson (1998), Bermúdez (2009), and Heck (2000). Note that Tye, to the best of my knowledge, is the only one in this list who endorses externalism.

for her beliefs so that they can be justified. These reasons have to be the subject's own reasons, i.e. accessible to the subject. So, they must reflect her perspective and cannot just be ascribed by the theorist for some other theoretical purpose. If we exclude some aspect of how the world is taken to be by the subject in having this reason, we risk misrepresenting how well justified her belief is in virtue of her reason. The same is true if we include aspects in the subject's reason which go beyond her take on the world.

According to internalism, the subject's reasons are either mental states of the subject or their contents.[58] Even internalists who identify the subject's reasons with her mental states typically accept that there is *propositional* justification. A belief is propositionally justified if the subject has other mental states whose contents support the justified belief's content in virtue of the logical relations between these contents. (This holds even when the subject does not draw an inference from the beliefs with the supporting contents to the propositionally justified belief.) Consequently, if one endorses internalism, a subject's mental contents, as her reasons, have to reflect as closely as possible the subject's take on the world.[59]

To return to my Spiderman example, Mary Jane possesses two different concepts of one and the same person, viz. *Spiderman* and *Peter Parker*. She has two different conceptual abilities that enable her to think of the same person, and when she employs them in belief, she will thereby have a different take on the world, even if her beliefs are otherwise identical. Moreover, she will use these distinct conceptual abilities to draw different inferences. For instance, if she believes *that's Spiderman in front of me*, then she will infer *that's a superhero in front of me*; but, assuming that she does not realize that Peter Parker is Spiderman, she will not infer the same belief from *that's Peter Parker in front of me*. But this is not all—in the described case, she will also not be justified to move to the belief that *that's a superhero in front of me* from her belief *that's Peter Parker in front of me*. That is, Mary Jane's latter belief, unlike her belief with the same truth-conditions, *that's Spiderman in front of me*, is not fit to be a reason or justifier for her superhero belief.

The example makes clear that ascribing Russellian contents to a subject's beliefs is incompatible with internalism. For a satisfying internalist account of the subject's epistemic reasons, we need fine-grained reasons and thus mental contents which are constituted by Fregean senses and reflect how the world appears to the subject in a given belief, corresponding to the conceptual abilities that she employs in her undergoing the occurrent belief state. So, if a subject exercises different conceptual abilities in manifesting two different beliefs, different contents need to be ascribed to them.

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The fact that the epistemological worry and the corresponding epistemological presumptions are central to the best available defense of (S2C) should give those who so far reject internalism or foundationalism reason to change their minds.

[58]For the first view, see Conee and Feldman (2004), for the second, see Swain (1981).

[59]I will return to epistemological internalism in Sect. 7.4.

Taking a leaf out of Duhau's book, the critics might reply to this argument that we do not need to introduce different contents for different exercised conceptual abilities. Rather, it is sufficient to appeal to the different representational vehicles that are involved in the *Spiderman* belief and the *Peter Parker* belief. Since these representational vehicles are distinct, it is plausible that the beliefs involving them are distinct *reasons*, for different beliefs, as well. This fits nicely with Duhau's suggestion that conceptual abilities can be explained by appeal to discursive representational vehicles—distinct exercised conceptual abilities give us distinct reasons, and underlying both we have distinct representational vehicles.

However, the critics' reply is not successful. Epistemological internalism requires epistemic reasons for belief that are accessible to the subject, and which therefore reflect how she takes the world to be. Different representations at the subpersonal computational level are not something that the subject has access to.[60] They cannot make a difference for how the subject takes the world to be, unless we allow that they make a difference for the content of the subject's belief. But this last consequence is just what the critics are trying to block. Note also that Mary Jane takes the *world itself* to be different when she believes, in one situation, *that's Peter Parker before me*, and in the other, *that's Spiderman before me*. It does not appear to her, in her beliefs, that the same worldly situation is represented to her, just by different representational vehicles or conceived of in different ways. As far as the subject is concerned, these two beliefs really are *of* two distinct situations. This is why the contents of these two beliefs can serve as reasons for different beliefs about the world.

Let me add that the same move is available to Toribio, but not made explicit by her, with respect to reasons for action. As long as we are concerned only with *explanatory* reasons, it has to be conceded that different mental states and thus mental representations, irrespective of their contents, might be sufficient to serve our explanatory purposes. That is, the different representations involved explain on their own why different actions are performed, even if we ascribe the same (extensional) contents to them. Also, as long as externalism is a live option, such explanations may be seen to be rationalizing explanations because of certain reliable connections between perceptual input, cognitive processes, and behavioral output. However, if internalism is presupposed, and if we are interested in deliberative reasons, in the reasons in the light of which the subject acts or the reasons that she takes to justify her actions, we have to ascribe contents to her that reflect her take on the world. For these kinds of reasons can only be things that she is aware of. Subpersonal representational vehicles do not help, unless we assume that they make a difference for her conscious mental contents. As soon as it is assumed that

[60]The terms 'subpersonal level' and 'personal level' apply to explanations of mental phenomena that focus on parts of individuals (hence, *sub*personal) and the whole individual or person (hence, personal), respectively. Subpersonal theories deal with topics such as computational processes in the perceptual modules or neural structures. Personal-level theories are theories concerned with the acting and thinking person. Personal-level states are typically identified as ones that are accessible to consciousness or rationally integrated with the individual's propositional attitudes. Cf. Bermúdez (2005, 30/31).

the subject is conscious of the different ways in which the world is presented to her in her mental states, there is a difference in how *the world* appears to be to her, and thus a difference in content.

Moreover, on the picture of reason-based justification I am proposing, we end up with a quite attractive overall view of justificatory processes, both with respect to the conceptual abilities and to the Fregean propositions involved in justification. When I justify a certain belief, the inferential steps I take in exercising certain combinations of conceptual abilities are paralleled by the inferential relations between my belief contents.

Let me provide an example. Imagine I am playing hide-and-seek with my daughter. I see her enter the hallway in the direction of her room and the living room. When I am done counting, I follow her into the hallway. Based on my visual experience, I form the belief *Martha went in this direction*; I infer *she must be somewhere in this direction*; I add *there are only two rooms in this direction for her to hide, her room or the living room*; then I infer *she is either in her room or in the living room*. After searching her room without success, further reasoning (including my newly acquired belief *she is not in her room*) leads me to the belief *she is in the living room*. This belief is justified, I take it, because I go through valid inferential processes which lead from my visual experience through several beliefs to this final belief.

How am I able to reason in this way (for instance, by reasoning from excluded alternative)? How do I manage to have beliefs such as, *Martha is either in her room or in the living room*? The account of both of these abilities I am proposing here is very simple and elegant. When I believe that Martha is either in her room or in the living room, I do this by combining my conceptual abilities to have beliefs of Martha, of her room, of the living room, and of the relation of something's being in something. Moreover, I use my understanding/concept of disjunction, which enables me to have disjunctive beliefs ('either . . . or'). I combine my conceptual abilities in a certain way to form this specific belief, rather than a different belief composed of the same components, such as *either the living room or Martha's room are in Martha*. Recombining some of the same conceptual abilities in different ways, I then acquire the belief *Martha is not in her room* and infer *Martha is in the living room*.[61] My inference works because I have an, at least rudimentary, grasp of the logic of disjunctions; I am able to reason by excluding alternatives. After all, it is *me* drawing the inferences; I do this by using certain conceptual capacities of mine. The inferences I draw, then, take place at the level of my conceptual powers.[62]

[61] I acquire this justified belief in response to my visual experience. How to make sense of this, and whether it commits us to conceptualism, will be discussed in Chap. 7.

[62] This leaves room for an explanation of my conceptual abilities on the basis of representational vehicles.

Note that this account fits nicely with the idea introduced above that possessing a concept requires the subject to have the respective inferential abilities, and that to exercise it is to exercise the relevant conceptual abilities.

Now, the content of my beliefs is determined by my conceptual capacities both with respect to *what* it is that I believe and with respect to the *structure* of my belief contents. Paralleling the inferential steps I take with the help of my conceptual/inferential abilities, there are inferential relations between the contents of my beliefs, so that my final belief is (propositionally) justified. The inference is valid because of the logic of disjunctions and because the same content components (e.g. *Martha*, *something is in something*) show up in the right places in the premises and in the conclusion. The most elegant way to capture these inferential relations between my belief contents is to allow their structure to be determined by the conceptual abilities I exercise in having my beliefs as well as by the ways I combine my conceptual abilities.

So, since I exercise conceptual abilities in having beliefs and in drawing inferences (nor would I be *able* to have beliefs and draw inferences if I did not exercise them), Fregean propositions ought to be ascribed as the contents of my beliefs. Fregean belief contents allow for the right kind of logical relations to hold between the contents of my beliefs, and thus help to explain the inferential transitions that take place when I perform inferences from one belief to another. Fregean propositions ought to be ascribed as belief contents even in cases in which I neither draw further inferences from my belief nor form it in an inference from other beliefs. For I could, in principle, start an inference from this very belief, or arrive at it by an inference from other beliefs. To explain this ability, we have to conceive of my belief contents generally as Fregean propositions.

Note that this argument is superior to Heck's (somewhat similar) argument from the Generality Constraint. Both arguments are based on certain conceptual abilities possessed by the subject, the ability to draw certain inferences and the ability for general thought, respectively.[63] The important difference between them is that, as I have argued, the Generality Constraint is too vague to single out a feature of thought that is clearly unique to it—other kinds of mental states are similarly systematically related and productive. This is true even if they do not involve the exercise of *conceptual* abilities—any other kind of reusable and recombinable ability will do. My focus on the conceptual ability to draw inferences from one belief to another, by contrast, has the potential to bring out a feature that is particular to belief and thought, but not shared by experience, mental imagery, and the like. Whether this is so will depend on whether experience is involved in inferences in a way that forces us to say that it, too, involves the exercise of conceptual (and thereby inferential) abilities. But if we are forced to say that it does, then it will be fine for the adherent of (S2C) to ascribe conceptual content to it.

To sum up then, the epistemological source of the nonconceptualism debate provides an argument for the right-to-left direction of (S2C): if the relevant concepts need to be exercised in undergoing a mental state, then its content is conceptual. In virtue of the presented epistemological considerations, the content that theorists ascribe to conceptual mental states should reflect the subject's conceptually shaped

[63] See above, Sect. 2.2.1.3.

take on the world. This establishes the claim accepted by both conceptualists and nonconceptualists, that the content of thought—which everyone takes to be a conceptual state—is conceptual (Fregean) and propositional.

Further, it is legitimate to try to capture the subject's perspective with the help of the propositions or non-propositional contents ascribed to her mental states. The problem with Bermúdez's first-person argument for (S2C), presented above, is that it involves the claim that the combination of nonconceptual perceptual experience with conceptual content is *unintelligible*. What we should say, rather, is that one of the sources of the nonconceptualism debate is the theoretical purpose of accounting for the way the world strikes the subject in perceptual experience, for its phenomenal character—in terms of perceptual content. How can we best make sense of phenomena such as the transparency of experience or the naïve view of perception as our openness to the world?[64] Now, recalling (MC), we can say that perceptual experience has that kind of content which best suits the theoretical purpose of capturing the subject's perceptual perspective on her environment.

It is not possible for the critics to reply by appealing to the representational vehicles involved in perceptual experience here, so as to explain the subject's perceptual perspective on the world while leaving its content untouched. On the one hand, if the representational vehicles make no difference for the phenomenal character of perceptual experience, they are irrelevant to the issue of the subject's perspective. On the other hand, if they do have an impact on how the world perceptually appears to the subject, then they also make a difference to her conscious perceptual content.

The phenomenological claim gains additional force from the content worry. This is the concern that we need to explain how world-directed thought is possible. To have empirical thought at all, subjects need to have *directly referential* thought of the world. This is possible only if the world is given to them in perceptual experience. For this to be possible, subjects need conscious experience of the external world. We as theorists need to conceive of the subject's experience as her awareness of the mind-independent world, her openness to the world. If the subject's conscious perceptual openness to the world is to constrain her empirical thought, its content has to be captured by our ascribing abstract objects to it that are as true as possible to how the world perceptually strikes her. For otherwise, we risk allowing her to have empirical beliefs about aspects of the world even though with respect to them, the world does not really exert any rational constraint on her thinking via experience. Vice versa, we might risk denying her some empirical thoughts that she is able to have—if the contents we ascribe do not capture the full range of aspects of the world that are perceptually present to her.

The claim is equally supported by the epistemological worry: Assume that theorists ascribe an abstract object as the content of a perceptual experience without paying attention to what the subject is consciously confronted with in her experience. This content cannot be relevant for the experience's epistemic significance,

[64] In Sect. 2.1.3, I highlighted the fact that this issue is central to philosophy of perception.

according to epistemological internalism. For otherwise, an unnoticeable difference in the content of a perceptual experience might change what it can be a reason for, even though the subject would not be able to tell.[65]

What do these considerations imply for the truth of (S2C), particularly its left-to-right direction from nonconceptual states to nonconceptual contents? The relevant question here is: Assuming for the sake of argument that perceptual experience does not require concept employment, does it follow that its content is nonconceptual? First, note that (some of) the motives provided above for ascribing conceptual and propositional contents are missing here. To undergo a nonconceptual experience, there is no requirement to employ conceptual abilities. Further, the subject does not pass from one perceptual experience to another in inferential transitions.

In the absence of such constraints, the phenomenological worry (with its backing from the epistemological and content worries) supports the claim that experience has nonconceptual content. Due to phenomenological considerations, it is problematic to ascribe propositions with a subject-predicate structure as the content of an experience. For the world does not strike the subject to have a subject-predicate structure.[66] Rather, perceivers are confronted with spatially structured environments. Fregean propositions, particularly, are problematic because they are constituted by Fregean senses. The world, however, as it is presented to the perceiver, does not involve modes of presentation, but immediately confronts the perceiver with objects and their properties.[67]

As far as I can see, the kind of content that best addresses the phenomenological concern is scenario content. It involves no modes of presentation and has a non-propositional, egocentric spatial structure. So, I think the following defense of (S2C)'s left-to-right direction is available. (MC) has to be in place. We have to presuppose the theoretical purposes (the content, epistemological, and

[65] As before, an appeal to representational vehicles will not help the critics. If the vehicles are irrelevant to the subject's conscious experience, they cannot contribute to its justificatory powers; if they impact the subject's conscious experience, they are reflected in her perceptual content.

[66] This is the reason why McDowell (2009a, 261) endorses the claim that perceptual content has an intuitional rather than a propositional structure.

Note that possible-worlds propositions do not fare any better in this respect. The perceiver's immediate environment does not strike her to be a set of possible worlds. Instead, she is simply confronted with objects in her immediate environment (and their properties and relations).

[67] In Sect. 4.1.4, a related problem will show up as the claim that Fregean senses are too fine-grained to capture the content of perceptual experience.

Modest Nonconceptualism allows that Fregean senses may sometimes be involved in perceptual content, for instance, in the visual experience of the duckrabbit and other ambiguous figures. This is compatible with C-NC-ism$_{min}$. Note that one attraction of minimal nonconceptualism is that it can allow for conceptual changes to have an immediate impact on the content of experience, for it can allow that different Fregean senses will be included in the relevant experience contents. Thus, this view can accommodate problems for nonconceptualism caused by ambiguous figures, as presented by Macpherson (2006) and Gennaro (2012, 151–156). Obviously, such an account would have to deal with the phenomenological implausibilities of Fregean senses in perceptual content.

phenomenological worries) that are the sources of the nonconceptualism debate, and remember that this debate is concerned with subjects like us, who have phenomenally conscious perceptual experiences and content-bearing thoughts. In this context, it is true that if the relevant conceptual abilities do not need to be exercised to undergo a content-bearing mental state, its content is neither conceptual nor propositional.

The conceptualist will be able to endorse this claim as much as the nonconceptualist. The former will merely add that perceptual experience does require us to exercise the relevant concepts. Let me emphasize that the epistemological worry (beyond the force of the importation model of perceptual justification) pushes not only towards a phenomenologically adequate view of perceptual content. It also provides support for the conflicting claim that perceptual experience has conceptual and propositional content and is thus able to be a reason for empirical belief. In my view, this is a genuine conflict that can be dissolved in one of two ways: One can either take the conceptualist route and argue that conceptual and propositional content can be made to fit with the phenomenological worry. Or one can take the route I am proposing here and argue that perceptual justification can be accounted for without the concession that perceptual experience has conceptual content.[68]

To come to a conclusion of this section, I think that (S2C) should be defended not primarily by appeal to the subject's mental abilities or to action explanations. I also find the claim too strong that a view that combines Fregean contents with nonconceptual mental states is unintelligible. The best strategy, which is the one I wish to endorse for Modest Nonconceptualism, is to defend (S2C) by drawing on the sources of the nonconceptualism debate itself, and argue that epistemological considerations together with considerations from the subject's perspective support the claim that conceptual thought and belief have conceptual and propositional content. In the same way, it can be argued that nonconceptual perceptual experience has nonconceptual and non-propositional content by appealing to the content, epistemological, and phenomenological worries fueling the debate.

[68] Another option, not open to the discussants, is to ascribe two distinct kinds of phenomenal content, such as a Fregean content and a Russellian content, to experience to dissolve the tension. I have suggested previously that this is possible. However, in the nonconceptualism debate, perceptual content is supposed to account for how the world perceptually appears to the subject. The very same phenomenal content is supposed to exert rational constraints on the content of thought and to be involved in the (internalistically conceived) justification of belief. Moreover, in typical perceptual experiences, a subject is aware of only one content. Seeing as respect of the subject's perspective is a defining feature of the debate, its participants had better not ascribe several distinct contents to her perceptual experiences to meet conflicting theoretical needs.

This consideration also disqualifies a recent conceptualist proposal by Bengson et al. (2011). According to it, what we would normally call perceptual experience involves two distinct conscious mental states, a content-bearing perceptual experience and a state of sensory awareness, which has no content but relates the subject directly to certain perceived properties and relations. Bengson et al. (2011) do not say much about how these two states are related, but to the extent that they really are distinct, their view is incompatible with how the world strikes the subject. For in undergoing *one* particular perceptual experience, she is not undergoing two distinguishable conscious states, one of experience and one of awareness.

## 3.5 Summary

This chapter has served two purposes. On the one hand, I have provided a clarification of conceptualism and nonconceptualism. This involved a distinction between state and content versions of conceptualism and nonconceptualism, but also a distinction between nonconceptualisms of different strength. On the other hand, I have defended the participants in the nonconceptualism debate against the critics who claim that their views involve an equivocation or at least that their arguments mostly support the state versions of their views, but not the desired content versions.

I have suggested that conceptualists and nonconceptualists endorse the (S2C) principle, the claim that conceptual states have conceptual content and nonconceptual states nonconceptual content. I have exposed the weaknesses of existing defenses of (S2C) and then presented my own defense, which relied on the fact that we can only make sense of the nonconceptualism debate if we buy its theoretical presuppositions. I will later return to the remaining task of addressing the critics' legitimate theoretical concerns, voiced under the headers of 'the importation model of perceptual justification', 'the believability constraint', and 'the Publicity Constraint'.

In the next three chapters, I will examine some central arguments for the claim that experience has nonconceptual content. On the one hand, this is to investigate whether nonconceptualism (in any variety) can be supported by such arguments. On the other hand, it is to argue that Modest Nonconceptualism, with its presupposition of (General NC-ism$_{min}$), is well-supported. Modest Nonconceptualism, then, holds that no perceptual experience requires the perceiver to exercise all the relevant concepts to undergo it. With respect to content, it states that every perceptual experience has a scenario content, but allows that perceptual contents may include some Fregean elements. As I have argued in the preceding paragraphs, the view that experience—if indeed it does not require all-out concept employment—has nonconceptual and non-propositional scenario content is supported by the epistemological, phenomenological, and content worries.

Conceptualism, as it will be conceived in the following chapters, presupposes the truth of (S-C-ism) and (C-C-ism). Part of the fall-out of my defense of (S2C) was that conceptual mental states have Fregean propositional content, for this best explains how we draw inferences. In light of this, the best version of conceptualism holds not only that undergoing perceptual experiences requires the subject to exercise all the relevant concepts, but also that perceptual content is both conceptual and propositional. Specifically, it identifies perceptual content with Fregean propositions.[69]

[69]What of McDowell's recent view that perceptual content is conceptual, but not propositionally structured? I will mostly ignore this view in the following. For one, I am trying to reduce complexity. For another, I am not sure what to make of his "intuitional unity". Finally, one of the main advantages of conceptualism (which relates back to the epistemological worry) is due to its endorsement of propositionalism: It makes possible a highly plausible account of perceptual justification in terms of inferences.

To the extent that the arguments to be discussed in the following chapters lend immediate support only to state nonconceptualism (S-NC-ism), keep in mind that (S2C) extends the relevance of these arguments to content nonconceptualism (C-NC-ism). Moreover, I will bring out in the following whether the arguments support only the weakest version of nonconceptualism ((Weak NC-ism$_{min}$)) or whether they provide support for (General NC-ism$_{min}$), the view endorsed by Modest Nonconceptualism.

# Chapter 4
# Arguments from Phenomenology

In the following, I will examine the main arguments for nonconceptual content. There are quite a few arguments that have been brought up in the literature; I group them here into arguments from phenomenology, an argument from content, and arguments from concept possession. The first group of arguments, to be discussed in the current chapter, draws on the phenomenological worry introduced in Sect. 3.4.2: the argument from fineness of grain (Sect. 4.1) and the argument from situation-dependence and inextricability (Sect. 4.2). In Chap. 5, the argument from contradictory contents brings to the fore features of the content of experience that set it apart from the content of belief. The third group of arguments, which will be the topic of Chap. 6, explores the relation between experience content and concept possession. The arguments to be discussed are the argument from memory experience (Sect. 6.1), the argument from animal and infant perception (Sect. 6.2), and the argument from concept acquisition (Sect. 6.3).[1]

The defense of nonconceptualism to be discussed now shows that only the assumption that experience content is nonconceptual does justice to the phenomenology of experience. In particular, if experience content is conceptual, then it is not rich, fine-grained, and determinate. Nor does conceptual content allow for phenomena such as perceptual constancy or for the fact that properties are always represented as properties of an object in experience.

[1] I should add that this division is somewhat arbitrary; some of the arguments could have been grouped differently, such as the argument from fineness of grain, which relies on assumptions about the phenomenology of experience and about concept possession. Moreover, the arguments in Chap. 6 draw on the content worry, as will become apparent below.



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## 4.1 The Argument from Fineness of Grain

### *4.1.1 Arguments from Fineness of Grain, Richness, and Determinateness*

The argument from the fineness of grain of experience is probably the most prominent argument for nonconceptualism. One of the first to put forth the argument was Gareth Evans. According to him,

> no account of what it is to be in a non-conceptual informational state can be given in terms of dispositions to exercise concepts unless those concepts are assumed to be endlessly fine-grained; and does this make sense? Do we really understand the proposal that we have as many colour concepts as there are shades of colour that we can sensibly discriminate? (Evans 1982, 229)

It plays a major role in the debate between Peacocke (1992, 1998, 2001a,b) and McDowell (1994a, 1998); other important participants in this debate are Kelly, Heck, and Tye on the nonconceptualist side and Brewer, Byrne, and most recently Gennaro on the conceptualist side (Brewer 1999; Byrne 2005; Gennaro 2012; Heck 2000; Kelly 2001a; Tye 2006). In this section, I will first introduce the argument from fineness of grain; then I will discuss the different stages the argument has undergone in the course of the debate; finally, I shall assess the value of the argument for the defense of nonconceptualism.

It is a widely accepted fact about experience that its phenomenology is very rich and full of detail. Listening to a song on the radio is one example for the richness of experience—there is something it is like for me to hear the sounds of the different instruments as well as the voice of the singer. It seems impossible to capture one moment of this auditory experience in words, let alone the whole experience of listening to the changes in the melody or instruments used over the course of the whole song.

Another example, which is more commonly used in the current philosophical debate, is visual experience. Again, it is apparently impossible to capture with words the rich and detailed phenomenology (and, accordingly, the rich and detailed phenomenal content) of any ordinary visual experience. When I look at the curtain in front of me, I experience different patterns in the fabric, which are curved because of the way the curtain is hanging, different shades of orange, black, and brown, and the irregular shape of the folds of the curtain. In this description, all I could do was gesture at how the world appears to me in visual experience. It was impossible for me to fully capture the fine-grained and rich content of my experience. The reason is not only that it would take forever to put the content of my experience into words, but also that I apparently *lack the vocabulary* to do so. There *are no words* that could describe the peculiar shape of the folds of the curtain, nor do I have words for all the different shades of orange that are part of the content of my experience.

So far, what we have is an observation about the difference between experience content and linguistic content. The content of (perceptual) experience is arguably richer and captures more details (i.e., it is more fine-grained) than the content of any

sentence I could produce. What the nonconceptualist needs, however, is an argument for the claim that experience content is richer and more fine-grained than *thought* content. If she could show this latter claim to be true, she might be able to argue from there to the claim that experience and thought must have different kinds of content, the core thesis of content nonconceptualism.

One way one could try to do this is by arguing that conceptual content is the same as linguistic content. Therefore, since linguistic content is not as rich and finely grained as experience content, conceptual content is not as rich and finely grained either. However, it is not clear that all thought content really is linguistically expressible, that is, that thought content is identical with linguistic content.[2] So, the nonconceptualist needs a different argument.

The standard nonconceptualist strategy is to show that it is not just our linguistic resources that are limited in comparison to what we can experience, but also our conceptual resources. To return to the example of my curtain, I can discriminate shades of orange in experience that I do not possess (and therefore cannot exercise) concepts for. So, the content of my experiences is not limited by the concepts I possess—it is nonconceptual. The content of my thoughts, on the other hand, is limited by the concepts I possess; if I do not have concepts for the shades of orange I experience, then I cannot exercise the required concepts in thought, and therefore I cannot have thoughts whose contents involve these shades of orange. So, there are properties that can enter into the content of my experiences that I cannot take up in thought even in principle; thought and experience must have different kinds of content.

How does the nonconceptualist argue for the claim that I can discriminate shades in experience that I do not possess concepts for? First of all, everyone should agree that I can discriminate very many different shades of orange that my curtain has: darker and lighter oranges, more reddish and more yellowish ones. Let's assume that my current experience of the curtain presents to me (at least) two shades of orange, call them orange$_1$ and orange$_3$.[3] They are so similar in color that I can only just discriminate them in my experience. Both shades, then, are represented in my experience; they are part of its content.

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[2]Byrne (2003) argues that, in Jackson's knowledge argument, the reason why Mary cannot learn propositions such as *an experience that represents objects as red represents them like this* before leaving her black-and-white room is that they cannot be expressed linguistically. After her encounter with a red object, Mary can *think* that *an experience that represents objects as red represents them like this*, so the proposition can be the content of a thought. But since this proposition cannot be conveyed to her linguistically in her lessons in the black-and-white room, the proposition cannot be linguistic content. So here we have a case of thought content that is not identical with linguistic content.

The question of how linguistic content and thought content are related is certainly very interesting. However, I do not want to go into this question any further here, for I think that the question of whether experience and thought have the same kind of content is independently interesting, and that it can be answered independently.

[3]The numbers of these shades are made up randomly—just think of two rather similar shades of orange.

However, it is very doubtful that I possess the relevant concepts *orange*$_1$ and *orange*$_3$. Intuitively, I cannot just focus on the curtain, point at one orange spot and say (and actually know what I am saying) 'that's orange$_3$'. But I *am* able to do just this with my general concept *orange*—I can look at my curtain and can truthfully and knowingly say that this curtain is orange. This is an indication that I possess the concept *orange*, but not the concept *orange*$_3$.

More to the point, one requirement for concept possession is that I be able to identify and re-identify the objects or properties picked out by the concept.[4] I have to have certain re-identification or *recognitional* capacities. To possess the concept *orange*$_1$, I should be able to recognize different instances of orange$_1$ as such in different experiences that I have *after* my original experience of the orange curtain is over. Imagine that, 1 min after I enjoy the visual experience of my curtain, someone shows me an orange color chip, telling me that the shade of the chip is either orange$_1$ or orange$_3$. If he asks me which of the two shades it is I am now experiencing, I will not be able to answer his question. For I am unable to re-identify either orange$_1$ or orange$_3$ as the shades they are; I simply do not have the kind of memory that would enable me to recognize very similar shades after my original experience is over.

Therefore, the argument goes, the content of my experiences cannot be limited by the concepts I possess, unlike the content of my thoughts—it is more fine-grained. I can experience things without possessing (and thus exercising) the relevant concepts; the content of my experience must be nonconceptual. Let me provide a better overview of this argument:

1. In undergoing my visual experience of the orange curtain, I visually experience properties of the curtain (e.g. orange$_1$) which I cannot later re-identify.
2. If I cannot later re-identify the curtain's property of being orange$_1$, then there is at least one concept needed to specify my experience content that I do not possess.
3. If there is at least one concept needed to specify my experience content that I do not possess, then there is at least one concept needed to specify my experience content that I do not have to exercise in order to undergo the visual experience of the orange curtain.
4. If I do not have to exercise all the concepts needed to specifiy the content of my visual experience of the orange curtain, then its content is nonconceptual.[5]
5. Therefore, the content of my visual experience of the orange curtain is nonconceptual.

This argument supports (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$).[6] For it does not all by itself establish any more than that *some visual* experiences have minimally nonconceptual content.

[4] Cf. Sect. 2.2.1.3.

[5] This can be derived from (S2C).

[6] That is to say, it does not provide us with a strong enough nonconceptualism to help the Modest Nonconceptualist. Note, however, that my final response to the conceptualist on this issue will establish the needed (General NC-ism$_{min}$). See Sect. 4.1.6.

The argument from the fineness of grain relies on the fact that there are some things that I can experience for which I lack the corresponding conceptual capacities. As such, it is an argument starting from possession of conceptual abilities (see premises (2) and (3)) that draws a conclusion about perceptual content. The argument succeeds only if the fact that the subject does not possess (and therefore need not exercise) the conceptual abilities needed to specify an experience content entails it is nonconceptual. That is to say, it presupposes that my argument for (S2C) in Sect. 3.4.2 works.

There is a similar *argument from the richness of experience*. This argument relies on a comparison between my experiences and my thoughts, for instance, of my experience that the curtain is orange and my belief that the curtain is orange. The belief that the curtain is orange carries just this information—I cannot extract any more facts from its content than that the curtain is orange.[7] The experience content, on the other hand, involves many more details about the specific shades, shape, etc. of the curtain, about the window partly covered by it, the view outside, and many other things.[8] That experience content is rich means that there is an extreme difference in the amount of detail and information involved in the content of similar experiences and thoughts.[9]

Unfortunately, the richness of experience does not provide grounds for a good argument for nonconceptual content. After all, leaving aside the problems caused by the fineness of grain, it seems possible that a very *long* thought might be able to capture all the richness of my experience of the orange curtain. What makes it implausible that I could have such a thought is the fact that many distinctions that are part of the content of my experience cannot be captured conceptually; it is not the fact that my experience has a content that contains many more details than the content of a thought that we would ascribe with the same sentence. For this reason, I will ignore the argument from the richness of experience in what follows.

Similar things can be said about the determinateness of experience content: When I have a visual experience of the orange curtain, all I experience are *determinate* shades of orange, such as orange$_3$. It is impossible for me to experience anything but these determinate properties. On the other hand, I can *think* of the general color orange of the curtain (for example, when I think that the curtain is orange), in which case no determinate shade enters into the content of my thought—it is somewhat indeterminate.[10] The following argument could be constructed from this:

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[7]Let me qualify this claim: I do not want to deny that I can *infer* from this thought to further beliefs. But the content of my original thought does not contain further details about the curtain, whereas the content of my visual experience does.

[8]Recall that I endorse Peacocke's view that experience has scenario content. For further discussion of what experience represents, see Sect. 7.3.

[9]As I read him, Dretske (1981, 137/138) captures this difference by calling experience content analog and thought content digital. Potentially, more could be made of this argument than a mere comparative difference of detail, such as a genuine difference between two formats of content. I will not discuss this possibility. For a detailed discussion of the argument, see Chuard (2007).

[10]This line of thought goes back to Dretske (1981) as well.

Conceptual content is a kind of content that can be indeterminate; perceptual content cannot be indeterminate; so perceptual content is not conceptual.

I will not pursue this argument here, however. For one, I want to focus on the argument from fineness of grain. For another, I am not confident that this principled difference between experience and belief can be upheld. Mental imagery is very similar to perceptual experience with respect to phenomenology; still, when I visually imagine my orange curtain, it does not seem have a determinate shade of orange or shape. Further, even if the argument from determinateness gets off the ground, it can be defeated by the demonstrative strategy that the conceptualist employs against the argument from fineness of grain (see below). Finally, the intuition backing the argument from determinateness has close affinities to the situation-dependence and inextricability of experience, and so is relevant to Sect. 4.2.[11]

### *4.1.2 The Demonstrative Strategy Against the Argument from the Fineness of Grain*

The point of the nonconceptualist argument from the fineness of grain is that the content of (some of my) experiences is not conceptual, for there are properties that enter experiential content that I do not possess and thus do not need to exercise concepts for. To block this argument, the conceptualist can either argue (against (1)) that the subject can later re-identify all the features of the curtain that she experiences, or he can argue (against (2)) that the subject does possess all the required concepts even if she cannot re-identify these features. Both moves would establish that the subject *does* possess all the concepts that are needed to specify the content of an experience when she is undergoing the experience. I will next discuss conceptualist attempts to establish this claim. In Sect. 4.1.5, I will investigate whether the conceptualist's demonstrative strategy can do more than block the argument—whether it can establish the truth of conceptualism. Finally, in Sect. 4.1.6 I will present my own argument, which shows that the demonstrative strategy leads the conceptualist to insurmountable problems regarding the phenomenal character of hallucinations.

How could the conceptualist counter the claim that our experience contents outrun our conceptual capacities? In his *Mind and World*, McDowell puts forth a simple and ingenious reply to the argument from fineness of grain. He points out that Evans and Peacocke only take *general* concepts into consideration when they claim that experience content contains details that we cannot capture conceptually. General color concepts are concepts such as *yellow*, *orange*, or *turquoise*; they allow

[11] Thanks to Gualtiero Piccinini for pressing me on this point.

the subject to classify objects in a context-independent way. For a concept such as *turquoise*, it seems rather obvious that to possess it, a subject has to be able to identify turquoise objects as turquoise, independently of the context in which she is presented with them.

McDowell demands that we also take demonstrative concepts such as *that shade* into consideration when we try to decide whether the content of experience can be captured conceptually. His claim is that demonstrative concepts are exactly as finely grained as the content of experience; moreover, their possession conditions make it plausible that a subject—contrary to what the nonconceptualist claims—does possess them when she is undergoing the respective experience. (See McDowell 1994a, 57–59 and 172/173.)

McDowell assumes that most of us possess the concept *shade*, since we possess concepts of particular shades such as *yellow* or *orange*. Equipped with this concept and our ability to demonstrate properties we perceive, we are able to form the concept *that shade* for any shade we visually experience. So, even though I do not possess general, completely context-independent concepts such as $orange_1$ or $orange_3$, I do possess a demonstrative concept *that shade* for $orange_1$ and $orange_3$, respectively, when I have a visual experience of these shades.

For example, when I look at the curtain and visually experience the shade $orange_1$, I can think that *that shade* of orange is very pretty. The concept *that shade*, which I exercise in my thought, obviously is a concept of the shade $orange_1$. In this example, the content of my experience is just as finely grained as the content of my thought. That is to say, for any detail captured by the content of my experience, I possess, and can exercise in thought, the respective demonstrative concept. This causes trouble for the argument from the fineness of grain, for even if I do not possess $orange_1$, I can still possess a demonstrative concept to pick out the shade $orange_1$.

I think that McDowell's reply to the argument from fineness of grain has some intuitive appeal. For instance, it seems quite obvious to me that I can *think* about this specific shade of orange I am currently experiencing as *that shade*. Since all agree that the content of my thoughts is determined by the concepts I possess, I do seem to have a concept *that shade* for the relevant shade. So, one might plausibly demand of the nonconceptualist to concede that, via the concept *that shade*, a shade can be both part of the content of my experience and of my thought, so that experience content is not more finely grained than my conceptual abilities allow.

Still, this reply faces some problems: First, it is questionable whether the demonstrative capacities McDowell alludes to really are conceptual capacities (see Sect. 4.1.3); second, it can be argued that demonstrative concepts are too fine-grained to capture the content of experience; and third, McDowell's reply implausibly presupposes that the subject possess *some* general concepts (for both problems, see Sect. 4.1.4).

### 4.1.3 *Demonstrative* Concepts*?*

Let's turn to the first point, the question of whether the subject's ability to demonstrate is an indicator of her possessing a certain demonstrative concept. To be a conceptual capacity, this ability should go along with the subject's ability to re-identify or to recognize the same property as that property on different occasions, with the help of the same concept. After all, this is one of the conditions for concept possession. Even McDowell concedes this point:

> We need to be careful about what sort of conceptual capacity this is. We had better not think it can be exercised only when the instance that it is supposed to enable its possessor to embrace in thought is available for use as a sample in giving linguistic expression to it. That would cast doubt on its being recognizable as a conceptual capacity at all. (McDowell 1994a, 57)

What is required for this apparent ability to demonstrate a certain shade to be a conceptual ability, according to McDowell, is a certain *distance* between thoughts containing this concept and whatever it is that makes these thoughts true (for instance, between my thought *that shade of orange is pretty* and orange$_1$, the pretty shade of the curtain).[12] This distance is guaranteed by the fact that my ability to think about the shade (to "embrace [the shade] in thought" as McDowell puts it), with the help of my concept *that shade*, as expressed by my linguistic ability to use the expression 'that shade', sticks around for a short amount of time even after the original experience is over. The experience provides the subject with an, albeit short-lived, recognitional capacity. McDowell claims that, if I experience the same shade of orange again after a very small amount of time, I will be able to recognize it as *that shade*. Even if I do not experience the shade again, I will be able to think of the shade thanks to my memory of it that persists for a little while after the original experience is over.

In the light of the concept possession conditions I introduced above in Sect. 2.2.1.3, for *that shade* to count as the subject's concept of orange$_1$, it must enable her to re-identify the shade on later occasions. For me to possess the concept *Angela Merkel*, for example, not only should I be able to draw certain inferences and think all kinds of thoughts involving the concept, I should also be able to pick out Angela Merkel on more than one occasion. Otherwise, it seems odd to say that I really know what is meant by the expression 'Angela Merkel'; rather, we would

[12] McDowell compares this case to the Wittgensteinian example of a person claiming that she knows how tall she is just because she is able to put her hand on top of her head. We would deny (according to McDowell) that her utterance, 'I am this tall,' really expresses a thought about how tall she is, for it lacks the necessary distance from the facts that make it true.

This talk of "distance" should probably be interpreted as follows: To give expression to a real conceptual ability, a subject's ability linguistically to refer to a certain property has to be somewhat independent of the property referred to itself. If I can only talk about orange$_1$ by relying on the presence of this shade itself, it might seem questionable whether I really possess the respective conceptual ability, and not just a mere linguistic ability.

say that I lack an understanding of who this person is, and that it would be wrong to ascribe the corresponding concept to me.[13]

The same is plausibly true of a concept like *that shade*. To ascribe the observation-based concept *that shade* for orange$_1$ to me, I should at least be able to pick out the same shade again after the original experience is over. This ability does not have to persist for a very long time. But, intuitively, I should be able to re-identify orange$_1$ with the help of my concept *that shade* if I experience the same shade again after a very short time—let's say five or ten seconds after my original experience.

If I cannot, I do not possess the concept in the first place. In this case, since I can discriminate the shade in experience but do not possess the corresponding concept, the content of experience is more fine-grained than that of thought, and the argument for nonconceptualism goes through. The only way to reach a different conclusion is to give up on the re-identification possession condition for concepts.

Kelly (2001a) presents an argument for nonconceptual content that relies on exactly this difficulty. He claims that there are actual and possible cases in which a subject can discriminate properties that she cannot later re-identify, i.e., that she does not possess the relevant demonstrative concepts for. So the content of her experiences must be nonconceptual. He defends the so-called re-identification condition on demonstrative-concept possession, which states: "*[I]n order to possess a demonstrative concept for x, a subject must be able consistently to re-identify a given object or property as falling under the concept if it does.*" (Kelly 2001a, 403)

Kelly argues, as I have also pointed out in Sect. 3.3, that the conceptualist makes a *necessary* claim about experience content. Consequently, even a *possible* scenario in which a subject has empirical beliefs, but the content of her experiences is nonconceptual, is a counterexample to conceptualism.

Here is such a scenario. Kelly presents a test in which a subject is confronted with two very similar shades of green. She is consistently able to discriminate these shades—she is asked several times whether the shades presented to her are the same, and she repeatedly and correctly answers no. This is evidence that the subject indeed experiences two different shades of green. In a second test, she is presented ten times with only one of these shades. Every time, someone asks her whether the shade she is presented with is the one that was originally presented on her left. Now, the subject answers 'no' five times and 'yes' five times even though she is always presented with the same shade. This is evidence that she is unable to *re-identify* the shade. She does not possess the corresponding demonstrative concept. What makes

[13] In the previous chapter, my emphasis was on the other two conditions for concept possession, the ability to draw inferences and the ability for general thought. My change of focus (to the ability to (re-)identify) is due to the fact that it is the one ability that philosophers in the debate focus on. At least *prima facie*, this is a plausible move, for we are currently dealing with *observational concepts*, concepts which are directly based on experience, such as *red*, *square*, or *orange*$_1$. Plausibly, to know what red is (and to be able to have thoughts involving such an experience-based concept of red), a subject has to be able to identify and re-identify the color on different occasions.

this a plausible scenario is that our memory of shades is much more limited than our ability to discriminate them in perception.

Kelly's exact point is, as he emphasizes, "that for any given amount of time between the trials, we can imagine a subject who has a memory skill that does not allow him to re-identify the sample after the amount of time." (Kelly 2001a, 412) For what is responsible for our ability to re-identify shades and colors is our visual memory; how well a subject's memory works and how well she can discriminate shades in her experiences are really two quite independent matters. So there are possible (and even actual) cases in which a subject can discriminate two properties, but in which she does not meet the re-identification condition for demonstrative concept possession. The content of experience is therefore not limited by the demonstrative concepts a subject possesses; it is nonconceptual.

As far as I can see, there are two interesting responses for the conceptualist to this sort of argument. First, he could claim that the subject, in the original test in Kelly's example, need not possess two concepts of the form *that shade*; instead, she possesses a concept of the difference between the two shades she experiences, and Kelly's example does nothing to disprove that she can possess this concept. Second, he could reply that the subject can possess a demonstrative concept without meeting the re-identification condition.

The first line of response is anticipated by Kelly in his article and taken up by Brewer (2005). Brewer concedes that it is possible that there is a subject who cannot re-identify the same shade as *that shade*, not even if, in the very same uninterrupted experience, she was originally able to discriminate the shade from a very similar one. He takes this as an indication of the fact that the subject really does not possess the corresponding concept *that shade*. Her ability to discriminate the two shades to begin with can be explained by a different concept she possesses. According to Brewer, the original experience of the two shades is "irreducibly relational in content, presenting the two samples as 'colored thus-in-relation-to-that'." (Brewer 2005, 226) That is to say, the subject possesses a *relational* demonstrative concept *colored thus-in-relation-to-that*; she obviously meets the re-identification condition for the possession of the concept. For, as Kelly himself assumes in his example, she is consistently able to distinguish both shades if they are presented to her simultaneously.[14]

I do not find this reply very convincing. For one, it is not clear that Brewer's interpretation of the subject's original experience as an essentially relational experience is correct.[15] Let's assume that conceptualism is true for a moment. Then, what the subject's experience represents, according to Brewer, is not that there is this shade (it has this specific look!) and that shade (it has that specific look!), but that there are two shades, "colored thus-in-relation-to-that". The only respect in which the subject experiences two individual shades is that she can distinguish

[14]The argument is expounded by Gennaro (2012, 176).

[15]Kelly (2001a) makes a similar point.

them in comparison with each other, and that she can notice that there is a difference between them.

This is an implausible description of the experience from a phenomenological perspective. When I look at my orange curtain and focus on those two similar shades of orange, they both individually strike me to be a certain shade. It is an additional fact that the one shade looks, say, slightly warmer than the other when I see them in relation to each other. Independently of this comparison, there is something it is like to experience each of the shades, and this 'something it is like' is different for each of them. The biggest problem for Brewer's response is that it leaves it unclear which concept the subject exercises (and must thus possess) in undergoing her experience of just the one shade of green. Imagine that her entire field of vision is taken up by one of the shades of green. Now, it cannot be the case that she is exercising a relational concept, but (according to Brewer) it also cannot be the case that she is exercising the concept *that shade* for this shade of green. Which concept, then, constitutes the content of her experience of the shade of green?

A more plausible analysis of the subject's experience, then, is to say that she experiences two different shades, and that she does experience them to be different. But this experience of difference is constituted by her experience of each of the shades individually. If this is true, then, on the conceptualist picture, the subject possesses two individual concepts of the two shades after all; she must somehow meet the possession conditions for these concepts.

Moreover, according to Brewer, the subject must possess some relational concept such as *is colored thus-in-relation-to-that*. That is, she must have some idea of what a *relation* (between two shades) is. While I agree that the subject in Kelly's example plausibly possesses such a concept, I do not think that we can ascribe this sort of concept to any subject who can discriminate the two shades. Kelly's subject can actually articulate her experience of difference between the two shades—this is what she does when she correctly answers the question of whether she is presented with two different shades. So, we should grant that she has an understanding of difference between shades and therefore a conception of the relation between them.

On the other hand, we can imagine a very unsophisticated subject who does not have such an understanding of difference or of a relation between different entities, but who can nonetheless visually experience both shades. Since I am not a developmental psychologist, I am not sure in which order children normally acquire their first concepts. But it seems plausible that the concept of a difference between two shades is even more demanding than a mere concept of a shade. So Brewer's move makes it even harder for the conceptualist to show that his position is true.

It is conceivable that an infant can *perceive* a difference between two shades without having a concept of this difference. That such a case should be possible strikes me as even more plausible than the claim that there might be a case in which a subject can experience a shade without possessing a concept (either general or

demonstrative) of the shade. This is so exactly because the concept of a difference between shades is more sophisticated than that of a shade *simpliciter*.[16]

Now, let's turn to the second interesting response to Kelly's anti-conceptualist argument, according to which the subject can possess a demonstrative concept without meeting Kelly's re-identification condition. Basically, this response consists in saying, 'so what if the subject cannot re-identify the shades in her later experiences?' The re-identification condition is simply too strong for possession of some *demonstrative* concepts. Even without meeting this condition, the subject can be said to possess the relevant demonstrative concepts because she can think about the distinct shades presented in her experience while it lasts.[17]

While she is experiencing the shades, she fulfills the other conditions for concept possession I listed above: She has the ability to think all thoughts (that she has concepts for) whose contents involve the concept *that shade* for each of the shades she is experiencing. For instance, she can think that *that shade* would look pretty in her living room or that she would not drink water if it was colored *that shade*. Similarly, she can draw inferences involving her demonstrative concept—from *that shade is a shade of green*, she can infer *that shade is not a shade of red*. What is required for her to have these abilities is that she be able to discriminate the relevant shade from other shades in her current perceptual experience; it is not necessary that she be able to recognize the shade on later occasions.

Peacocke (2001a) concedes this much when he makes a distinction between perceptual-demonstrative concepts and recognitional concepts. He agrees with Kelly that recognitional concepts cannot capture the content of our experiences, for our ability for perceptual discrimination clearly outruns our (visual) memory, and our recognitional concepts are restricted by memory. Perceptual-demonstrative concepts, on the other hand, are concepts we possess independently of our recognitional capacities. Peacocke allows that we possess these concepts only for as long as the experience lasts. In response to McDowell's suggestion that there must be some distance between the thought and what it is of, and to his example of someone's knowledge of how tall he is, Peacocke says that, in the presence of an experience of one's height, the perceptual-demonstrative way of thinking about how tall one is actually the most basic way of knowing one's height. He says,

> a perceptual-demonstrative thought latches on to a magnitude, or shade, or colour, only if that magnitude, or shade, or colour, is itself given in the experience which makes the perceptual-demonstrative concept available. [. . .] Such perceptual-demonstrative reference is the most fundamental way of knowing what magnitude, or shade, or colour is in question. (Peacocke 2001a, 249)

In a similar vein, Chuard (2006) argues against Kelly's re-identification condition. He points out that Kelly's example above excludes amnesiacs from possession of perceptual demonstrative concepts. In an example similar to the one I described above, a subject is presented with a triangle and a square simultaneously. She can

[16] For more on these issues, see Sects. 6.2 and 6.3.

[17] Speaks (2005) makes this point as well.

reliably distinguish them as long as they are both present; but confronted with the triangle by itself, and asked whether this is the shape that was originally presented on her left, the subject is not able to give a reliable answer.

Chuard asks us to imagine that the subject in this example is an amnesiac. To be able to answer the question of whether the triangle is the shape originally presented on her left, she has to have some memory of what happened to her in the past, specifically, of which shapes were presented to her before. An amnesiac does not have this sort of memory, and this alone excludes her from possessing the respective demonstrative concept, on Kelly's view. This result is implausible—for why should the subject not possess a demonstrative concept for the triangle just because she has a hard time remembering things about her own past? Whether or not she possesses such a concept seems to be completely independent of how good the subject's memory of herself is. So, Kelly's re-identification condition is too strong. There are cases in which a subject does not meet this condition even though we would credit her with the demonstrative concept.

To sum up this strand of the debate, the central issue seems to be whether, to possess a demonstrative concept such as *that shade*, a subject needs to be able to re-identify (or recognize) the same shade as *that shade* after the original experience is over. It is an empirical fact that our discriminatory experiences outrun our visual memory, so that we plausibly do not have this ability for the shades of color that we experience. But maybe it can be maintained that subjects can have the demonstrative concept anyhow.

This takes us back to a fundamental question about concept possession: What cognitive abilities are really necessary for possessing a concept? Are there different abilities that are necessary for different kinds of concepts? I find it plausible that, to have the observational concept *red*, I have to be able to identify objects as red in different contexts at different times. If I cannot consistently tell whether a tomato is red or green, for instance, then I simply do not know on the basis of perception what it is for a tomato to be red, and I do not possess the perceptually based concept *red*.

On the other hand, it is plausible that I can think about things being $\text{orange}_1$ via a demonstrative concept even if I do not possess the concept $orange_1$. When I look at the orange curtain and at the spot where it is colored $\text{orange}_1$, I can think that I would not want to wear pants that are colored *that shade*, that *that shade* is a shade of orange and therefore is not a shade of green, etc. The contents of my thoughts may not have the distance from the facts that they are of which was demanded by McDowell, but I do not see how someone could deny that they are real, content-bearing thoughts. I am currently thinking them, so what else could they be? Moreover, they are thoughts about the *specific* shade of orange that I am just looking at. For instance, I can think that I would not want to wear pants colored *that shade* (looking at the $\text{orange}_1$ spot), but think that I would love to have pants colored *that shade* (looking at the $\text{orange}_3$ spot right next to it).

The nonconceptualist agrees that the contents of my thoughts are determined by my conceptual abilities. If I can think that I would not want to wear pants colored *that shade*, then I have to possess a genuine concept *that shade* of $\text{orange}_1$, and I have to exercise whatever conceptual abilities are required to entertain this thought.

The only way to make sense of my having these thoughts I can think of, then, is to admit that they are both thoughts whose contents involve demonstrative concepts of shades that are just as fine-grained as the contents of my experience of the curtain.

Consequently, Kelly's re-identification condition cannot be required for the possession of perceptual-demonstrative concepts. Instead, we need to appeal to other conditions, such as the Generality Constraint and the inferential condition, to guarantee that *that shade* is indeed a concept. Let me conclude that, so far, the conceptualist's demonstrative strategy is very promising.[18]

### *4.1.4 Demonstration via General Concepts*

Now, let's turn to the second argument against the demonstrative strategy, the claim that (quite the contrary to what has been argued so far) demonstrative concepts are too fine-grained to be able to capture the content of experience. This claim was put forth in Peacocke (1998, 382).

The basic idea of the argument is that, for each shade I can visually experience, I may possess quite a few different demonstrative concepts. (In contrast to the normal argument from fineness of grain, the point is not that there are too many experienced shades and too few concepts for them, but that there are too many concepts for the shades we can perceive.) For instance, looking at a scarf that is a specific shade of scarlet, and experiencing it to be a certain specific shade of scarlet, I am able to refer to it in thought with my demonstrative concepts *that red*, *that scarlet*, or *that color*.

Which of the concepts do I exercise when I undergo the experience, and which of them therefore determines its content, according to the conceptualist? He cannot allow all of the corresponding Fregean senses to enter my experience content, since I only experience *one* shade; if all of these concepts (as in *Fregean senses*) were part of the content of my experience, it would have to involve three different elements, all at the same time, corresponding to the experienced same shade. This is a phenomenally inadequate assumption. So, the content of my experience of the scarf cannot be determined by my demonstrative concepts, for if it were, the experience would have multiple or indeterminate contents instead of just representing one specific shade of scarlet.

As a reply to this argument, the conceptualist could pick one, for instance the most specific, demonstrative concept and claim that this is the concept that determines the content of the experience. This move, however, does not solve the

[18]Contrary to my line of thought here, Veillet (2014) claims that the nonconceptualist has to stick with the re-identification condition—otherwise, she is forced to abandon the argument from fineness of grain. Veillet argues quite rightly that, on the presupposition of the re-identification condition, some demonstrative *thoughts* threaten to turn out nonconceptual as well. I think that the latter problem should and can be bypassed. Some demonstrative concepts are concepts even though they do not meet the re-identification condition; their concepthood is ensured by the fact that they meet the inferential condition and the Generality Constraint.

problem. To demonstrate this, Peacocke asks us to imagine two perceivers who are looking at the same shade of scarlet. They experience this shade as the same shade (i.e., their experiences have exactly the same content), yet they possess different demonstrative concepts for the shade they experience. Subject S possesses the concept *that scarlet*, subject T only possesses the concept *that red*. In this case, the conceptualist is forced to admit that their experiences have different contents after all, for the content of S's experience is more specific (since it is determined by the concept *that scarlet*) than that of T's experience (which is determined by the concept *that red*). This again, Peacocke argues, is very implausible. A better description of the scenario would be to say that both subjects undergo experiences with the same content, but that these identical experiences make different demonstrative concepts available to them, *that scarlet* for S and *that red* for T.

As a reply to this argument, the conceptualist could simply bite the bullet, as suggested by Kelly (2001b). He can concede that, in different contexts, the content of my experience of the scarlet scarf is determined by different demonstrative concepts; moreover, he can argue that it is *plausible* to assume that subjects who possess different demonstrative concepts for the same shade will experience this shade differently.

According to Kelly, it is plausible to assume that a subject will perceive her surroundings differently if she possesses and exercises different (demonstrative) concepts. She may perceive the shade of the scarf as *that scarlet* or as *that red*; in each case, the scarf will indeed look differently to her. Each time, the same real world shade will be represented (this is simply the color the scarf actually has); but it will be represented differently. Which concept the subject does employ in her experience depends on the context.

For instance, imagine that the subject perceives the scarlet scarf against the background of other red objects. In such a context, her demonstrative concept *that red* will pick out the shade of the scarf with just the right determinacy. For she perceives the shade of the scarf as a specific shade of red that is different from the other reds represented in her experience; *that red* is a concept just fine enough to pick out the scarf's scarlet from the other shades of red. Analogous things will be true of the concept *that scarlet* if the subject perceives the scarf within the context of other scarlet objects.

The conceptualist need not follow Peacocke's intuitions in the intersubjective case either. To make this claim plausible, Kelly asks us to compare an interior decorator with an average perceiver. For the interior decorator, who deals with very fine differences between shades on an everyday basis, "part of what she sees is that this scarlet scarf looks like color chip r-235, but not like r-110."[19] On the other hand, we can imagine that the average subject cannot distinguish the shades of chips r-235 and r-110, and take this as an indication that, while the scarf looks to be a shade of scarlet to the interior decorator, it looks like a shade of red to the average subject. The scarf looks different to them because their conceptual abilities with respect

[19]Kelly (2001b, 226) I refer to the page numbers of the reprint of the article in Gunther (2003).

to shades of scarlet are not equally fine-grained. We could say that the interior decorator's experience is determined by the concept *that scarlet*, whereas that of the average perceiver is determined by the concept *that red*.

What lends plausibility to this scenario is the fact that someone who is trained to distinguish different but similar shades might indeed perceive the world around him differently than someone who is not. Similarly, it is plausible to hold that a music lover with professional training hears a classical piece of music differently than a layman; among other things, the music lover will be able to make finer distinctions in what she hears than the layman.

Nonetheless, I find Kelly's conceptualist argument problematic. It conflates the distinction between *seeing as* and *seeing*, where *seeing as* is a form of experience that is conceptually informed, and *seeing* is a kind of experience that is completely independent of concepts or further beliefs.[20] For instance, imagine someone who learns to understand Chinese. Before and after learning the language, there will be something it is like for her to hear someone utter a certain Chinese sentence. At some level, she will be hearing the same thing, the same sounds, pitch, etc. before and after learning Chinese. At another level, her experience will change: The sounds will acquire a meaning for her after learning the language.

Both before and after learning Chinese, the subject's experience will be unchanged with respect to what she *hears*; but it will change with respect to what she *hears* the Chinese sentence *as*. This change is due to a change in her conceptual abilities. The nonconceptualist can allow for concepts making a difference to our experiences in this way, but she has to insist that there is a level of experience content that is nonconceptual and therefore untouched by conceptual changes.

The conceptualist wants to deny the distinction between *seeing* and *seeing as*. In Kelly's example, the subjects' experiences are instances exclusively of *seeing as*—one subject sees the shade *as a sort of scarlet*, the other sees it *as a sort of red*. There is no shared level of content that is the same for both of them despite their conceptual differences. The conceptualist might in the end turn out to be right about this claim; nonetheless, it is illegitimate for him to conflate the distinction between *seeing* and *seeing as* at this point, for it is exactly what is at stake: Can there be experience content that is not determined by one's concepts? If the conceptualist argument relies on an assumption that all experience is conceptually informed, he begs the question.

Before turning to McDowell's and Brewer's replies to Peacocke's objection (that our conceptual abilities are more fine-grained than the contents of our perceptual experiences), let me raise a further problem for the demonstrative strategy, which was brought up by Peacocke and Tye, the third issue I alluded to above. (The replies arguably solve both problems, which is why I save them for later.)

According to Tye, the demonstrative strategy illegitimately presupposes that the subject possesses a *general* concept, namely the concept of a shade. Possession of this concept is required for a subject to possess the concept *that shade*; to be able

[20]Cf. Dretske (1969).

consistently to demonstrate shades, not shapes or sounds, in different contexts, a subject must know what a shade is.

But it is very implausible that everyone who can experience specific shades possesses the general concept *shade*. For, as Tye argues,

> [t]o possess the concept *shade*, one must possess a cognitive grasp of the difference between a shade and a color that is not a shade, classifying $red_{27}$ as a shade, for example, and red as not. It seems to me quite likely that some high schoolers do not grasp the concept *shade*! (Tye 2005, 231)[21]

The conceptualist could reply that we should take the possession conditions for the general concept *shade* to be less demanding. For example, he could claim that possession of the concept merely requires an understanding that the shades a subject perceives all have something in common, something that a specific shade and a specific sound do not have in common. (She would have to have some very basic grasp of the fact that being a shade is one specific sort of property.) Further, the conceptualist could claim that this requirement can be met by any being that can plausibly perceive shades. He would have to argue that the fact that a subject can perceptually pick out shades (in contrast to other features of her experience) is sufficient for her to have some basic idea of what it is to be a shade.

I am not sure that this is a very plausible account of what it is to possess the concept *shade*. Again, the question is what requirements we should assume for concept possession. At any rate, the nonconceptualist can reply that even a subject who does not meet the proposed possession condition can still enjoy the very same experience with the same content as one who meets the possession condition for *shade*. Similar issues will be discussed below in Chap. 6; therefore, I will not pursue it any further at this point.

In light of this, the most promising reply that is open to the conceptualist is that the demonstrative concept involved in perceptual experience is simply *that*. The content of my visual experience of the orange curtain, specifically of the shade $orange_1$, is constituted by my demonstrative concept *that* which refers to the actual shade $orange_1$.[22] And why not? Not only can I think that *that shade is pretty* while looking at $orange_1$; I can also think that *that is pretty* while looking at the shade, thereby meaning the shade. If this strategy works, the conceptualist can avoid appealing to general concepts in his account of our perceptual demonstratives altogether.

The biggest problem of the strategy is that it is not clear how the concept *that*, if it is not supplemented by a general concept, can pick out one specific property at all. For instance, when a subject visually experiences a red triangle and thinks *that's pretty*, how does the concept *that* succeed in referring to the color, not the shape of the object she perceives? With respect to experience: If the concepts that determine the content of her experience are pure demonstratives that do not contain

[21] Peacocke makes the same argument with respect to the concept *that shape* in Peacocke (2001a, 245).

[22] This conceptualist reply is proposed by Peacocke (2001a, 245) and Tye (2005, 231).

any specification as to what exactly is demonstrated, it might seem doubtful that they succeed in picking out the shade present in one location of the visual field, for example, instead of the shape. How would pure demonstratives do this?

Peacocke (2001b, 610) argues that the *that* as a demonstrative concept causes problems for the conceptualist (on the pure demonstrative strategy) when it shows up in *thought*. Peacocke argues that the conceptualist cannot give an account of how thoughts such as *that is pretty* achieve their reference since he cannot claim that they are supplemented by nonconceptual content in experience. A related objection to the conceptualist would appeal to experience content directly—if experience content (sometimes) consists of nothing but pure demonstratives, how does my experience manage to have any specific representational content at all?

Peacocke argues that only with the help of nonconceptual ways in which properties are presented in experience can we explain how the (unsupplemented) demonstratives we use in thought can achieve determinate reference. A conceptualist, who assumes that there are no such ways, cannot give an account of how the subject manages to think *that's pretty* of the shade, but not the shape, of the red triangle. According to Peacocke, "[t]he kind of property referred to—a shape property rather than a sound property, say—is fixed by the perceptual way that contributes to the individuation of the perceptual-demonstrative in question." (Peacocke 2001a, 247). So, when the subject's concept *that* latches on to the way in which she perceives the color in her experience, but not the shape, it will refer to the color. The conceptualist, without support of Peacocke's ways of perceiving, cannot explain how she succeeds in her reference.

Brewer (2005) responds to this charge by providing a conceptualist account of our ability to refer to specific properties with the demonstrative *that*. What fixes the reference of pure demonstratives on his picture is the fact that the subject *focuses her attention* on the shade, not the shape of the object she perceives. This focus of attention constitutes an attentional and tracking relation between the subject and a specific property (such as the shade of the triangle), which is unique and determinate and can therefore guarantee determinate reference to just the shade. This attentional relation, in turn, constitutes the subject's exercise of the demonstrative concept *that*, in experience, for the respective property (Brewer 2005, 224).

Brewer seems to assume that, when I experience something, this already involves focus of attention. Even before attending to it in thought, in experiencing the red triangle, my attention is focused on its shade and shape; this focus constitutes two different tracking and attentional relations to two different properties of what I see. Thereby, I possess and exercise two different pure demonstrative concepts, which are then also available for me in thought. When I think *that is pretty*, meaning the shade of the triangle, my thought relies on the tracking and attentional relation between my experience and the shade. This is how I succeed in thinking of the shade, not the shape of the red triangle.

This strategy—eliminating the general concept *shade* from the concepts that are needed to constitute the content of experience—can be equally well applied to the second objection that I discussed above: The demonstrative concept that I exercise in undergoing my experience, and that therefore determines its content, is always

the pure demonstrative *that*; it is irrelevant whether I also possess the concepts *that shade*, *that red*, or *that scarlet*. It may be true that I and another perceiver are looking at the same scarlet scarf and that I possess the concept *that scarlet* but she only possesses the concept *that red*; but this does not necessarily mean that we experience the scarf differently, for, in undergoing our experiences we both exercise the pure demonstrative *that*, a concept of the same shade, which is equally fine-grained for both of us. This is how the conceptualist can account for the commonalities between the experience contents of different perceivers with differing conceptual capacities.

Granting for now that this pure demonstrative strategy works, does it also establish the truth of conceptualism? I will turn to this question in the following paragraphs.

### *4.1.5 Conceptualizable, But Not Conceptualized*

Let's assume for now that the pure demonstrative strategy shows that subject S possesses a concept *that* for every property that is represented in his experiences. The argument from the fineness of grain has failed—our experience contents do not outrun our conceptual abilities.[23] In particular, I can possess a concept of something without being able to re-identify it (contra premise (2) above). However, this does not entail that my experiences have conceptual contents (which are constituted by demonstrative modes of presentation). Let me explain.[24]

What is implied by the fact that experience content is no more fine-grained than the concepts possessed by a subject is that the subject possesses a concept corresponding to every feature of his experience. This certainly has one negative consequence for the position of the nonconceptualist—one of her arguments for her view is inconclusive. Her point was that experience content cannot be conceptual because the subject does not even *possess* all the concepts that would be needed to specify the contents of his experiences. The way things look now, the nonconceptualist cannot make this point anymore: Thanks to his demonstrative concepts, the subject indeed possesses all the concepts needed to specify his experiential contents.

However, this does not mean that the failure of the argument from the fineness of grain is an argument *for* the conceptualist position or *against* nonconceptualism. It is simply neutral on the question of whether conceptualism or nonconceptualism is true. For conceptualism to be true, what is required is not only that the subject *possess* every concept to specify his experience content, but also that he *exercise*

[23]To connect this back to my discussion of the argument from the determinateness of perceptual content in Sect. 4.1.1: For every fully determinate aspect of her perceptual experience, S possesses a pure demonstrative concept. The conceptualist can claim that her experience requires the exercise of all these concepts, and that its determinate content is therefore conceptual (and demonstrative).

[24]The same claim can be found in Coliva (2003, 58). The idea is also suggested by Wright (2002a,b), although he seems to combine state nonconceptualism with content conceptualism. See Wright (2002b, 171).

these concepts in undergoing the experience. But all that the conceptualist has shown so far is that the subject possesses concepts corresponding to every detail represented in experience; he has not shown that these concepts are required to be exercised in order for the subject to undergo the experience.

The nonconceptualist could now defend the following view: Some of the relevant concepts are not exercised in experience itself; therefore experience content is nonconceptual. But we are able, thanks to our pure demonstrative concepts, to take up *all* the content of our experiences in thought; i.e., experience content is fully conceptualizable (if we think about it) even though it is not already conceptual in experience itself. This might even be relevant to an account of how experience can justify belief, a thought I will further pursue in Sect. 7.3.

That a subject's conceptual abilities are just as finely grained as the contents of her experiences is equally compatible with such a view as it is with a conceptualist view, according to which she needs to exercise all the relevant demonstrative concepts in her experiences. We need other arguments for or against nonconceptualism to decide which view is more appropriate to our mental lives. Let me now present such an argument for nonconceptualism—and against the conceptualist's pure demonstrative strategy.

### *4.1.6 The Phenomenal Adequacy of Demonstrative Perceptual Contents*

I do not think that the nonconceptualist has any room to argue that Brewer's pure demonstrative concepts are not fine-grained enough or too finely grained to capture exactly the detail of content of our visual experiences. So the argument from fineness of grain, as it is present in the literature, is inconclusive. But let me present a novel problem for the demonstrative strategy: An account that takes experience content to be constituted by nothing but demonstratives is not phenomenally adequate, and thus in conflict with the phenomenological source of the nonconceptualism debate. Let me explain.

First of all, we should note that conceptualism and nonconceptualism lead to two very different pictures of perceptual experience. Let's take my visual experience of the orange curtain as an example. For the nonconceptualist, experience content consists in scenario content, objects and properties arranged along axes originating from the perceiver.

There are three levels relevant to the issue[25]: There is, for one, the real world orange curtain with all its real world color and shape properties. For another, there is the experience with its content, which may or may not match the way the world really is—the content of the experience consists in the shape and the shades of the curtain, which are located at a certain distance from me right in front of me, etc.

[25]This distinction goes back to Peacocke (1998, 381).

Third, there are my beliefs about the curtain, such as that I like its orange color or the patterns on it.

The nonconceptualist explains the rich phenomenology by appeal to the intermediate level, the level of the rich amount of properties presented in the experience, i.e., the level of its scenario content. Very many detailed properties are part of a scenario content; they are responsible for the feel of my experience.

The conceptualist can be seen to assume three levels as well: First of all, there is the real curtain. Second, (and this is where he contradicts the nonconceptualist) there is the level of experience content, which is constituted exclusively by pure demonstrative concepts referring to properties of the real curtain, of the real world scene before my eyes. Third, there are the thoughts I can have about the real curtain thanks to the demonstrative concepts in play in experience that ensure my contact with it.

On this picture, what can account for the rich phenomenology of experience? There are (as far as I can see) two options. Either the modes of presentation associated with the demonstrative concepts are responsible for the phenomenal character,[26] or the properties that are demonstrated themselves supply the phenomenal character. The first of these options is problematic because the assumption that the phenomenal content (and thereby the phenomenal character) of experience is constituted by modes of presentation leads to problems similar to those of sense-datum theory.

For one, undergoing a visual experience seems to *directly relate* us to properties of objects. The phenomenal character that my visual experience of the orange curtain has is apparently inseparable from the orange of the curtain itself. Recall the transparency intuition which I introduced earlier. When I focus on the phenomenal character of my experience, I simply end up with the apparent orange of the curtain. In the phenomenology of my experience, I seem to be presented with the properties of objects around me—but I cannot notice any modes of presentation of these properties. (See Chalmers 2006, 61–63.)

For another, we can construct inversion scenarios in which it does not make a difference—for the correctness of an experience with a phenomenal content as of an orange curtain—whether the real world color it represents is, e.g., orange or turquoise. Imagine that I have an inverted twin—her visual experiences of color are phenomenally inverted with respect to mine. When she looks at the orange curtain, her mode of presentation is phenomenally like my mode of presentation of a turquoise curtain. This is compatible with her representing the curtain's color correctly, for she simply represents the color of the curtain under a different mode of presentation.

Now imagine that I am looking at an orange curtain while my twin is looking at a turquoise curtain. In this scenario, the phenomenal character of the modes of presentation constituting our respective experience contents will be identical for me

[26]This option is the one picked by Brewer (2005, 156). He holds that "all phenomenology is a matter of the *mode of presentation* of certain states of affairs to a person." (my emphasis)

and my twin. Our experiences will be phenomenally indistinguishable; moreover, they will both be veridical. This means that it is irrelevant for the content of our experiences which real world color is represented.[27] Color properties are not part of the content of an experience. Instead, its phenomenal content is constituted exclusively by modes of presentation of the respective properties.

The result of the first conceptualist option is that experience does not directly confront us with reality. Even worse, since there are scenarios in which real color properties of real objects do not play a role for whether an experience is correct, they cannot be part of the phenomenal content of experiences at all. The content of experiences is constituted by nothing but modes of presentation of physical properties, and we only experience the world through them. This view conflicts with the intuition that experience is our openness to the world. It does not address any of the three worries that are the source of the nonconceptualism debate.

According to the second view, it is not the demonstrative concepts (alone) that constitute the phenomenology of an experience; rather, it is the real orange curtain that I experience. It is the rich variety of shades and shapes of the curtain *itself* that I experience by demonstrating these properties; therefore, it is these properties all by themselves that are responsible for the feel of my experience.

This way, not only can the conceptualist account for the phenomenology of experience; he also gains the advantage of not introducing an extra layer of experience content that separates the subject from the real world. This fits especially well with the naïve conception of perceptual experience as our openness to the world. On the nonconceptualist view, if I have described it correctly, it might seem appropriate to say that I experience the content of my visual experience, not the curtain and its properties itself. On the conceptualist view, on the other hand, I *directly* experience the real world curtain.

Despite this advantage, the conceptualist faces a version of the standard problem of direct realism: How do we account for the rich phenomenology of experience in the case of hallucination? Before getting to this phenomenological problem, let me shortly summarize a similar, but epistemological problem brought up by Tye (2005, 232) and Heck (2000, 496). They argue that the conceptualist cannot explain how thoughts involving demonstrative concepts can have their reference fixed in cases of misperception, where there is no real property that the demonstrative refers to. The nonconceptualist can have the reference of the concept fixed by the content of the experience, which will be determinate even if the experience content is not in accordance with the real world. The conceptualist, who assumes that the experience

[27] There is an analogous claim that experience content is abstract: My visual experience of Charlie the cat is phenomenally indistinguishable from my experience of his identical twin, Chuck the cat. Apparently, which individual is present is irrelevant for the correctness of my visual experience. Particular objects are not part of experience content—experience content is abstract. (Cf. Tye 1995, 138.)

The *correctness* of my inverted twin's and my experiences is due to the fact that each of us exercises her respective proper concept (corresponding to the relevant mode of presentation) for the color of the curtain in undergoing her experience.

content is constituted by demonstrative concepts, has nothing that can play the role of reference-fixer for these concepts.

I think that Brewer's aforementioned proposal of an attentional and tracking relation solves this problem—this relation can exist between a certain demonstrative concept exercised in my experience and a certain real world property even if the property is not currently present. Brewer simply has to add an optimal conditions clause, stating that the demonstrative tracks and thus refers to the property that it is a response to under *optimal* conditions.[28]

I do not see how this strategy could help the conceptualist against my phenomenological objection, however. To repeat, in the case of veridical perception, he can explain the rich phenomenology of experience by appeal to the wealth of real world properties perceivers are presented with. But what can he say in the case of misperception, e.g., if I hallucinate my orange curtain? Imagine that I am currently in a pitch black room, so that the only real world property that I could demonstrate by exercising concepts in my visual experience is *black*. Still, it visually appears to me as though there is a curtain in front of me, which displays a great wealth of shapes, patterns, and shades of orange.

The nonconceptualist (and particularly the Modest Nonconceptualist, who ascribes scenario content to experience) can easily accommodate this example: The scene in front of my eyes is not an instantiation of the spatial type constituting the scenario content of my visual experience; still, I can and do experience a great amount of detail, namely those objects and properties that are part of the scenario content of my experience.

The conceptualist, on the other hand, cannot account for the phenomenal richness of my experience in the usual way—there are no real properties of the curtain, and there is no real curtain, that can be made responsible for the feel of my experience. And while the attentional/tracking relation in combination with optimal conditions may solve the epistemological problems mentioned above, I do not see how it could be of any help with the current phenomenological issue. The demonstrative concepts exercised in my experience demonstrate properties that are not present, but would be present under optimal conditions. This means that there is no great variety of properties that is currently present that could explain the phenomenology of my experience. This phenomenal adequacy problem of conceptualism constitutes an argument in favor of (General NC-ism$_{min}$) and thus Modest Nonconceptualism. Given the plausible assumption that corresponding to every veridical perceptual experience, there is a hallucination with the same phenomenal character, every perceptual experience will need to have at least some nonconceptual content to account for this phenomenal character. For the conceptual content is unable to do so, both in the case of the hallucination and in the case of the phenomenally indistinguishable veridical perceptual experience.

[28]This adaptation also deals with the criticism in Bengson et al. (2011, 176) that Brewer has no account of what the demonstratives in non-veridical experiences *succeed* to refer to.

I guess the conceptualist could try to appeal to the objects and properties that would be present under optimal conditions to account for the phenomenology. But I am not sure how this move is supposed to work. Since the objects and properties are not really present, they would have to be present *somehow* thanks to the demonstrative concepts involved in my experience. But this would mean that the content of my experience is not simply constituted by demonstratives, but also by the properties they refer to themselves. These objects and properties (as far as I can see) cannot be conceptual; so the conceptualist would end up with a level of nonconceptual experience content after all.

A natural way for the conceptualist to solve the problem at this point would be to embrace metaphysical disjunctivism and hold that hallucinations do not have the same phenomenal character as the veridical experiences they are indistinguishable from. The subject just *mistakenly* takes them to be phenomenally identical. To make this move, however, would be to abandon conceptualism.[29] The conceptualist, to my understanding, holds that what veridical experiences and hallucinations have in common is that they are appearances that the world is a certain way. They have a phenomenal character in virtue of being appearances, even in the case of *mere* appearances, in which the world is not as it perceptually appears. Subjectively indistinguishable veridical and hallucinatory experiences really do have the same conceptual content and phenomenal character.[30]

This argument relies on the close connection between phenomenology and perceptual content, which is backed by the phenomenological worry. It is in principle open for the conceptualist to say that he does not *try* to account for the rich phenomenal detail of experience, so that it is not problematic if he cannot explain it in the case of hallucination. Experience just has qualia; this issue is independent of the question of what kind of content it has—the phenomenal properties of experience supervene on neurophysiology, for example.[31]

In addition to the conflict with the phenomenological source of the nonconceptualism debate, this reply has the following problem: By accepting the challenge of the argument from the fineness of grain, the conceptualist already concedes that there is a close connection between phenomenology and perceptual content. For the argument assumes that the content of experience is determined by what qualities I

[29] As a matter of fact, this is just what Brewer (2006) does. For a clear statement and a defense of this kind of claim, see Martin (2004/2009).

[30] For this view, see McDowell (1982/2009, 80). Note that the appearances in the veridical case just are the facts. McDowell, by the way, is an *epistemological* disjunctivist, but not a metaphysical disjunctivist. While he denies that the subject's evidence is as good in the case of hallucination as it is in the case of veridical perception, he assumes that both cases, if indistinguishable, involve the same perceptual content. A very helpful statement of the distinction, as it applies to McDowell, can be found in Byrne and Logue (2008, 66/67).

[31] Note that Brewer, as one major proponent of conceptualism, does not take this view. He claims that the phenomenology of experience is owed to its representational content, or rather, to the modes of presentation involved. He even suggests that the notion of pure phenomenal properties is incoherent (Brewer 1999, 156).

can distinguish in experience and therefore by the phenomenology of experience. But if the conceptualist accepts this, he cannot take it back at this point and claim that he is not worried about the fine-grained detail of the phenomenology of our visual experiences. Instead, he would have to hold that the whole argument from the fineness of grain is irrelevant since it assumes an intimacy between content and phenomenal character that does not exist.

### *4.1.7 Conclusion*

The nonconceptualist argues that a subject's conceptual abilities are surpassed by the amount of fine-grained detail that perceptual experiences represent. Therefore, experience content is nonconceptual. The conceptualist's best bet is to retreat to an account according to which pure demonstrative concepts are exercised in perceptual experience, and the corresponding demonstrative Fregean senses constitute perceptual content. I have dissolved the ensuing impasse between conceptualism and nonconceptualism by arguing that there is no plausible way that the conceptualist can explain the phenomenal character of hallucinations. This means that the phenomenal content of perceptual experience cannot be constituted by demonstrative concepts. The argument from the fineness of grain supports (General NC-ism$_{min}$), according to which each perceptual experience is minimally nonconceptual, and thus Modest Nonconceptualism.

## 4.2 The Argument from Situation-Dependence and Inextricability

Situation-dependence (and the related phenomenon of perceptual constancy) and inextricable richness are seen to be problematic for conceptualism by Kelly (2001b) and Jackson (2003). Jackson merely mentions that inextricability distinguishes experience from thought. Kelly presents a more elaborate argument against conceptualism based on these features of experience. In this section, I will discuss this argument.

Two features of experience are pointed out by Kelly (2001b) that are not compatible with the view that experience content is conceptual: Experience content is context-dependent and object-dependent or, generally, *situation-dependent*. Let me explicate these arguable features of experience in turn.

### 4.2.1 Context-Dependence

First, context-dependence. One example of this is related to the phenomenon of color constancy. When I look at the wall of my study, I see that it is all the same color, namely white. It looks to me to be the same white all over—my visual experience represents to me *one* uniform color of the wall. However, the wall also looks to me to have many different shades of white and gray, depending on the illumination. Where the light from the window hits the wall, it looks bright white; where it is in the shade, it looks to be colored different degrees of gray.

Or imagine that you are standing on the side of a long street stretching away from you. On the one hand, it looks as if the street is the same width everywhere, as far as you can see it in the distance. On the other hand, it looks as though the width of the street is diminishing as it stretches farther into the distance. In both examples, it seems to be the case that an object has the same property, but at the same time, that the object has different properties of this kind in different places (or in different contexts).

Kelly's analysis of this phenomenon is that we simply cannot fully capture what a color (or another property) looks like in experience by just talking about the color that appears to be the same in all contexts. To fully capture the content of an experience, we must include the *context* in which we see the color, for example the lighting context. So,

> a white piece of paper never merely looks white; it looks like a white-piece-of-paper-in-the-shade or a white-piece-of-paper-in-the-light, and these are different but equally viable ways of looking like it is the very same color. (Kelly 1999, 116)

### 4.2.2 Object-Dependence and Inextricability

Object-dependence is an even odder, though related, phenomenon. Kelly says that,

> when I perceive a property like height or color, what I see is not some independently determinable property that any other object could share; rather what I see is a dependent aspect of the object I am seeing now. The dependency of the perceived property on the object is so complete that even if I see the color of the carpet to be the same as the color of some other object—a shiny steel ball, for instance—I can always rationally wonder whether they are in fact the same color. (Kelly 2001b, 228)

Kelly takes this idea from phenomenological observations of Merleau-Ponty and Peacocke. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty holds that we cannot capture the color of a carpet as we experience it unless we include the fact that it is the *carpet's* color. We also need to include other perceptible properties of the carpet in our description, such as that it looks to have a woolly texture, a certain weight, or that it looks to feel a certain way. (See Merleau-Ponty 1974, 373.)

Merleau-Ponty's position here is related to Jackson's view that experience content is *inextricably* rich (Jackson 2003, 269). Consider the sentence 'the carpet

is woolly and purple' in comparison to my experience of a woolly, purple carpet. The sentence has one part that is concerned with the particular texture of the carpet, another that is concerned with its color. I can easily formulate a sentence that is just about the texture ('the carpet is woolly') and another one that is just about the color ('the carpet is purple'). By contrast, I cannot visually experience the color of the carpet without also experiencing its structure or vice versa. These different properties of the carpet seem to be inextricably tied together in my experience.

Note that this causes problems for any attempt to describe experience content linguistically. If we try to capture the content of my visual experience of the purple wool carpet with the help of the sentence 'there is a purple and woolly carpet', this might suggest that there are two separate and separable properties of the carpet that I perceive, which might even be located in different areas of my visual field (one part of the carpet being woolly, the other purple). This, however, is not the case. The carpet looks to be purple in the very same places it looks to be woolly.

I completely agree with Kelly's position this far. It consists of a claim about how different properties of one and the same object are related in experience. This partly explains what Kelly means when he says that "even if I see the color of the carpet to be the same as the color of some other object—a shiny steel ball, for instance—I can always rationally wonder whether they are in fact the same color." A shiny purple steel ball looks different than a purple wool carpet; to be exact, a specific shade of purple looks different when it is instantiated by a shiny steel object than it does when it is instantiated by a woolly object. (I hope this is obvious—just imagine the look of a purple steel ball versus the look of a same-colored wool carpet.) One might even go so far as to wonder whether it really is the same shade of purple that both the steel ball and the carpet instantiate. At least, it is not irrational to wonder whether they do.

However, Kelly's claim is not just something like the following: We cannot fully capture the color content of an experience if we just describe the color perceived; we also have to include the other properties of the relevant objects. In addition, he claims that we need to describe of which *object* it is a color. In perception, he says, colors are simply perceived as colors of objects. We have to keep this in mind when providing an account of experience content. We see objects under their color *aspects*. Another example he gives is that, when a subject sees two men who look to be the same height, one of whom is skinny, the other fat, she may rationally wonder whether they are indeed the same height (Kelly 1999). The fact that a certain property is experienced as the property of a particular object makes it in some respect a different property that cannot simply be shared by another object.[32]

I am not sure what to make of this additional claim. It seems to me that it is incorrect, insofar as it cannot be traced back to the inextricability of different

[32]To avoid counterexamples, his position as presented so far would have to be amended in the following way: *If a property is perceived as a property of an object*, then it is perceived as the property of this particular object. I am not sure what he would say of properties that we do not perceive to be properties of specific objects, e.g. the colors of rainbows or afterimages.

properties of the same object. So, the reason why one might wonder whether the fat and the skinny person really are the same height is that, in one case, there is a *fat* and tall person one is looking at, in the other, there is a *skinny* and tall person. These properties cannot be pried apart in perception. By contrast, imagine that I am currently looking at two red cups, at the same distance from me, that have all the same perceptible properties (except that they are numerically different). Does it really make sense for me to wonder whether they have the same color or whether they are the same size?

Maybe I am simply missing a subtle point made by Kelly here; at any rate, I do not see how the fact that a property is seen to be instantiated by different objects can be relevant—unless it is because these objects also appear to differ with respect to other properties that they instantiate. In what follows, I will presuppose an adapted version of Kelly's argument, which involves the inextricability rather than object-dependence of perceptual experience.[33]

### *4.2.3 Presentation of the Argument*

Let's turn to the resulting argument against conceptualism. It is based on this thought:

> Concepts, even demonstrative ones, pick out situation independent features, but the perceptual experience of a property is always dependent upon the two aspects of the situation I mentioned above—context and object. [. . .] This seems to me a more likely reason that perceptual content is non-conceptual—because it's situation-dependent, and situations are not specifiable in conceptual terms. (Kelly 2001b, 229)

We can extract the following argument:

1. Some experience contents involve situation-dependent properties.[34]
2. Concepts, even demonstrative concepts, pick out only situation-*in*dependent properties.

[33]How are context-dependence and inextricability understood in these terms related to each other? What both of these features come down to is that we cannot fully capture any single property presented in experience all by itself, while leaving out its context. As for context-dependence, we will not understand everything about the way a certain property, e.g. a color, appears to a subject in experience unless we take into account such aspects of its context as the lighting or the distance away from the subject. These other properties that constitute the context of our original property determine how the property is presented differently even while it appears to be the same all over.

As for inextricability, we will not fully understand how a certain property appears to the subject if we leave out the other properties of the object. These help determine the appearance of our original property in the experience and are therefore needed to fully capture how the property is presented. So, both features of experience content are based on the fact that no single aspect of experience content can be fully captured without its context.

[34]I weaken the claim from 'all' to 'some' because experiences such as the visual experience of pitch black are counterexamples to the universal claim.

3. So, not all aspects of all experience contents can be specified conceptually.
4. If not all aspects of all experiences can be specified conceptually, then subjects do not have to exercise a concept for every aspect of every one of their experience contents.
5. If subjects do not have to exercise a concept for every aspect of every one of their experience contents, then some experiences have nonconceptual content.[35]
6. Therefore, some experiences have nonconceptual content.

I have elaborated on premise (1) above; let me discuss premise (2) now. One result of the discussion in Sect. 4.1 was that pure perceptual-demonstrative concepts such as *that* have the best chance of capturing experience content. These are concepts that do not presuppose possession of any general concepts; moreover, they do not require the subject to have any recognitional capacities extending beyond the original experience. So it might seem as though the second premise does not hold—these concepts are situation-dependent because they do not persist beyond a certain experiential context. This, however, would be to misunderstand the notion of situation-dependence.

That a property is presented in a situation-dependent way means that, even though it is presented to me as one particular property throughout (for example as the shade orange$_1$), it also appears to be different in different situations (for example, depending on the object it is a shade of or on the lighting context). Let's return to the example of my visual experience of the purple steel ball and the purple wool carpet, and let's add that one part of each the steel ball and the carpet is well-lit, while the other remains in the shade. In this example, only one shade of purple is represented to be instantiated by the ball and the carpet, in the shade and in the light. But it is also true that this shade of purple appears to be different to the subject, depending on whether it is the purple of the steel ball in the light or in the shade, or on whether it is the purple of the wool carpet in the light or in the shade.

That concepts pick out properties in a situation-independent way means that our concepts are concepts of properties *independently of* the context they show up in. My concept *that* is a concept of a particular shade of purple, for instance, no matter whether it is the purple of a steel ball or a wool carpet, or whether it is well-lit or in the shade. It is the concept of the shade both of these objects have.

There are two reasons to hold that concepts are situation-independent: For one, our concepts of properties we experience can also show up in our thoughts, and obviously, we can (and do!) think that both the steel ball and the carpet are the same shade of purple (they are both colored *thus*). To think this thought, the subject needs a situation-independent concept *thus* (or *that*), which is applicable to all instances of this shade of purple.

For another, the conceptualist (who does not take experience content to be fully constituted by modes of presentation) holds that we experience the real properties

[35]This can be derived from (S2C). For subjects cannot be required to exercise concepts that *would* be needed to specify a situation-dependent perceptual content in order to undergo the corresponding experience if these concepts simply cannot be had.

of the real objects around us directly; we refer to them, in experience, with our pure demonstrative concepts. The steel ball and the carpet both really instantiate the same shade of purple. The concept *that* is a concept of the same shade of purple both when the subject experiences the shade of the ball and when she experiences the shade of the carpet (and also, when she sees it in the light and in the shade). Since this concept is plausibly a concept of the real properties it correctly refers to, it is in each case a concept of the same shade of purple; it is a situation-independent concept.

If this defense of premise (2) works, the argument can proceed in the following way: On a conceptualist view, the color aspects of a subject's experience of the purple steel ball and the purple wool carpet, including the differing lighting conditions, are due to her exercise of the concept *that* of the particular shade of purple presented. This concept is situation-independent; it applies to the identical shades of purple instantiated by both objects, independently of the different lighting conditions involved. It cannot fully capture the color aspects of the subject's experience, however. For the experience contains more color details than just the constant color that the subject experiences; in addition, there is a different way the same shade of purple looks when it is instantiated by the steel ball, by the carpet, in the light or in the shade, respectively. These details cannot be specified by our concepts, not even by the pure perceptual-demonstrative concept *that*. So, the subject who undergoes experiences with situation-dependent contents cannot be required to exercise a concept for every aspect of such contents. Therefore, the content of such experiences is not conceptual.

### *4.2.4 A Conceptualist Reply: Situation-Dependent Concepts*

This objection against conceptualism has a number of weak spots. To begin with, the conceptualist can reply (contra premise (2)) that our conceptual resources are indeed sufficient to capture all the fine-grained distinctions made in experience thanks to the situation-dependence of the properties presented. He can point out that the argument leaves out all the other concepts that are in play in an experience, for example, concepts of the lighting context, of the objects that instantiate the colors, and of all their other properties that are relevant to the appearance of the object's color. If we take all these other demonstrative concepts into account, our conceptual resources will be finely grained enough to capture the differences between the shade of purple as it appears in different contexts after all.

To this possible objection, Kelly replies that there are simply *too many* ever-changing aspects of a situation that influence the look of a particular shade for us to be able to possess concepts for all of them. He claims that there might be indefinitely many aspects that constitute the situation that the appearance of any one property depends on; our conceptual resources are not sufficient to specify these highly complex situations (Kelly 2001b, 229). But why not? It seems to me in principle possible to *think* about any aspect of my experience, no matter how complex it is.

I just have to focus on the object, the lighting conditions, or what have you. And if I can think about it, I can have a concept for it. So, the complexity of situations presented in experience does not outrun my conceptual resources.

What I find more problematic about the proposed conceptualist reply is that it does not quite seem to get to the heart of what makes a property situation-dependent. The idea is that the experienced purple itself seems to be *a different purple* in different contexts, while also looking to be the same shade. So adding different concepts, for example for the carpet and its properties, will probably be sufficient to fully specify the situation that I experience the shade of purple to be a part of. But this move will not be able to explain how come the purple itself looks different to me in this situation than in other situations. After all, my concept of the shade of purple is still the same *that* in different situations, so how could I experience a different purple in each situation?

At this point, the conceptualist might reply that, in addition to the situation-independent concept, I also exercise situation-dependent demonstratives in my experience. For one, I exercise a pure demonstrative concept for the shade of purple which remains constant for the steel ball and the carpet under different lighting conditions. For another, I exercise concepts for the different appearances of the same shade of purple, which are different depending on the context they show up in. For any instance of a property I perceive, then, I exercise two concepts—the context-dependent and the context-independent one. For instance, I see that *that* (the steel ball) is *thus* (situation-independent purple) and *thus* (situation-dependent purple).

To support his case, the conceptualist might add that we are at any rate able to *think* about the constant shade of purple as well as the situation-dependent one.[36] I can think that *that* looks pretty, meaning the shade of purple instantiated by both the carpet and the steel ball. Or I can think that *that* looks pretty, thereby meaning the look of the purple of the wool carpet in the sunlight. The conceptualist could expand on this point by arguing that we are able to draw inferences using both kinds of concepts and to combine these concepts with other concepts we possess in thought, so that they both qualify as real concepts.

My reply is that this still sounds off as an account of perceptual experience. It suggests that I experience two colors where I just experience one. When I look at the purple wool carpet in the sunlight, for example, I do not see one context-independent purple *and* one sunlit woolly purple. I see just one shade of purple, which appears to be the same as the purple of the steel ball, but also looks different than that. If this is what I experience, how does this fit with the claim that I exercise two different concepts? It seems that two different concepts exercised mean two different colors experienced. Maybe the conceptualist can claim that we have just one experience of one color despite the two concepts that are involved. But to defend this claim, he would have to explain how the two different concepts that are exercised are compatible with the experience of just one color.

[36] Speaks (2005) makes a similar point.

Here is how the nonconceptualist can solve the same problem: According to her, my visual experience represents the properties steely-purple-in-the-sunlight and woolly-purple-in-the-shade, for instance. Here, one shade of purple is represented in different areas of my visual field, but it is nonetheless different in different situations.[37]

A further conceptualist objection, again directed at premise (2), is suggested by Peacocke (2001b, 613). He can try to capture what remains unchanged about the shade of purple by saying that it is the reference of my demonstrative concept *that*, and try to capture what appears to change about the color by saying that those are the different modes of presentation under which the concept refers to the same real world shade. I think this corresponds pretty well to the way in which properties seem to change yet remain the same in experience: This would mean, for instance, that the purple can be presented under a *steel-ball-in-the-shade* or under a *wool-carpet-in-the-light* mode of presentation.

I am not convinced by this objection. It is odd to say that part of what I experience (what remains constant between the steel ball and the wool carpet, for instance) is the shade of purple itself, and part of what I experience (the changing situation—the woolly or the steely texture of these objects, for example) is the mode of presentation of the shade of purple. Just as the shade of purple itself, the woolly texture of the carpet or steeliness of the ball seem to be part of what is represented in my experience, part of what is out there. These are properties represented in my experience, on a par with the shade of purple. Think of a different scenario, in which I see two wool carpets, one purple and one turquoise. To capture the situation-dependence of this experience, we would have to introduce a purple and a turquoise mode of presentation for the same, situation-independent property of woolliness. The result is that *purple*, for instance, is part of my experience content as a represented property *and* as a mode of presentation, which strikes me as highly implausible. Moreover, recall my criticism of modes of presentation as constituents of phenomenal content in the previous section.

So, unless the conceptualist can come up with an account of how the exercise of two different concepts can result in my experience of just one property, or can find an argument for the claim that the woolly structure or the light intensity present in my experience are not just properties that are represented in the same way as the shade of purple is, his demonstrative concepts will be unable to account for the context-dependence and inextricability of experience content. The result is that perceptual experiences with situation-dependent contents are minimally nonconceptual. Hence, the argument supports (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$). It is not strong enough to support the Modest Nonconceptualist claim that all perceptual experience is nonconceptual.

[37] Alternatively, the nonconceptualist might hold that scenario contents can contain more than one property at each point of a scenario. I have to concede that I am not sure how best to spell out the details of the nonconceptualist view here; overall, the nonconceptualist's options seem to be more attractive than the conceptualist's, however.

# Chapter 5
# The Argument from Contradictory Contents

The previous chapter gave us two successful phenomenology-based arguments for nonconceptualism: The argument from fineness of grain, which supports (General NC-ism$_{min}$) and thus Modest Nonconceptualism, and the argument from situation-dependence and inextricability, which supports (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$). Next is an argument that is based directly on observations about the content of experience.

The argument from contradictory contents claims that experience content allows for contradictions within one and the same content. There are at least two examples of this, the waterfall illusion and the visual experiences of some grapheme-color synesthetes. However, no conceptual contents are contradictory, so that some experience contents are nonconceptual.[1] As in the previous sections, I will start out by giving a short description of the argument and of the related debate; then I will evaluate whether the argument can serve to support nonconceptualism and, particularly, Modest Nonconceptualism.

## 5.1 Presentation of the Argument

The argument was first brought up by Crane (1988). Here is my version of the argument:

[1] I try to speak of mental *contents* as contradictory (or not); I will mostly speak of logical relations obtaining between mental *contents* as well as mental contents being revised by the subject. This way of speaking makes sense especially in contexts like the current chapter, where I try to argue from such features of content to its structure. But recall that I claim that there is a parallelism between the inferential relations obtaining between exercises of conceptual abilities and between conceptual contents; correspondingly, sometimes I will also speak of the mental *states* that are contradictory, of logical relations obtaining between them, or of their being revised by the subject.



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1. All perceptual experiences have Fregean propositions as their exclusive contents. (assumed for *reductio*).[2]
2. If (1), then some perceptual contents are self-contradictory (as evidenced by the waterfall illusion and grapheme-color synesthesia).[3]
3. If (1), then no perceptual contents are self-contradictory. (This follows from the Fregean principle of concept individuation (PCI) introduced below.)[4]
4. Therefore, not all perceptual experiences have Fregean propositions as their exclusive contents. (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$) is true.

The argument has the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*. If we assume the truth of the claim that defines conceptualism, that all perceptual content consists exclusively in Fregean propositions (premise (1)), we reach a contradiction (premises (2) and (3)): The assumption entails both that some perceptual contents are self-contradictory and that none are self-contradictory. If it can be shown that premises (2) and (3) are true, then it follows that premise (1) is false; not all perceptual experiences have only Fregean propositions as their contents. Some perceptual experiences have some contents that are not Fregean propositions, as is claimed by (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$).

Let's start with the second premise—if all perceptual experiences have Fregean propositions as their exclusive contents, then some perceptual contents are self-contradictory. Crane's example of a self-contradictory perceptual content is the waterfall illusion. You can create this illusion by staring at a surface, such as a waterfall or a spinning wheel, which is constantly moving in one direction. After a little while, turn your attention to an immobile object. It will now look to you as though this stationary object is moving in the direction opposite to the movement you observed originally; at the same time, the object will look as though it is *not* moving.[5]

Another example is the visual experience of some grapheme-color synesthetes. Synesthesia is a condition in which a subject's perceptual experience in one sensory modality causes her to have a further perceptual experience in the same or another

[2]At this point, it is relevant that I take conceptualism to be combined with propositionalism. Recall that this is the position I fixed on at the end of Chap. 3. Correspondingly, the argument as I put it here does not address McDowell's recent view that perceptual content has an intuitional structure. It does not establish that perceptual experience has scenario content. I will address these issues below in my defense of premise (3).

[3]The idea, which will be made clearer below, is that *on the assumption of conceptualism* such perceptual contents will come out as self-contradictory. I will argue that the Modest Nonconceptualist's scenario contents do not allow for self-contradictory contents in the full sense of the word.

[4]Note that, on one understanding, this principle applies only to rational subjects. I leave out this qualification as it does not affect the argument: We just have to add to premise (2) that some perceptual contents of rational subjects are self-contradictory, to match the claim in premise (3) that no perceptual contents of rational subjects are self-contradictory.

[5]There are many examples of this illusion available on the internet. One example may be found at Neave (n.d.).

sensory modality. For instance, in some perceivers the auditive experience of hearing words triggers the visual experience of seeing specific colors. Synesthesia is involuntary and robust—the same triggering experience is consistently connected with the same synesthetic experience.[6]

In grapheme-color synesthesia, when a subject has a visual experience of a black grapheme (a letter or a numeral in black ink), she also has a visual experience of color. The synesthetic color she experiences corresponds to the particular grapheme that she sees. For instance, for a particular subject it might be that five is blue, two is green, three is red, etc. There are individual differences in how synesthetes experience the fusion of the synesthetic color with the actual, perceived color of the grapheme, but at least for some subjects, one and the same numeral looks to have both the color black and the synesthetic color. They report to have *one* experience of a numeral with both the real and the synesthetic color—for a synesthete, one and the same numeral five in front of her may look both black (the actual color of the ink) and blue (the synesthetic color) at the same time.[7]

These, then, are the examples of contradictory content alluded to in premise (2). My visual experience, after staring at the moving screen and while focusing on an immobile object, represents the object to be moving and not to be moving, both at the same time. The synesthete's visual experience, when looking at a grapheme, represents it to be black and not to be black, both at the same time. So, if all perceptual contents consist exclusively in Fregean propositions, we have to say that the structure of the contents of these perceptual experiences is *Fa and not-Fa*.

Let's turn to the third premise, the claim that if all perceptual experiences have Fregean propositions as their exclusive contents, then none are contradictory. This follows from a plausible principle that determines the individuation of concepts or Fregean senses; if a content consists in Fregean propositions, the concepts constituting it should conform to this principle. The principle of concept individuation (CI) can be put as follows:

> (CI) Two concepts *F* and *G* are distinct concepts if a thinker who grasps both concepts can rationally judge that an object is F and not-G. (See Crane 1988, 144.)

For example, Hans can rationally judge that

> ($B_1$) Venus is Phosphorus, but it is not Hesperus,

[6]For more details, see Fish (2010, 132).

[7]Here is a description of synesthete A.D.'s experience: A.D. "told us that the digit she saw was both black and the induced color at the same time. When probed about the locations of the two colors, A.D. reported that she didn't know how to explain it, but that both appeared on the shape in the same location at the same time. . . . When one color (we are including black) is generated by wavelengths from the stimulus and another by its shape, the two colors appear to coexist." (Robertson and Sagiv 2005, 100)

while grasping both the concepts *Phosphorus* and *Hesperus*. The fact that he can hold this belief rationally makes *Phosphorus* and *Hesperus* two distinct concepts.[8] Compare Hans's judgment that

($B_2$) Venus is Phosphorus, but it is not Phosphorus.

There is only one concept *Phosphorus*. Correspondingly, it is impossible for Hans rationally to hold this belief.

(CI) is a plausible principle for determining whether two concepts *F* and *G* really are two different concepts. With its help, we can distinguish between beliefs that just are not very well informed (such as ($B_1$)) and beliefs whose contents are really unintelligible (such as ($B_2$)). If we evaluate Hans's beliefs by taking into consideration only the level of reference, the result will be that, by holding ($B_1$), he believes that a certain object (Venus) is itself (Phosphorus) and that it is also not itself (Hesperus). ($B_1$) and ($B_2$) will turn out to be equally irrational to hold. Intuitively, by contrast, we draw a distinction between ($B_1$) and ($B_2$).

Moreover, without (CI), we will have to conclude that Hans is not a rational agent if he believes ($B_1$). This is a rather uncomfortable result, especially if we apply a Davidsonian principle of charity—we should always try to interpret an agent's behavior and utterances in such a way that we take him to be maximally rational. (See Gunther 2001, 187.) (CI) enables us to respect this principle because the contents of beliefs like ($B_1$) turn out not to be contradictory; they simply involve different concepts for the same object. Beliefs like ($B_2$), on the other hand, cannot be held by a rational thinker who grasps all the concepts involved as well as the whole proposition constituted by these concepts.

In accepting (CI), we thereby make it impossible for an agent consciously and rationally to judge or to believe a contradiction. Any belief content that might seem to involve a direct contradiction at first sight really just involves two distinct concepts, one of which is affirmed and the other denied, even though both are applied to the same object. To get the same result (that there are no self-contradictory

[8] Raphael van Riel provided me with some counterexamples to this principle. Take beliefs about literature, for instance. An author might tell a story that involves a contradiction, and the reader may rationally believe that, in a certain book, an object is F and not-F, with *F* being just one concept. Moreover, a thinker might have a very long and complicated belief which involves a direct contradiction that he is not aware of, but this would not change the fact that *F* is really just one concept.

As to the first counterexample, I think that the reader can believe that, in the book, an object is F and not-F only in a limited sense. She can have a belief about the words and sentences printed in the book along the following lines: *the book says that o is F and not-F—on one page, there is a sentence saying o is F, on another page, there is a sentence that says that o is not-F.* But she is not able to understand what the book's claim that o is F and not-F is about (in the sense of grasp the corresponding state of the world). And what she cannot understand, she is unable rationally to believe or judge. Similar concerns will surface below.

As to the second counterexample, it is irrelevant to the claim made by (CI). This is an example in which the subject lacks complete grasp of the whole proposition of which she grasps the constituting concepts. The example is relevantly similar to what I will argue to be irrelevant below, situations in which a thinker has two *distinct* beliefs that contradict each other.

contents) for *perception*, we need to extend (CI) to perception, for example with the following principle:

> (PCI) Two concepts *F* and *G* are distinct concepts if a rational subject who grasps both concepts can perceive that an object is F and not-G. (See Crane 1988, 145.)

Why should concept distinctness and identity depend on perceptual experience as well as on belief or judgment? One *prima facie* reason might be that the conceptualist claims that the same concepts are involved in belief content and perceptual content, so that the same content can be believed and experienced. Moreover, some conceptualists hold that having a justified perceptual belief is simply to endorse the content of the relevant perceptual experience—think back to the believability principle and the importation model of perceptual justification discussed above. Given this, one might think that two concepts *F* and *G* are distinct not only if the subject can rationally believe *this object is F and not-G*, but also if she can rationally have a perceptual experience that this object is F and not-G.

Another reason why the conceptualist in particular should accept (PCI) is his idea that perceptual content, just like belief content, is part of the "space of reasons" (McDowell 1994a, 125), which is governed by a "constitutive ideal of rationality." (Davidson 1980, 223) (I will discuss this idea at length in Sect. 7.2.) This ideal of rationality forces us to apply Davidson's principle of charity in our explanations of other people's behavior, and to interpret their beliefs as maximally rational. Crudely put, the motivation for this demand is the thought that, in explaining and predicting the actions of rational agents, what we do is explain their behavior in terms of what makes it rational. Everything that plays a role at this, personal, level of explanation underlies the ideal of rationality that defines such explanations. If this ideal forces us to maximize, in interpretation, the rationality of an agent's belief contents, the same must be true for his perceptual contents.

Let me make the relation between (PCI) and (3) explicit: With the help of (PCI), whenever there is an apparent contradiction in a perceptual content had by a rational subject—as in the perceptual experience (apparently) representing that something is F and not-F, it will turn out that the first and the second instance of *F* must really be instances of two distinct concepts *F* and *G*. Any apparent contradiction within a conceptual content will be eliminated by this principle. So, for rational subjects, if all perceptual experiences have Fregean propositions as their exclusive contents, then no perceptual contents are self-contradictory.

Recall premises (1) and (2). Together, they entail that some of the perceptual experiences of a rational subject may have self-contradictory contents. If the content of—say—Hans's experience of the waterfall illusion consists in a Fregean proposition, it involves a contradiction, viz. that a certain object is moving and not moving. Similarly, if the synesthete's visual content consists in a Fregean proposition, it involves a contradiction, for it represents a numeral to be black and not to be black. But also, by premise (3), if all perceptual contents consist in Fregean propositions only, no perceptual contents involve a contradiction. The assumption that the content of all perceptual experiences consists exclusively in

Fregean propositions and is therefore conceptual, then, is false. The content of at least some perceptual experiences is (minimally) nonconceptual.

## 5.2 Two Clarifications: Only One Concept, Only One Content

Let me add two clarifications before turning to the objections. First, we cannot explain away the contradiction involved in the waterfall illusion as we can in the case of belief ($B_1$) by pointing out that two distinct concepts are involved. It is not legitimate to *dissolve* the contradiction between the concepts involved in the waterfall illusion, for example by claiming that it involves the concepts *intrinsically moving* and *not moving relative to other objects*. (Cf. Gunther 2001, 191.) For, in the perceptual experience the object really appears to do the same thing (i.e., to move) and not to do it at the same time. Neither does this strategy work in the case of the synesthete's visual experience: As subject A.D. describes her visual experience, the same numeral simply looks black and not-black to her, both at the same time.[9]

Second, the problem for conceptualism is caused by a contradiction within *one* content, not by *different* mental states contradicting each other. In the Müller-Lyer illusion, for instance, the two lines in the drawing look to be different lengths to me even if I correctly believe that they are the same length (see Fig. 5.1). My perceptual content contradicts my belief content. But we should not proclaim an agent to be irrational, in the relevant sense, just because he has two *different* mental states with contents that contradict each other. (See Crane 1988, 143.) Hardly anyone has a completely consistent system of beliefs; to require this would ask too much of normal people and their ability to monitor all of their beliefs. The fact that a subject has two separate beliefs with contradictory contents might be nothing more than a causal contingency—it might be a contingent fact that a subject has both beliefs, without there being a logical relation between the beliefs and their contents.

Gunther (2001, 197) explicates this nicely by comparing the case of two mental states with contradictory contents with a case of two individuals who hold contradictory beliefs. For instance, Suzie believes that Goethe is the author of *Faust*, but Hans believes that Goethe is not the author of *Faust*. The fact that Suzie's and Hans's beliefs contradict each other does not violate the principle of concept individuation. There is no need to conclude that Hans and Suzie jointly believe that Goethe did and did not write *Faust*. Similarly, if one subject has two contradictory beliefs, we should interpret her as being 'partitioned' into two

[9]That the example of A.D. is pertinent comes out even more clearly if we compare her situation with the visual experiences of other synesthetes for whom it is plausible that they do not have experiences of graphemes as black and not black. Apparently, not all synesthetes experience the synesthetic color to be located in the numeral. Some report "that the color is anywhere from slightly off the shape to hovering elsewhere or as an aura." (Robertson and Sagiv 2005, 100)

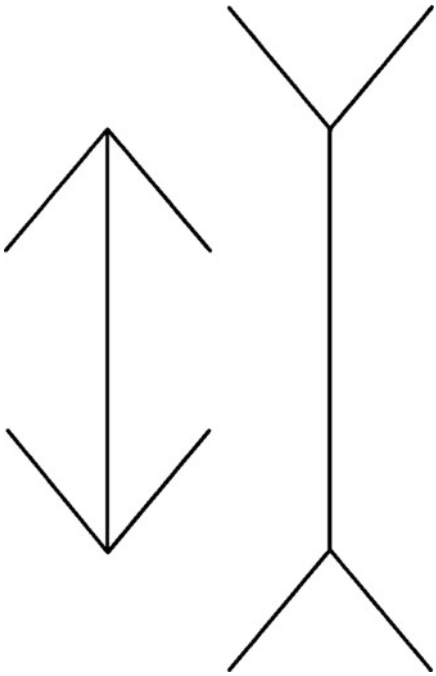

**Fig. 5.1** The Müller-Lyer drawing (Müller-Lyer 1889)

subjects, or as her mind being split into two relatively independent structures. This way, we can still grant maximal rationality to her. In the same way, we can interpret a subject undergoing the Müller-Lyer illusion as having a mind that is divided into a perceptual and a cognitive partition. This illusion does not violate (PCI)—but the waterfall illusion and the synesthete's experience do.

## 5.3 The First Objection: Two Distinct Contents

The argument from contradictory contents can be attacked either by denying premise (2) or by denying premise (3). The conceptualist can either show that the waterfall illusion and the synesthete's experience are not examples of *one* contradictory content. Or he can argue that while (CI) holds for belief, we have no reason to accept the analogous principle (PCI) for perception.

To attack premise (2), the conceptualist can claim that the waterfall illusion and the synesthete's experience are not examples of *one* perceptual experience with *one* content that is self-contradictory, but that the concepts *moving/black* and *not moving/not-black* are elements of two separate contents. So, contrary to premise (2), it is not established that if all perceptual contents consist exclusively in Fregean propositions, some *one* perceptual content is self-contradictory. (See Mellor 1988, 149.) The nonconceptualist can object to this claim on phenomenological grounds.

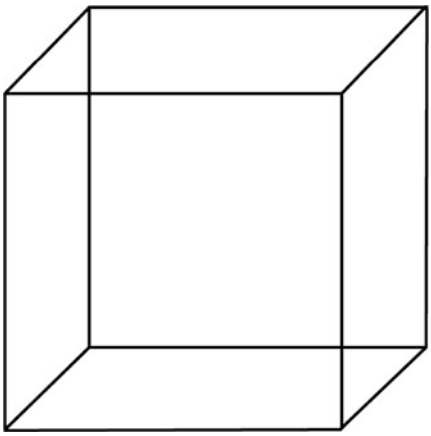

**Fig. 5.2** The Necker cube (Necker 1832)

Compare the waterfall illusion with the Necker cube (see Fig. 5.2). In the case of the Necker cube, my visual experience seems to shift between two different cubes; I seem to have two different experiences with two different contents. What appears to be the front side of the cube in one experience appears to be its backside in my other experience of the cube.

The same is *prima facie* not true of the waterfall illusion. Once I turn my attention from the moving image to the stationary object, I seem to have just *one* perceptual experience, in which the same object seems to be moving and not to be moving, both at the same time. There is no apparent experience switch. Moreover, as A.D. describes her experience of the numeral, she does not mention any shift between seeing it to be black and not to be black, but claims that the two colors "both appeared on the shape in the same location at the same time." So there is really just one visual experience, which has one contradictory content.

Against this, Gunther (2001, 195) tries to strengthen Mellor's point. According to him, it is not implausible to say that there are two different contents involved in the waterfall illusion. This is so because, first, individuating phenomenology, i.e. distinguishing what counts as *one* experience with *one* phenomenal character, and what counts as *two distinct* experiences with *two distinct* types of phenomenal character, is problematic. Gunther doubts that we can be sure that there is only one phenomenology involved in experiencing the waterfall illusion. He suggests that there might be more than just one way it is to have this perceptual experience; we cannot exclude the possibility that there is something it is like to undergo the waterfall illusion, and then again there is *another something* it is like to undergo the same illusion. What is needed to counter Gunther's criticism is a (plausible) way of individuating phenomenal types, which yields the result that there is only *one* experience involved in the waterfall illusion.

In a second step, Gunther (2001, 195) questions the assumption that there is a one-to-one correlation between contents and phenomenal character. We might as well suppose that there are many contents related to just one phenomenology.

As a counterexample to the nonconceptualist's assumption, Gunther mentions the phenomenon of blindsight, in which subjects receive visual information (i.e., there is visual content), but have no visual phenomenology whatsoever.

Gunther concludes that it is not implausible to claim that there are two contents involved in the waterfall illusion, which explain its illusory character. Either there are two separate perceptual experiences, or there is one experience with two separate contents. Either way, since the contradiction is now between distinct contents, the waterfall illusion does not violate (PCI). No self-contradictory content is involved in perception, so no contradiction can be derived from premise (1). The nonconceptualist argument fails.

As to Gunther's first point (that there might be two different experiences), I agree that it is hard to individuate phenomenology or, more generally, to say anything about the phenomenal character of our experiences that everyone agrees with. But I do not think that we can do without talking about phenomenology in philosophy of mind, especially when dealing with experiences. For it is an essential and philosophically interesting aspect of experience. In the face of this, I think we just have to do the best we can to make phenomenological intuitions accessible and plausible to other philosophers, while relying on our own introspective evidence.

So, what reasons could there be to suggest that I experience more than one phenomenology in undergoing the waterfall illusion? I pay attention to my experience and to its phenomenal character; I look at one object; I do not look at anything else in between; the scene before my eyes does not suddenly change; if asked, I would insist that I am still seeing the same thing and that my experience (weird as it may be) has not changed. Also, I would say that the object looks to be immobile and moving, both at the same time, as part of one visual experience. With all of this evidence in place, I am not sure why one would think that I am undergoing two different experiences.

Think again of the Necker cube. Here, even though I am constantly looking at the same image, I would say that I am experiencing two different cubes, and that my experience switches back and forth between them, or that I have two distinct experiences with two distinct contents (the different cubes do not seem to be present simultaneously). This is evidence to suggest that I am undergoing two distinct experiences. But no such thing is true of the waterfall illusion, so there is no good reason to assume that there are two distinct phenomenal types (or two distinct experiences with distinct contents) involved in it.

As to the synesthete's experience, the claim that she has one visual experience with one phenomenology can be supported by contrasting A.D.'s case with the situation of other synesthetes. One big difference in how synesthetic experiences strike synesthetes that research has revealed in recent years comes out in the distinction between projectors and associaters, where projectors "report experiencing their photisms [i.e., the synesthetic color] in external space, whereas … [associators] report experiencing their photisms 'in the mind's eye'." (Dixon et al. 2004, 335) That is to say, associators do not experience the synesthetic color of the grapheme to be out there in the world, but projectors do.

In the case of associators, there is reason to doubt that there is just one visual experience of the numeral being black and not being black. For them, there might be a sort of shift between experiencing the color "in the mind's eye" and experiencing the color of the numeral in front of them. By contrast, A.D.'s description of her own visual experience does not indicate that there is any kind of shift or switch in her experience. So again, there is no good reason to assume that there are two distinct visual experiences involved in her visual experiences of graphemes.

Second, Gunther's claim that there might be one phenomenology, yet two contents involved in the waterfall illusion is irrelevant to the argument. The contradictory parts of the content of the waterfall illusion *are both* phenomenally conscious. Yet to make his objection work, Gunther has to claim that the phenomenally conscious content of the waterfall illusion suggests that the object is moving, but that a phenomenally *un*conscious content of the perceptual experience purports that the object is immobile (or vice versa). Unfortunately for Gunther, this is not an accurate description of what is going on in the waterfall illusion. It is part of the phenomenal content of the waterfall illusion that the object is moving *and* that it is not moving. The same can be said for color-grapheme synesthetic experiences. Subjects like A.D. have *conscious* experiences of the real *and* of synesthetic colors of the numerals they see.

To sum up, the conceptualist tries to show that the contradiction involved in the waterfall illusion or in synesthetic experiences is a contradiction between two distinct contents and that therefore the truth of premise (2) cannot be established with the help of these examples. I replied that—for phenomenological reasons—the examples of the waterfall illusion and of A.D.'s synesthetic experience are best understood as cases of *one* experience with one contradictory content.

## 5.4 The Second Objection: Against (PCI)

The second objection that I want to discuss, which attacks premise (3) of the argument, is raised by Speaks (2005) and Mellor (1988). Speaks claims that "Crane's argument goes wrong by generalizing Frege's Criterion from cognitive attitudes like judgement or belief to the propositional attitudes associated with perception". (Speaks 2005, 372) Frege's Criterion, or (CI), he points out, does not hold for desires either. Everyone agrees that the content of desire consists in Fregean propositions even if it can involve contradictions, so that desire does not satisfy (CI) (or, to be more exact, an analogue of (CI) for desire). So the content of perceptual experience may well be conceptual even if perception does not conform to (PCI).

Here is an example. While at a party, it is possible for Hans to desire to stay at the party and also to desire to go to bed and sleep. In this situation, Speaks might claim, Hans has a desire to sleep and not to sleep. He has a desire with a contradictory content, which should be excluded by (CI) if the principle did apply. For then Hans's concept *sleep* (first instance) should be distinct from his concept *sleep* (second instance). Instead, we have a real contradiction, involving the affirmation and denial

of one concept. We do not want to deny that desires have the same kind of content as beliefs, i.e., conceptual content. So, according to Speaks, we should conclude that (CI) is applicable only to "cognitive attitudes like judgement or belief".

There are two ways to reply to this objection, corresponding to the two ways of motivating (CI) which I explicated above. The first motivation for (CI) was the need to distinguish unintelligible beliefs from ones that simply are not very well informed. All of us probably have beliefs like Hans's belief ($B_1$), that Venus is Phosphorus, but it is not Hesperus. By contrast, it is hard to understand what it would be for Hans to believe ($B_2$), that Venus is Phosphorus, but it is not Phosphorus.

The underlying assumption here is that a subject cannot believe a direct (and obvious) contradiction because it is unintelligible what it would even mean to have such a belief. I do not understand what it would be for Venus to be Phosphorus and not to be Phosphorus. I am not sure what it would be to ascribe such a belief to anyone in a position to grasp its meaning.

Let me elaborate on this point. To have such a belief involves understanding what it is about; the subject possesses the concepts involved *and* she understands what it means for them to be combined the way they are. This is what distinguishes genuinely believing that *she is sleeping and not sleeping* from merely saying the words in one's head without knowing what one is saying. But one can only understand what one believes if the belief itself is intelligible.[10]

But if a belief such as *Venus is Phosphorus and Venus is not Phosphorus* is unintelligible, the same is true of analogous desires. I am not sure what it would be for someone who grasps the relevant content to have one desire to sleep and not to sleep, since this is unintelligible. And the same is true of all other attitudes towards conceptual contents, including even entertaining a thought, or—to get to the attitude relevant in the current context—undergoing a perceptual experience, on the conceptualist picture. If the contents of all perceptual experiences are Fregean propositions, then no perceptual contents are self-contradictory.

The second motivation for (CI) is the Davidsonian principle of charity, according to which we should try to reduce the amount of irrational attitudes we ascribe to a subject. Concerning this motivation, the nonconceptualist can concede that (CI) does not apply to desire because having a desire with a contradictory content is not (very) irrational. At the same time, she can maintain that having a perceptual experience with a contradictory content is just as irrational as believing a contradiction.

[10]Note that this makes (CI) and (PCI) even stronger than I have claimed so far: Even an irrational agent cannot *really* believe a contradiction, given that she fully grasps her belief's content.

Interestingly, there are ties between my claims here and the Generality Constraint. To meet the Generality Constraint is to understand a concept and, on the basis of this understanding, to be able to entertain all kinds of thoughts involving the concept in question. Plausibly, this involves an understanding of what (apparent) thoughts involving the concept are unintelligible, for instance by being self-contradictory, such that the subject cannot be required to be able to entertain contents of this kind. Rather, possessing the concept requires her to refrain from trying to entertain such apparent thoughts. So grasping a concept, as defined by the Generality Constraint, involves an inability to entertain self-contradictory thoughts involving same-said concept.

(And consequently, that both beliefs and perceptions with contradictory contents are excluded by (CI) and (PCI), respectively.)

Think again of Hans's desire to sleep and not to sleep. Even assuming that we can correctly ascribe this to him as *one* desire, the most plausible way to describe it is not as a desire for one contradictory state of affairs to come true, but as a desire for *two* distinct and incompatible possible situations to become actual. We might describe him as feeling pulled in two directions: For one, he would really like to stay at the party, which would preclude his going to bed and sleep. For another, he is very tired and would really like to go to sleep. It seems plausible enough that he would describe his state of mind by saying, 'I have a desire to sleep and not to sleep'. But what this means is not that he wants *one* impossible (and therefore unintelligible) world to become actual, a world in which he sleeps and does not sleep at the same time. Instead, there are *two* different possible worlds, one in which he stays at the party and one in which he goes to bed, and he would like for both of them to become actual.

To be completely rational, Hans will have to make up his mind which of the two possibilities he wants to go with. Still, I think that his desire is not blatantly irrational, since its content does not involve one impossible situation, but two incompatible possible worlds that are internally consistent. On this interpretation of the content of Hans's desire, it is fine to admit that it is contradictory (in some sense), which is not excluded by an equivalent of (CI) for desire. The principle of charity does not force us to avoid ascribing this kind of harmless irrationality to a subject.

Perception is different. Just like belief, it purports that the world is a certain way.[11] It is just for this reason that one might expect that it is impossible to have a contradictory perceptual experience and yet to be rational, for the actual world does not contain any contradictory states of affairs. What makes beliefs such as *o is F and not-F* irrational is that it is impossible for this belief to be true. The whole point of simple empirical beliefs is to correspond to the actual world (and thereby to make successful interaction with the world possible). If the content of an empirical belief did contain a contradiction, it would represent a contradiction within one possible world. It is impossible to have such a belief, to understand what it means, and to be rational all at once.

Perception is like belief in this respect—its function is to represent the world correctly. So again, to have a perception with a self-contradictory conceptual content is to represent a contradiction in one possible (viz., the actual) world. It follows that it is equally irrational to have a self-contradictory perceptual experience as it is to have a self-contradictory empirical belief. Either one is excluded by (CI) or (PCI), respectively, if we take it to be motivated by a principle of charity. Premise (3) of

[11]Cf. Mellor (1988, 148/149) for a different formulation of this point. Heck (2000, 508) calls this the "assertoric force" or the "presentational aspect" of both perceptual experience and belief and uses it in a defense against McDowell's claim that the nonconceptualist cannot explain how perceptual experience can justify empirical belief. I will get to this topic in Chap. 7.

the argument from contradictory contents stands—if all perceptual content consists exclusively in Fregean propositions, then there are no self-contradictory perceptual contents.

There is an obvious reply open to the conceptualist. He can point out that ought implies can, and that we cannot revise the contents of our perceptual experiences as we can revise our belief contents. From the point of view of rationality, I have the duty to revise my obviously contradictory belief contents because it is in my power to do so. It is impossible for me to revise the contents of my perceptual experiences; so I cannot be under any obligation to correct them, and I cannot be called irrational if I do not. This means that (PCI) cannot be motivated for perception by appeal to the principle of charity. We do not increase the irrationality of a subject by ascribing self-contradictory perceptual experiences to him.

We should all agree that a subject cannot be called irrational for undergoing a perceptual experience with a contradictory content, for he simply cannot revise his experience even if he realizes that its content is contradictory. The situation is different for empirical belief: If a subject realizes that the content of his belief involves a contradiction, he is in a position to revise it and to form a belief whose content is not self-contradictory. It would therefore be irrational for him to maintain a belief with contradictory content. We may now wonder what the underlying reason is for this difference between belief and perception: Why am I in a position to revise my beliefs, but not my perceptual experiences?

The Modest Nonconceptualist can easily come up with a plausible explanation for this fact. According to her, all belief content is conceptual and propositional. This means that one belief content will stand in inferential relations to many others, it can serve as a premise or a conclusion with respect to the other belief contents of the subject. A subject can arrive at a new belief by inference, and he can revise his beliefs based on inference.[12] By contrast, at least some of the content of each perceptual experience is nonconceptual and non-propositional. It consists of a scenario content.[13] If this is the structure of perceptual content, it is not surprising that we are not able to infer to a different perceptual experience when confronted with a contradictory perceptual content. A non-propositional content that does not consist of concepts that can show up in the contents of other mental states and thereby make inferences possible cannot be tied into a subject's inferential net in the same way as a belief content. It cannot be inferred to or revised like the content of a belief.

The Modest Nonconceptualist, then, can explain the difference between perception and belief by appeal to a difference in the structure of perceptual and belief content. This road is not open to the conceptualist, however. If belief content and perceptual content both have the same conceptual and propositional structure, we should expect that we can equally well infer to beliefs and to perceptual experiences. What kind of explanation of this difference with respect to revisability is the

[12] See Sects. 2.2.1.3 and 3.4.2. For a similar point, cf. Crane (1992b, 147).

[13] See Sect. 2.1.2.4.

conceptualist able to give? One option, pursued by McDowell (2009a) is to give up on the claim that perceptual content is propositional, but to maintain that it is conceptual and has an intuitional structure. On this view, it is not surprising that perceptual contents are not inferentially embedded and cannot be revised in the way that I suggested for conceptual/propositional contents.

Given the conceptualist's endorsement of (S2C)[14] and the parallelism between a subject's exercise of conceptual abilities and the corresponding contents I defend in Sect. 3.4.2, the following problem remains for this reply: That a perceptual content is conceptual (i.e., constituted by Fregean senses) must be due to an involvement of conceptual abilities in the subject's undergoing the respective perceptual experience. Such abilities are paradigmatically under the subject's control to exercise. Assume that we are talking about a rational subject. If her perceptual experience really does involve the exercise of conceptual abilities, she should be able to adjust her perceptual experience (and experience something else) in the face of her beliefs that rationally require her to do so.

McDowell's answer to this allegation, both on his old and his new view, is that concepts are actively exercised in belief and judgment, but merely actualized or "brought into play" in perception. (McDowell 1994a, 10) Unfortunately, he does not explain what it is for a conceptual ability to be actualized (in contrast to a conceptual ability being actively exercised). I do not understand what it would be for conceptual abilities to be merely actualized, and I am not sure that they could be. The least McDowell would have to do to make his strategy palatable is to provide an explanation of what this means.

Recall my claims in Sect. 2.2.1.3 that to exercise a concept is to exercise (at least) one of three conceptual abilities, viz., the ability to draw inferences or abilities for re-identification or for general thought (which I take to be conceptual if the subject possesses them in virtue of her inferential abilities). I can also make sense of the notion of a conceptual ability that needs to be possessed, but not exercised in undergoing a mental state. But I do not see how we could make room for the notion of actualizing a conceptual ability, if it is neither possessing nor exercising a conceptual ability.[15]

[14] See Sect. 3.2.

[15] In his newer writings, McDowell partially phrases the issue in a Kantian jargon, which I do not find very illuminating either. For instance, he says that conceptual abilities are "involuntarily drawn into operation under ostensible necessitation from an ostensibly seen object" (McDowell 2009d, 31) and that "[i]n intuiting, capacities that belong to the higher cognitive faculty are in play. The unity of intuitional content reflects an operation of the same unifying function that is operative in the unity of judgments." (McDowell 2009a, 264) His idea still seems to be that it is one and the same conceptual abilities that are drawn on in perceptual experience and belief. In belief, they are exercised as part of a discursive activity such as making judgments; this exercise is paralleled by a belief content with a propositional structure. In perceptual experience, on the other hand, their activation is forced on the perceiver in reaction to what she is perceptually confronted with. This activation is paralleled by a perceptual content with an intuitional structure. (I have not found any useful explications of what characterizes this structure.) Crucially, this content is not

Gennaro (2012, 150) makes a suggestion that might be useful to the conceptualist here: According to him, concepts are *un*consciously applied in experience. Consequently, their application apparently cannot be under the subject's (conscious) control. I find this suggestion confusing: It seems that conceptual abilities are abilities that could not just be standardly activated without the subject's even noticing. Gennaro agrees with this claim by committing to a Kantian view of perception and thought:

> the passive nature of the sensibility ... is contrasted with the active and more cognitive nature of the understanding, which thinks about and applies concepts to that which enters via the sensibility. (Gennaro 2012, 51)

Maybe his talk as if it is the *understanding* that applies concepts (rather than the thinker) is supposed to make room for concepts to be applied voluntarily without awareness of the subject. The problem with this claim is that it is still not clear how a concept application that just happens to the subject without her noticing could be under her control, and that it does not make it any clearer just to say that the subject's active understanding is involved in the application. Generally, it would seem that conceptual abilities are personal-level abilities exercised by the whole person, not by one of her parts.[16]

The conceptualist might move on to the claim that the difference between perceptual experience and belief is due to a difference in attitude, not to a difference in the structure of content. He might argue that belief is the kind of propositional attitude that allows for active manipulation of content, but that perceptual experience is not. While this idea is attractive in principle, I do not think that it works for the conceptualist. For the problem remains: What is it for one's conceptual abilities to be actualized or brought into play, if this is not for one to actively exercise them?

Unlike the critics (see Chap. 3), the conceptualist wants to tie conceptual structure of content to involvement of conceptual abilities. So the conceptual abilities corresponding to the concepts (at the level of content) must be involved in the subject's undergoing her perceptual experience, they must be relevant to whether it counts as an attitude that it is under our control to have or as one that we are settled with. But conceptual powers are paradigmatically controlled by the subject; the natural conclusion would be that the subject can control whether she undergoes the corresponding experience, and that she is able to revise it.[17] If the conceptualist

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yet articulated, but it could be—the very elements of an intuitional content can be elements of a propositional content, in the event that they are carved out and taken up by a belief.

[16] I make a suggestion of how to resolve this tension in a way that profits the nonconceptualist below in Sect. 6.2.4.

[17] But what about attitudes with conceptual contents that are not under my active control? Think of a student's fear of failing his exam, for instance. This fear seems to have a conceptual content, but the student does not have control over whether he has this fear or not. Let me make three points in reply. For one, the kind of control relevant to belief is not that the subject can believe whatever she wants to, but that her beliefs can be revised if this is rational. The same is true of some of our fears. If we realize that they are not warranted, we lose them. But we do not have this power over perceptual experience.

tries to solve this problem by talking of actualization of conceptual abilities, he faces the same problem as before—it is obscure what this actualization is supposed to be. So all in all, neither the conceptualist/propositionalist nor the conceptualist who abandons propositionalism can provide a satisfying explanation of the difference between perception and belief (the latter can be inferred to and revised, the former cannot).

Let me sum up my defense of the third premise. Either the concept individuation principle (CI) can be generalized to all attitudes towards conceptual content (if we motivate it by the claim that directly contradictory contents are unintelligible) or it can be generalized to all attitudes that purport to represent one possible situation, such as empirical belief and perception (if we motivate it by appeal to the principle of charity). Either way, perceptual content, if it consists in Fregean propositions, should conform to (PCI). To the second defense strategy, the conceptualist might reply that we cannot revise the contradictory contents of perceptual experience as we can revise the contradictory contents of belief; so it is not irrational to undergo a perceptual experience with self-contradictory content, and (PCI) cannot be motivated. If the conceptualist makes this move, however, he needs to explain *why* we are able to revise contradictory beliefs, but not contradictory perceptions. He cannot do this by appeal to content, and since he takes conceptual *abilities* to be involved in experience, he cannot do it by appeal to the attitude of perceptual experience. So premise (3) is correct—if all perceptual experiences have Fregean propositions as their exclusive contents, then all perceptual contents conform to (PCI) and do not involve a direct contradiction. Further, even if the conceptualist abandons propositionalism, this discussion exhibits a problem for his view: The fact that subjects cannot rationally revise their perceptual experiences cannot be accounted for if perceptual experiences are really just exercises of conceptual abilities, as the conceptualist has to claim.

## 5.5 Nonconceptual Content and Contradictions

While the preceding discussion establishes the falsity of conceptualism with respect to perceptual experience, it does not show that perceptual content consists in scenario content as compared to, say, Russellian propositions. For instance, a

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For another, our talk of the attitude of fear is ambiguous between being an emotion that is characterized by what it is like to undergo it, and that sometimes may not even have a clear articulable intentional object, and a propositional attitude. With respect to the former, I will say that it has a kind of nonconceptual content, so it fits my account that it is not revisable. As to the latter, it seems to be the kind of fear that can be revised if that is the rational thing to do.

Finally, my discussion in the preceding paragraphs has been restricted to attitudes whose function it is accurately to represent the world. Attitudes such as desire or fear were left to one side, granting that it may be less problematic to ascribe irrational desires or fears to a subject than it is to ascribe irrational beliefs, judgments, or perceptual experiences.

nonconceptualist might claim that belief content consists in Fregean propositions, and all experience content exclusively in Russellian propositions. This view, together with (S2C), entails that no conceptual abilities are exercised in experience, so it has no problems with its lack of rational revisability. Further, the view does not apply Fregean principles of concept individuation to experience content. So it does not entail that no perceptual content (in parallel fashion to premise (3) above) is self-contradictory.

Interestingly, on the Modest Nonconceptualist view that some of the content of every perceptual experience consists in nonconceptual and non-propositional scenario content, perceptual content cannot involve direct contradictions.[18] For, a contradiction cannot be formulated with the kind of materials provided by scenario content. We can formulate a contradiction within one proposition only if one of its elements is once affirmed and once denied. If a content is not a proposition and not composed of concepts, including concepts of negation or conjunction, then it is not self-contradictory. (See Mellor 1988, 147.)[19] So, if perceptual content is nonconceptual and non-propositional, we do not have the materials available to make sense of its being self-contradictory. So an analogue of premise (2) above (with the consequent "some perceptual contents are self-contradictory") cannot be established for Modest Nonconceptualism.

How then can the apparent contradiction in the waterfall illusion and in the synesthete's visual experience be explained? Remember that, in the beginning, I described the contents of the waterfall illusion and of the synesthete's experience as involving a contradiction, viz. that *an object is F and not-F*. Here is a proposal: While a subject is undergoing the waterfall illusion, a certain point of the scenario content of her visual experience is filled out with a surface or an object that has the property of moving, while also having the property of standing still. When A.D. sees a particular numeral, a certain point of her visual scenario content is filled out by a black numeral and filled out (at the same point) by that same numeral colored blue, say. To the subject, two *incompatible properties* appear to be instantiated in the same place and by the same object. Yet this visual content itself does not involve a contradiction in the full sense of the word, as no concepts are involved in the scenario content, so that there is no affirmation and denial of the same concept. Also,

[18]This is true at least to the extent that it is non-propositional and nonconceptual. I allow that some conceptual elements may enter a perceptual content. But I have argued above that it is phenomenally inadequate to ascribe more than one distinct content to a perceptual experience. So I do not think that an experience can have a propositional content in addition to its scenario content.

[19]If we read 'concept' broadly, as a re-combinable building-block of structured, truth-evaluable propositions, this allows for self-contradictory Russellian propositions. For possible-worlds propositions, we cannot 'formulate' a contradiction—a contradictory mental state will have the empty set of possible worlds associated as its content.

scenario contents lack a propositional structure that would allow for the properties to stand in the right kind of relation to make the content self-contradictory.[20]

Instead, Modest Conceptualism maintains that the perceptual belief that the perception is disposed to cause in the subject if she were to take her perception at face value (*this object is moving and it is not moving*, or *this numeral is black and it is not black*) would have a self-contradictory content and therefore cannot (rationally) be held. Note that this allows that the perceptual content may *imply* a contradiction; all I am claiming is that, being nonconceptual and non-propositional, it itself cannot involve a contradiction (in the full sense of the word).

Incidentally, this result helps resolve another problem that Gunther brings up against Crane's understanding of the waterfall illusion. He criticizes that, apparently, perception can do what logic alone seems to exclude: It can apparently present us with a straight-up logical contradiction, something that we cannot even conceive of (see Gunther 2001, 194). If perception is really nonconceptual and non-propositional as Modest Nonconceptualism claims, it cannot involve direct contradictions at all, and Gunther's consideration does not apply.

## 5.6 Results

To turn to the results of the argument from contradictory contents, the assumption that all perceptual contents are exclusively Fregean propositions leads to a contradiction, viz. that some perceptual contents are self-contradictory and that none are self-contradictory. We have to conclude that some perceptual contents are nonconceptual/non-propositional. In defense of premise (2), I argued that the given examples of self-contradictory contents indeed involve one single content. I then defended premise (3) by showing that, on the conceptualist/propositionalist picture, it has to be conceded that (PCI) applies to perception.

As to the strength of the nonconceptualism that the argument is able to support, it at first seems to be limited to a very small range of visual experiences, so that it appears only to support (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$). If we take into account the roots of the possibility of contradictory contents in perceptual experience that I have just uncovered, however, it becomes apparent that the argument is much stronger. It is true of *all* perceptual experiences that (at least some of) their content is not revisable in the same way as the content of empirical belief. As I have argued, this is due to the nonconceptual and non-propositional nature of the content of these

[20]So, even if someone were to argue that the relevant elements of the contents of the waterfall illusion or the synesthete's experience are Fregean elements, a possibility not in principle excluded by Modest Nonconceptualism, the fact that there is no propositional structure still prevents self-contradictions in the full sense. Let me add that I find the claim highly implausible that the relevant elements (moving/stationary; black/blue) are Fregean senses and thus correspond to exercised concepts. For the subject is not in a position to revise her experience of the waterfall illusion or her synesthetic experience, which I would expect if conceptual abilities were involved.

perceptual experiences and to the fact that perceptual experiences, as nonconceptual states, are *not* such that subjects have to exercise the relevant conceptual abilities in order to undergo them. Consequently, all perceptual experiences have at least some nonconceptual content, which is the claim of (General NC-ism$_{min}$) presupposed by Modest Nonconceptualism.

A surprising result for the original argument is that my suggestions entail that no genuine contradictions are involved in the scenario content of perception in the first place. The closest analogue to self-contradiction in a scenario content is the presence of two incompatible properties at the same point. Reflection on the waterfall illusion and some synesthetes' visual experiences shows that perception and belief have a very different kind of content indeed—the latter, but not the former, has a structure and constituents that make it possible to formulate contradictions, but that also require their elimination.

# Chapter 6
# Arguments from Concept Possession

In this chapter, I discuss arguments for the claim that a subject can have an experience with a certain content even if she does not possess all the concepts needed to specify this content. If she does not possess all the relevant concepts, then she cannot exercise them. So, she can undergo such an experience without being required to exercise all the concepts needed to specify its content. It is a minimally nonconceptual state and has—by (S2C)—minimally nonconceptual content.

The *argument from memory experience* goes back to Martin (1992). Since we can extract new information from memories of previous experiences when we acquire new concepts, the content of these previous experiences cannot have been all conceptual. The *argument from animal and infant perception* presupposes that some subjects who lack concepts of any kind nonetheless have perceptual experiences with the same kind of content as human perception. So, the content of human perception must be nonconceptual just like the perceptual contents of these subjects. The third argument, the *argument from concept acquisition*, which has been elaborated by Roskies (2008, 2010), shows that we cannot explain how subjects acquire some of their first concepts unless we assume that experience content is nonconceptual.

## 6.1 The Argument from Memory Experience

### *6.1.1 Presentation of the Argument*

One—not very promising—way of arguing against the conceptualist would be the following. Imagine a subject, Mary, who likes to play board-games with dice. One of her favorite games involves two dice, an eight-faced die (or octahedron, see Fig. 6.1) and a twelve-faced die (or dodecahedron, see Fig. 6.2). The eight-faced die has a different color on each of its faces, whereas the twelve-faced die has animals on



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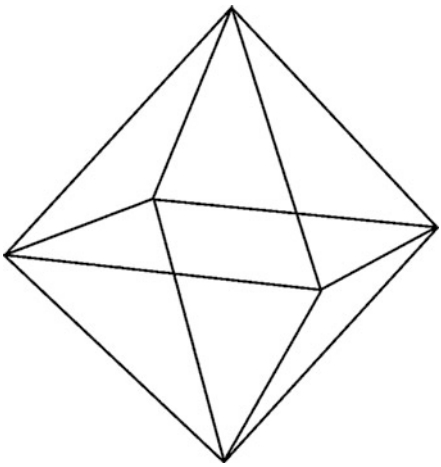

**Fig. 6.1** An octahedron

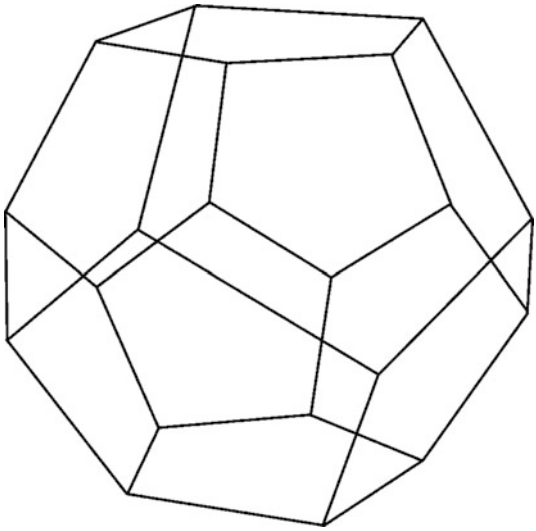

**Fig. 6.2** A dodecahedron

its faces. Mary can interact with these different dice just fine in the context of the game. She does not recognize them by the kinds of geometrical shapes they are, however, but just by what is printed on them. She does not possess the concept of a dodecahedron or of an octahedron. To her, the dice are just many-faced dice. (We can imagine that she cannot count very well past six, for example.)

Based on this example, the nonconceptualist could claim that a subject can have a visual experience of an object (the dodecahedron) without having the relevant concepts (the concept *dodecahedron*). The content of her experience must be nonconceptual, then.

Unfortunately, there is an easy reply open to the conceptualist. He can challenge the assumption that the content of Mary's experience distinguishes between the

octahedron and the dodecahedron. Instead, it could be argued, her experience represents that there are two many-faced dice. That is, the conceptualist can maintain that, where there is no *conceptual* distinction between two shapes, there is no distinction between the shapes in the content of the subject's perceptual state either.[1]

An argument presented by Martin (1992) manages to sidestep this problem. In his story of Mary, we are asked to imagine Mary later in her life. At some point, she acquires the concepts of a dodecahedron and of an octahedron. She can now distinguish between the two different dice based on the number and shapes of their faces. Imagine that she reminisces about her childhood games. She calls up a visual memory of herself playing the game involving the twelve-faced and the eight-faced die and suddenly realizes that the die with the animals printed on it is indeed a dodecahedron. Martin's claim is that Mary can realize that the die was a dodecahedron only if her memory experience of herself rolling the die represents this fact, and that her memory experience can only represent this fact if her original experience of herself playing the game also represented the fact that she was rolling a dodecahedron. The result is that Mary *originally* did have a visual experience of a dodecahedron even though she did not possess a concept of a dodecahedron at the time. Therefore, the content of her visual experience then could not have been conceptual.

Here is the structure of the argument. Take a subject *S* who has a visual experience *E* with a certain content at *t*.

1. At *t*, *S* does not possess a concept *c* that is needed to specify a certain feature *f* of the scene that *S* has before her eyes when undergoing *E*.
2. After acquiring *c* at *t'*, *S* recalls *E* and is thereby in a position to realize that *c* specifies *f*.
3. If *E* did not contain *f* as part of its content at *t*, *S* would not be able to realize at *t'* that *c* specifies *f*.
4. Therefore, *E* contains *f* as part of its content at *t*.
5. Therefore, *E* contains *f* as part of its content at *t* even though *S* does not possess a concept *c* that is needed to specify *f* at *t*.
6. Therefore, *E* has (minimally) nonconceptual content.[2]

Mary's original experience of the dice must have represented the dodecahedron, not just a many-faced die; otherwise, it would not be possible for her to realize later, when calling up the visual memory of the die, that her newly acquired concept

[1]To compare with the argument from fineness of grain in Sect. 4.1, the way to avoid the same objection in that context was by appeal to phenomenology. Although I possess no recognitional capacities for two very similar shades of orange, I can distinguish them in my visual experience, for there is a difference between what it is like to see each of these shades.

[2]The step from (5) to (6) relies on (S2C)—if *S* does not possess a concept needed to specify a feature represented by her experience, then she cannot be required to exercise such a concept in order to undergo the experience. So by (S2C), the content of her experience is nonconceptual at least with respect to this feature. See Sects. 3.2 and 3.3.

*dodecahedron* applies to the die. Yet she did not possess the concept *dodecahedron* at the time of her original experience. She was not able to count past six, and she was unable at the time to recognize that an object was a twelve-faced die or to distinguish twelve-faced dice from eight-faced dice. Since she did not possess the concept *dodecahedron*, she was not in a position to exercise this concept when undergoing her experience of the die. So, the content of her experience must have been (at least partly) nonconceptual.

The conceptualist has to maintain—contra (5)—that there are no perceptual contents that outrun a subject's conceptual resources. So, there are two basic lines of reply open to him. For one, he can agree that Mary did not originally possess the relevant concept, but deny that Mary's experience represented the dodecahedron (agree with (1), deny (4)). To go with this strategy, the conceptualist has to show that premise (3) is not true—either by showing that even if the dodecahedron had not been part of Mary's perceptual content, she would have been able to realize that the concept *dodecahedron* applies to the die, or by showing that this conditional is open to counterexamples. For another, he can admit that Mary's original experience represented a dodecahedron, but attack the claim that Mary did not possess a concept for the dodecahedron (concede (4), deny (1)). To make this strategy work, the conceptualist has to show that there is no reason to hold that Mary did not possess the relevant concept.

Note that what is really at stake is not whether Mary as a child *possesses* the concept *dodecahedron*, but whether she has to exercise the concept in order to undergo the visual experience of the dice. Seeing as Mary cannot exercise the concept *dodecahedron* if she does not possess it and thus does not *have to* exercise it to undergo the experience in question, nonconceptualism can be supported by an argument that Mary does not possess the concept as a child. If it can be argued successfully that the die must have been part of the content of her experience nonetheless, then this part of her experience content at least must have been nonconceptual. In the following discussion of the conceptualist reply strategies, what will be at issue is whether the conceptualist can show either that Mary did not perceive the dodecahedron (since she lacked the concept and could not exercise it in her experience) or that she did possess a concept of the dodecahedron (of which the nonconceptualist then cannot prove that it was not exercised in her undergoing the experience) and therefore did experience the dodecahedron.

### *6.1.2 The First Objection: Mary Did Not See the Dodecahedron*

Let's turn to the first line of argument: The conceptualist might concede that Mary did not originally possess any concepts more finely grained than that of a many-faced die. To admit this is to say that, at the time of her original experience, Mary did not have the conceptual ability to re-identify dodecahedra or to distinguish them

from other many-faced dice, let alone the abilities to draw inferences involving twelve-faced dice or to recombine her concepts to form new thoughts about them. Assuming that she is able to realize later that the die with the animals was a dodecahedron, how can the conceptualist argue that the dodecahedron was not part of her (conceptual) experience content?

First, he can argue that Mary can realize that she saw a dodecahedron because this was part of the *unconscious* information that the mental representations underlying her original experience carried. Chuard suggests that the conceptualist

> will argue that information about the . . . [dodecahedron] was processed only sub-personally, and didn't make it into the conscious representational content of the perceiver's mental state, until it was remembered. (Chuard 2007, 18)[3]

Mary did not then *experience* that the die was a dodecahedron, because all that she could consciously experience was what was conceptualized in the content of her experience. But the information that it was a dodecahedron was there nonetheless. As soon as she acquires the concept of a dodecahedron, this content of the representation underlying her memory experience suddenly becomes conceptualized. Thereby, the fact that the die with the animals printed on it was a dodecahedron rises to (phenomenal) consciousness. If a conceptualist were to take this position, he would allow that there is some sort of nonconceptual content, namely the content of the subpersonal mental representations underlying an experience. The phenomenal content of the experience, however, the content relevant to the transparency intuition and to the claim that perception is our openness to the world, remains conceptual.[4]

This strategy is not convincing. For it is not very clear how exactly the fact that the die was a dodecahedron suddenly pops into Mary's consciousness. At first, it is part of the unconscious information that the subpersonal representational state subserving her perceptual experience carries. When Mary acquires the relevant conceptual ability years later, somehow this information, which was unconsciously stored away, is conceptualized and thereby pulled into the phenomenal content of her memory experience.

This view should be unattractive for the conceptualist. First, it is very similar to what McDowell finds implausible about Evans's nonconceptualism, according to which nonconceptual content becomes phenomenally conscious when we can cognitively access it, so that

> the contentfulness of our thoughts and conscious experiences . . . [can] be understood as a welling-up to the surface of some of the content that a good psychological theory would attribute to goings-on in our cognitive machinery. (McDowell 1994a, 55)[5]

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[3]Page reference to the online version of the paper. I have adapted Chuard's example, which originally involves a mustache.

[4]This line of argument would fit well with Gennaro's higher-order thought view: The relevant subpersonally represented features become conscious as soon as Mary is able to form a higher-order thought involving concepts that apply to these particular features. As a matter of fact, Gennaro (2012, 165–172) is more sympathetic to the second objection presented below.

[5]For further discussion of McDowell's point, see Sect. 7.2 and Chap. 8.

The conceptualist might respond by spelling the situation out somewhat differently: The retained subpersonal information is not the same as the conceptual content of Mary's memory involving the dodecahedron that has suddenly emerged. We may need to appeal to subpersonal information in order to explain how, years after interacting with the dodecahedron, Mary can suddenly come to have a conscious visual memory of it. But this does not force the conceptualist to think of the subpersonal content as "welling up" to the surface of consciousness. Rather, her new conceptual ability extends her conscious memory of her childhood games to include the fact that the die she used to play with was a dodecahedron. There is a fact about the (past) world that is now manifest to her in memory experience.

This leads to the second problem of this proposal. When Mary was a young child, she played with a dodecahedron. This was the time that the state of affairs which is represented by her memory experience—the die she plays with is a dodecahedron—obtained. Now, years later, after not having played with the die in a long time, this fact is suddenly manifest to Mary in her memory. The question that worries me is how a fact that was not perceptually manifest to Mary when it obtained can later become the content of her conscious memory.

As far as I can see, the only answer the conceptualist can provide is in terms of information stored by subpersonal representations. But this answer is unsatisfactory for epistemological reasons: How can the content of a subject's memory, involving a state of affairs that obtained in the past, be more than a mere "exculpation" and provide genuine justification for beliefs based on it, if it acquires its content only via subpersonal mediation? This is especially worrisome since, from the subject's point of view the fact that she was playing with a dodecahedron will just pop into her consciousness, where before all she could consciously remember was the presence of a many-faced die.

I am willing to grant McDowell's account of perception, where states of affairs that obtain *now* can be perceptually manifest to the subject by becoming the content of her perceptual experiences (McDowell 1982/2009, 80). But I am not confident that this story can be adapted to fit memories of states of affairs obtaining in the past, at least in cases such as Mary's, who did not originally have a perceptual experience representing the state of affairs in question.[6]

In the face of these issues, the nonconceptualist account seems much more plausible: Mary was originally perceptually conscious of the fact that there was a dodecahedron in front of her; she just could not *cognitively* access this part of her experience content. As soon as she acquires the concept, she is able to realize that this one element of her memory experience content is a dodecahedron. It is not that the content of her memory experience itself changes (as the conceptualist claims), but that her judgments based on the memory experience change.

The second way to attack the claim that, if Mary can later realize that what she saw was a dodecahedron, the die must have been part of her original experience content, is proposed by Speaks (2005) and seconded by Gennaro (2012, 167).

[6]I will present McDowell's views in detail in Chaps. 7 and 8.

Speaks criticizes premise (3) of the argument by putting forth a counterexample to the conditional. Here is his formulation of the premise and his counterexample:

> (*A* can infer *p* from remembering an experience had at *t*) → (*p* was part of the content of *A*'s experience at *t*)
> [. . .] Consider, for example, the following case: I remember seeing an inscription on a plaque in my school of the words "Ad majorem dei gloriam"; not knowing Latin, I did not know what these words meant. Later on, I learn a bit of Latin, and, recalling my perception of this inscription, come to judge that the plaque had an inscription which meant "For the greater honor and glory of God." So we can infer that it was part of the content of my original experience that the plaque had an inscription which meant "For the greater honor and glory of God." (Speaks 2005, 385)

Speaks's point is that the fact that the Latin inscription meant "For the greater honor and glory of God" certainly was *not* part of the content of his experience. So the inference fails. Since his example is exactly analogous to the original inference—Martin claims that we can infer from the fact that Mary realizes later that she had an experience of a dodecahedron to the fact that the dodecahedron was part of her original experience content—that inference is also fallacious. There is no reason to believe that Mary's original experience content involved a dodecahedron, just as there is no reason to believe that Speaks's original experience of the Latin inscription also represented its English translation. Mary might be in a position to infer that her experience was of a dodecahedron even if her original experience did not contain this fact.

Speaks's counterexample is not convincing. His antecedent states that the subject can *infer* that something is the case from her memory experience. After learning Latin, Speaks *infers* that "Ad majorem dei gloriam" means "For the greater honor and glory of God." For him to be able to infer this, however, he needs something to infer it from. Plausibly, he can infer the English meaning from the Latin phrase only if he remembers the Latin phrase, or at least remembers what the letters looked like so that he can reconstruct the phrase. So, he must have had an experience of *something*, from which he is able to infer the English meaning.

On what basis does Mary draw her inference that what she saw back in the day was a dodecahedron? According to the current reply, the conceptualist claims that the dodecahedron was not part of her original experience content. Gennaro suggests that all that entered this content was the fact that there was a many-sided figure, and that she later infers from this that there was a dodecahedron. But how is Mary supposed to infer from this fact alone that what she experienced was a dodecahedron? This conclusion simply does not follow—the original content simply is not specific enough.

Speaks's argument *does* show that the fact that Mary realizes she saw a dodecahedron does not guarantee that the dodecahedron itself was part of the original experience content. That it was a dodecahedron might also follow from something else that she experienced then. For instance, she might have experienced the die as having five-cornered faces and then, after acquiring the concept *dodecahedron*, infer that it was a dodecahedron she saw. Alternatively, maybe she had a concept of the dodecahedron based on how it appeared to her visually, such as *the die that*

*looks like this*. From this, together with her newly acquired concept *dodecahedron* and her realization that dodecahedra look like this, she later infers that she saw a dodecahedron.

Even so, the most natural description of the Mary case seems to be not that of a lengthy inference from, for instance, facts about how many corners the faces of a dodecahedron have. When she recalls her earlier experience, it simply strikes her that what she experienced then falls under the concept *dodecahedron*. Most likely, when acquiring the concept, she learns that dodecahedra always look a certain way and then realizes that the die she used to play with also looked this way. To realize this, however, she needs to have experienced that the die looked this way, which is to say that her experience content must have involved the dodecahedron, not just an unspecific many-faced die.

Be this as it may—if the conceptualist wants to argue in this way, he has to give up the first objection, which consists of, first, conceding that Mary did not originally possess *any concepts whatsoever* to pick out the dodecahedron and, second, denying that Mary saw anything more specific than just a many-faced die. He has to admit that Mary's experience content contained *more* than just a many-faced die and therefore—being a conceptualist—that she must have had some conceptual resources to pick out the twelve-faced die in particular. There had to be something from which she can later infer that it was a dodecahedron that she saw.

### *6.1.3 The Second Objection: Other Concepts of the Die*

To pursue the second objection, the conceptualist has to argue that Mary possessed another concept—besides the concept *dodecahedron*—that is needed to specify the dodecahedron. This goes to show that premise (1), that the subject possesses none of the concepts needed to specify the dodecahedron, is false.[7]

First, the conceptualist can argue that Mary possessed *simpler* concepts of the die that enabled her to pick it out. This reply is discussed in Martin (1992, 754, fn. 12),[8] where he concedes that Mary does have some simpler geometrical concepts, such as a concept of a face or of an edge. The conceptualist might argue that the content of Mary's experience of the die can be fully specified by these other concepts that she possesses (against premise (1)), and that the argument therefore does not establish

[7]This paraphrase of premise (1) exploits the fact that the premise is ambiguous as it stands. It can be read either as '*S* does not possess a certain one out of a range of concepts, one of which is needed to specify a particular feature of *S*'s perceptual content' or as '*S* possesses none of the concepts that would be needed to specify the feature of *S*'s perceptual content.' On the first reading, the subject's perceptual content may well be conceptual, for the premise does not speak to the possibility that *S* possesses one of the other concepts out of the relevant range of concepts. On the second reading, premise (1) is falsified as soon as *S* possesses any one of the concepts that would be needed to specify the dodecahedron. This is what the objection tries to establish.

[8]Also, see Gennaro (2012, 168) and Genone (n.d.).

its conclusion (6). For instance, it might be said that Mary possesses the concept of a face with five corners and the concept of a face with three corners. The content of her experience can then be described as involving a die with faces with five corners and another die with faces with three corners.

Second, building on the demonstrative strategy presented previously, the conceptualist could argue that Mary possesses a *demonstrative* concept for the dodecahedron (*that die*) even if she does not possess the general concept *dodecahedron*.[9] When she looks at the two dice, she can think about the eight-faced die as *that die* and about the twelve-faced die as *that die*. Let's change the scenario to throw this point into sharper relief. Imagine that the two dice both have the same colors printed on them, so that Mary cannot distinguish the dice by what is printed on them. Nonetheless, she can certainly focus on the die on the left and think that *that die is small* and then focus on the die on the right and think that *that die is also small*. Again, premise (1) comes out false: she possesses all the concepts needed to fully specify the content of her experience.[10]

Martin (1992, 755, fn. 12) replies that Mary, when she undergoes the original experience, is not able to notice a difference between a dodecahedron and an octahedron, for instance. She simply cannot distinguish between them (unless there are additional features such as different symbols printed on them, which I have excluded above). So she does not at this point possess any other simpler concepts that would enable her to pick out a dodecahedron, nor does she possess any demonstrative concepts that enable her to distinguish between the two dice. Therefore, she possesses none of the concepts that would be needed to specify the dodecahedron, and the content of her experience is not conceptual.

As long as the conceptualist accepts Martin's scenario as described, he thereby accepts that Mary cannot cognitively distinguish between the octahedron and the dodecahedron: If there are no additional features to help her keep the two kinds of dice apart, she is unable to pick out the dodecahedra out of a group of dice (both eight and twelve-faced) in front of her. Nor is she able to re-identify a dodecahedron as such. There is no cognitively accessible difference for her between looking at an octahedron and a dodecahedron on the one hand, and looking at two dodecahedra, on the other. So she might be able, while looking at the octahedron and the dodecahedron, to think about *that die* (on the left) and *that die* (on the right). But as far as she can tell, nothing is different in a situation in which she looks at two twelve-face dice and demonstratively refers to both of them.

The claim that Mary possesses simpler concepts that enable her to pick out the dodecahedron is similarly problematic with respect to the given scenario. If she does possess the concepts *three-cornered face* and *five-cornered face*, she will be able to

[9] As is suggested by Martin (1992, 759).

[10] Notice the following similarity with the argument from fineness of grain above in Sect. 4.1: That the argument here does not establish the truth of nonconceptualism does not show that conceptualism is therefore correct. That the subject possesses all the relevant concepts does not guarantee that she has to exercise them in order to undergo the experience.

distinguish the octahedron from the dodecahedron. She will be able to think, *this is the die with the five-cornered faces*, and, *this is the die with the three-cornered faces*. Moreover, it is plausible that these concepts are sufficient to specify the content of her experience of the dice. What this claim comes down to, however, is a direct contradiction of the claim, that is presupposed in the scenario, that Mary *cannot* distinguish in thought between the two different kinds of dice. Thus, to argue that Mary has these simpler concepts is to change the example.

Compare the current scenario to the scenario in which a subject is faced with two very similar shades of orange. She might not be able to re-identify either of the shades later on. But at least she has the ability to distinguish the shades as she is undergoing the experience. She can certainly tell an experience of two different shades of orange apart from an experience in which she sees only one shade of orange. In Martin's scenario, Mary cannot even do this. Whether she looks at two dodecahedra or at one eight-faced and one twelve-face die, Mary is only able to grasp that she is looking at two many-faced dice. It should be concluded that Mary does not possess two different demonstrative concepts *that die* for eight-sided and for twelve-sided dice. All she has is the same concept *that die* for any many-faced die.

The nonconceptualist has to make it plausible that there is no cognitively appreciable difference between a dodecahedron and an octahedron for Mary. My worry is that this puts pressure on her to think of Mary as showing no difference in her *behavior* towards dodecahedra and octahedra, respectively. For any behavioral difference might be taken as an indication, by the conceptualist, that Mary notices a difference between the two kinds of dice after all. Imagine, for example, a situation in which Mary wants to play a game that involves only the dodecahedron, not the octahedron. Even though, by hypothesis, she is unable to become cognitively aware of the different perceptual appearances of the dice, she picks up the right die (the dodecahedron) to play the game.

What should we make of this rather strange scenario? Mary possesses many other concepts, so why is she unable to follow up on her behavioral discrimination between the dice with a cognitive ability to distinguish them? This situation gives the conceptualist room to ascribe two distinct concepts to her for the two dice. A plausible candidate would be phenomenal concepts: Based on the different appearances of the dodecahedron and the octahedron in Mary's visual experience, she could have two distinct phenomenal concepts of them.[11] The conceptualist would have to add that she is unable to distinctly verbalize her phenomenal concepts and that the situation as described therefore looks as though she possesses no distinct concepts. But this could be described as a linguistic limitation rather than a conceptual one.

[11]For phenomenal concepts, see e.g. Nida-Rümelin (2010). Note that the conceptualist view might be incompatible with the claim that Mary has phenomenal concepts based on a—presumably nonconceptual—content of her experience. But the current point is only that the nonconceptualist's concession that Mary has a distinct phenomenal concept of the dodecahedron counts against the truth of premise (1) of the argument.

Consequently, the nonconceptualist should probably insist that Mary does not behave differently towards the two kinds of dice. This leads to the further worry that the scenario gives us a subject who cannot distinguish the dodecahedron and the octahedron in thought (she possesses neither simpler nor demonstrative concepts that allow her to distinguish them) and who does not exhibit different behavior towards the dice. Yet as the child grows up and acquires the concept of a dodecahedron, she is able to remember how she played with the dice in so much detail that she can tell that one of them was a dodecahedron.

I am not a developmental psychologist; so I am not sure whether there are any actual cases of children who, for instance, cannot count to three and are only able to interact with different dice in such a limited way, but who can later remember their childhood games accurately enough to realize they were playing with a dodecahedron. As far as I can tell, there is no principled difficulty with this scenario, however. So I suggest that the best strategy for the nonconceptualist is indeed to adjust the scenario so that Mary does not behave differently towards the dodecahedron and towards the octahedron. She does not possess any concepts more finely grained than *many-faced die* or a generic *that die*, yet her experience represents the eight-faced and the twelve-faced die differently.

### *6.1.4 Content and Cognitive Appreciation*

Even so, this strong stance on the range of Mary's concepts leads to other problems for the nonconceptualist. Let's assume that Mary does not originally possess *any* concepts for the dodecahedron other than *many-faced die* or a generic *that die*. The conceptualist can now point out that this assumption entails a very strong claim about the content of experience. Not only does this strategy entail that Mary as a child did not actually notice, in thought, that there was a dodecahedron in front of her. It also entails that there are parts of young Mary's experience content that she *cannot* in principle notice or appreciate or take up in a belief. As a child, she does not have—and cannot yet acquire—any concepts for the dodecahedron, so she cannot be cognitively aware that one of the dice is a dodecahedron, not even in a rudimentary way. Still, her experience presumably represents one of the dice to be a twelve-faced die.

This nonconceptualist strategy entails that it is possible that the content of an experience is in principle cognitively inaccessible to the subject. Any argument for nonconceptualism that works with a scenario in which a subject has an experience, even though she is unable (at the time) to acquire the concepts to fully specify the content of her experience, forces the nonconceptualist to claim that some aspects of the content of an experience cannot be cognitively grasped by the subject. This view might appear counterintuitive—for, in Peacocke's words,

> the representational content is the way the experience presents the world as being, and it can hardly present the world as being that way if the subject is incapable of appreciating what that way is. (Peacocke 1983, 7)[12]

Think about the scenario—it does not make a cognitive or even a behavioral difference to Mary whether a dodecahedron or an octahedron is present. It is impossible for her to find out that she has a visual experience of two different-looking dice. The conceptualist will take this as evidence that she does not even *experience* that there is a dodecahedron (or an octahedron) in front of her.

The idea that one's conscious perceptual contents have to make a cognitive difference is wide-spread. For instance, Evans (1982, 158) makes claims to this effect. On the conceptualist side, McDowell (1994a) picks up on the Kantian idea that experiences without concepts are blind.[13] According to Tye (1995, 138), the nonconceptual content of an experience has to be poised to impact the subject's central cognitive (or conceptual or belief/desire) system, in order to be conscious.[14] Preceding the phenomenally conscious content of a perceptual experience, *un*conscious content is processed in the sensory modules. For instance, earlier stages of visual processing involve symbols representing properties such as light intensity or wavelength. Tye's explanation why these properties do not enter the phenomenal content of an experience is that the mental representations of these properties are not poised, i.e., not ready to have an impact on the central cognitive system. Applied to the current scenario, one might then say that the dodecahedron is not part of the *poised* content of Mary's experience. Mary as a child does not possess—and is not smart enough to acquire—any concepts that would enable her to grasp that there is a dodecahedron, which is to say that the representation of the die simply cannot have an impact on her central cognitive system. So there is no conscious experience of a dodecahedron.

Note, however, that a better understanding of Tye's notion of poise is the following: To be poised is to be part of a certain functional architecture, including a central cognitive system that can take up information from the sensory modules, normally by forming beliefs that are based on the relevant incoming information, and a representational state that is at the interface between one of the sensory modules and the cognitive system. Tye requires this state to be "apt for the production in the *right* ways of the *right* beliefs." (Tye 2003b, 290) The *full* content of this representational state is the phenomenal character of the respective experience even if a subject does not (yet) possess the concepts to take up all the information the state carries. This understanding matches the suggestion in Tye (1995, 9/10) that the phenomenon of unilateral visual neglect can best be explained by holding that the subject has experiences with no loss of phenomenal content, but is unable to attend cognitively to her experiences. Similarly, Mary cannot attend to

[12]This quote is discussed by Martin (1992). Similarly, Genone (n.d.) casts doubt on the claim that a subject could experience something that she cannot bring under concepts at all.

[13]I will discuss this at length in Chap. 8.

[14]Also, see Tye (2000, 62, 2003a).

the difference between the look of a dodecahedron and the look of an octahedron because she lacks the conceptual abilities, but there is a difference between these looks nonetheless. Once she has acquired the requisite concepts, her perceptual representation will produce the corresponding belief in the appropriate way.

Following the first understanding of Tye's claim, one might argue it has to be possible for the experience content to register cognitively with the subject even if it does not actually do so. Martin (1992, 757) replies that this condition is fulfilled in his scenario: Mary can appreciate that her original experience represented a dodecahedron later, after she has acquired the relevant concept. So even if the content does have an impact on the cognitive system at the time of the experience, it does have an impact later, after Mary has acquired the concept *dodecahedron*. So it is not true to say that she cannot even in principle notice that a dodecahedron is present.

This is not a good reply. For the conceptualist can easily object that what matters is not that Mary can appreciate the presence of a dodecahedron at some later point, but that the dodecahedron has to (be able to) register cognitively with her at the time of the experience. Otherwise, no dodecahedron is presented *to her at this time*. The conceptualist can argue that the scenario contains a principled problem: It is incoherent to claim that Mary can experience a certain property even though, at the time of the experience, this property cannot make a cognitive difference to her at all, for she is unable to acquire any of the relevant concepts.[15]

To reply to this objection, we need to get clear on what it is to 'appreciate' or 'register' something that is presented in experience. According to the current objection, all appreciation involves the exercise of conceptual capacities, so that Mary cannot appreciate the presence of the dodecahedron if she cannot bring it under concepts. Moreover, the appreciation takes place, or would take place, in a distinct cognitive state such as a belief that this is a dodecahedron. However, there is a weaker understanding of these terms. I will present a full argument for and account of my weaker understanding in Chap. 8, but let me briefly sketch my Modest Nonconceptualist alternative now.

What is essential to the phenomenal content of perceptual experience is, indeed, that experience presents a section of the world *to the subject*.[16] In perception, the world *strikes* the subject as being a certain way—the subject's surroundings are perceptually manifest to her. But we can account for this already by saying that her surroundings register with her in her perceptual experience and she appreciates them, in a sense, in the experience itself. This acknowledgement does not force us to bring conceptual capacities or additional cognitive states into the picture. For to explain how certain features of the world can be present to the perceiver in experience, it is sufficient to provide an account of *subpersonal* representation of the respective distal features inside the perceptual system, and to add that the representations of these features are poised (now taking the second understanding of

[15] That is, (5.) is incoherent if supplied with the claim that the subject cannot even acquire concept *c*.

[16] See Sect. 2.1.3.

Tye's notion of poise) to have an impact on the perceiver's central behavior-guiding system.[17]

Correspondingly, it is a non-sequitur to move from the fact that the world registers with the subject when she has a conscious perceptual experience to the claim that the subject needs to appreciate the world by taking it up in an additional conceptual state. Rather, all we can require so far is that the presence of a dodecahedron has to register with Mary, where it is not excluded that this occurs in her experience itself, and that an account entirely in subpersonal-level terms can be given of this.

To reject this Modest Nonconceptualist claim, the conceptualist has to do more than merely *say* that the only way for the subject to be presented with things in the world is via her concepts—he has to present an *argument* why additional conceptual appreciation is necessary for the world's striking the subject a certain way in perceptual experience. He cannot just count on the intuitive appeal of his claim. For what seems intuitively right about an 'appreciation' requirement can be accounted for by the nonconceptualist. Consequently, there is no obstacle for Mary to perceive something for which she is not able to acquire any concepts at the time.

Still, it is unsatisfactory that—in the scenario as I have described it—Mary does not behave differently towards dodecahedra and octahedra if it is true that the two kinds of dice look different to her.[18] But as I said before, bringing in behavioral differences invites the conceptualist to trace them back to some sort of conceptual ability in the end. There is an uncomfortable tension for the nonconceptualist position here: To strengthen the claim that appreciation requires no additional conceptual state (for all we need is for the world to register with her perceptually), Mary would have to behave differently towards the dodecahedron than she does towards the octahedron. However, to ensure that Mary does not possess, and is unable to acquire, any simpler or demonstrative concepts of the dodecahedron, we have to construct a scenario in which she exhibits the same behavior towards the two kinds of dice.

### *6.1.5 Results*

Let me sum up. The first conceptualist objection against the argument from memory experience fails. For if the fact that a dodecahedron is present does not enter

[17]In contrast to Tye, I will argue in Chap. 8 that the central behavior-guiding system is not in all cases a conceptual system or belief system. What is crucial for poise, in my view, is that a representation stands ready to impact the central control system that guides the subject's behavior or that it is in a position to be unified with the output of other perceptual/experiential modules so as to constitute the subject's perceptual, or more broadly, experiential perspective on the world. This allows for creatures who lack conceptual belief to have genuine content-bearing experience, as stated by the Autonomy Thesis introduced in Sect. 6.2.

[18]In light of the Modest Nonconceptualist account just sketched, the problem is that Mary exhibits no special behavior towards dodecahedra despite the fact that the relevant perceptual representations are supposedly poised to impact her central behavior-guiding system.

young Mary's visual content, there is no good way for the conceptualist to explain how Mary is later able to realize that she saw a dodecahedron as a child. The second objection provides a greater threat. It is not completely clear that a subject who cannot bring the dodecahedron under concepts at all, and who does not exhibit any special dodecahedron-directed behavior, has perceptual experiences of dodecahedra, as distinct from other many-faced dice, in the first place. On the other hand, the concession that Mary reacts differently to the dodecahedron than to the octahedron invites the conceptualist to argue that she possesses and exercises some other, for instance phenomenal concepts, of the dice, so that she can later infer from her memory experience that she used to play with a dodecahedron.[19]

Overall, then, while the argument brings out some points that lie at the heart of the disagreement between conceptualists and nonconceptualists, it is not conclusive. Also, it at best supports (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$), and is thus not strong enough to strengthen Modest Nonconceptualism. Even if we have to concede that the perceptual experiences of young Mary used to have nonconceptual content, this provides no argument for the additional claim that the content of her current experiences, now that she possesses many more concepts, is still nonconceptual. With this rather dissatisfying result, let's turn to the next section.

## 6.2 The Argument from Animal and Infant Perception

The argument in the previous section exploited the (alleged) fact that a child who does not possess certain concepts can nonetheless plausibly experience the features in her environment that these concepts are of. Relatedly, the nonconceptualist can construe an argument from animal and infant perception, i.e., from the plausible claim that animals and infants experience their environments even if they possess no concepts whatsoever. First, I will present the argument and motivate its premises. I will then defend it against two potential conceptualist objections.[20]

### *6.2.1 The Argument*

It seems plausible enough that some animals and very young children do not possess any concepts, but that they do have perceptual experiences.[21] If this is true, the content of their perceptual states cannot be structured by concepts. Next, it can be

[19]Recall that Speaks's argument needs no more than *some* way to pick out the dodecahedron that enables Mary later that she used to play with a dodecahedron. Even a phenomenology-based concept such as *the die that looks like this* would do the trick.

[20]Some of the material from this section has been published in Schmidt (2010).

[21]When speaking of animals, I thereby mean non-human animals. When I speak of adults and infants, I mean human adults and infants. The infants of interest in this chapter are infants at a very

argued that adult human perception and animal and infant perception have the same kind of content, or at least that there is a core content that they share. (This qualification is needed because we should not exclude the possibility that a subject's conceptual abilities may partly transform the content of her perceptual experiences.[22]) It follows that the content of adult human perception is at least partly nonconceptual.

1. There are animals and infants who do not possess any concepts, but have perceptual experiences with genuine content.
2. The content of their perceptual experiences is nonconceptual (by (1)[23]).
3. This content and the content of adult human perception are partially identical.
4. Therefore, the content of adult human perception is minimally nonconceptual. (by (2) and (3)).

The main proponents of this argument are Bermúdez (1998, 2003a,b); Evans (1982); Peacocke (2001a,b). Different steps of the argument are attacked by Brewer (1999); Byrne (2005); Gennaro (2012); McDowell (1994a). Let me examine the premises of the argument in more detail before turning to possible conceptualist objections.

### *6.2.2 Motivating Premise (1): Content, But No Concepts*

Let's start with premise (1). It seems clear enough that there are some animals that do not have any conceptual powers at all, for instance snails or amoeba. The same might be argued for very young infants, for instance newborn babies. But premise (1) also claims that these animals and infants have perceptual experiences with genuine content. This claim is intuitively plausible for animals such as cats and dogs and for older infants; but with respect to these, the claim that they do not possess any conceptual abilities at all might seem questionable. The underlying problem is that there exists a tension between the two assumptions that premise (1) combines: On the one hand, the relevant animals and infants lack certain demanding cognitive (viz. conceptual) powers, but, on the other hand, they have other relatively demanding mental (viz. perceptual) abilities.

To see how this tension can be resolved, recall what it is to possess a concept. (See Sect. 2.2.1.3.) For a subject to possess a concept is for her to have certain cognitive abilities: recognitional and inferential abilities as well as the ability for general thought. The subject has to be able to re-identify the corresponding objects

young age, before it is uncontroversial that they possess concepts. I will not add these qualifications every time in what follows.

[22] Also see my discussion of (NC-ism$_{min}$) in Sect. 3.3. Given the plausible claim that an infant or an animal could have all the same perceptual experiences, with at least partially the same content as an adult human, this argument shows that all perceptual experiences have minimal nonconceptual content. It thus supports (General NC-ism$_{min}$).

[23] (S2C) is presupposed together with the thought that subjects who do not possess conceptual abilities when undergoing an experience cannot be required to exercise them in order to undergo the experience.

and properties, she has to be able to draw inferences involving the concepts she possesses, and she has to meet the Generality Constraint. Recall that the Generality Constraint asserts that, in order to possess a concept *b*, I have to be able to combine, in thought, my concept *b* of an object with any concept *F* of a property I possess to form new thoughts *Fb*. It follows that I need to have a full understanding of what bs are (analogous things are true for possessing concept *F*).

What makes premise (1) plausible is the Generality Constraint. While it is, *prima facie*, debatable whether, for example, a dog can re-identify its owner in certain contexts, or whether it can draw limited inferences about its owner, it is out of the question to ascribe fully general thought to a dog. Let me give an example. Let's assume that the dog possesses the general concepts *tall* and *my owner*. If so, it has to be able to entertain the thought that *my owner is tall* even in situations in which no object is tall and in which its owner is not present. This is highly implausible for an animal such as a dog, as it is for younger infants. At least *prima facie*, accepting the Generality Constraint as a condition for concept possession guarantees that animals and infants do not possess any concepts.

Let me briefly reply to the objection that the Generality Constraint precludes animals and infants from possessing *general* concepts, but not from possessing context-dependent *demonstrative* concepts. The conceptualist who pursues this objection argues that, since a subject has to be able to exercise demonstrative concepts only in the presence of what is demonstrated, even dogs or infants are able to meet the Generality Constraint for this kind of concepts. He claims, for instance, that the dog is able to contemplate the thought that *this* (its owner) *is thus* (tall), but only in the presence of its short owner and a tall building. This is sufficient to show that premise (1) is false, for if the animals and infants in question meet the Generality Constraint for context-dependent demonstrative concepts, they possess demonstrative concepts.

But this is not convincing. It is highly questionable that animals or infants can entertain demonstrative thoughts of this kind even in contexts in which the relevant objects and properties are present. It is *not* plausible that the dog is able to entertain the thought that *this* (its owner) *is thus* (tall) in a situation in which its short owner is standing in front of a tall building. I concede that the Generality Constraint, when applied to demonstrative concepts, requires generality only in the sense of instantiation-independence, not full context-independence. But even without the added requirement of context-independence, full instantiation-independence of concepts is a condition that cannot plausibly be met by animals and infants.

My reason for this claim is similar to some of McDowell's considerations that will come out below: There is no basis for the assumption that animals and infants are able to contemplate thoughts that are completely irrelevant to their direct biological needs or their immediate activities even if these thoughts result from (random) combinations of the general or demonstrative concepts they arguably possess. The only 'thoughts' or 'beliefs' we can plausibly ascribe to animals and infants are ones that are directly action-guiding. But by the Generality Constraint, ascription of such beliefs requires us to ascribe to them the ability to have many other thoughts. This, in turn, is highly implausible.

To conclude, the Generality Constraint as a condition for concept possession requires us to ascribe thoughts to animals and infants that they certainly cannot entertain. Thus, the constraint is a strong *prima facie* motivation for the claim that the animals and infants in question do not possess concepts.

How about the content of animal and infant perception? Bermúdez provides empirical evidence for the claim that animals and infants have perceptual experiences with genuine content. (See Bermúdez, 1998, 62–66; 2003c, 85–87.) Let me summarize the studies he presents concerning human infants—similar things could be said with respect to animals. Recent research in developmental psychology, conducted by Elizabeth Spelke, among others, disproves the older view that, for human infants, the world is almost completely undifferentiated until the end of the sensorimotor period, which is to say that their perceptual states have no content. (See, e.g., Spelke 1990.) Even 3-month-old babies have certain expectations concerning the behavior of objects. They have certain principles by which they parse their visual fields. For instance, they show surprise when a solid object apparently moves through a solid surface. Their perceptual experiences must have some sort of content which explains these expectations. Yet at the age of 3 months, it is plausible that these infants do not meet the Generality Constraint.

Note that subscribing to the first premise requires the nonconceptualist to accept the so-called Autonomy Thesis, the claim that it is possible for a subject to undergo perceptual experiences with genuine content even if she possesses no concepts whatsoever. (See Peacocke (1992, 90) and Bermúdez (1998, 61).) The Autonomy Thesis is controversial even among nonconceptualists. It was originally rejected by Peacocke (1992, 90/91) who endorses it in the more recent developments of his view.[24] Due to his requirement of poise, presented in the previous section, Tye is not a proponent of the Autonomy Thesis either. Note that the Autonomy Thesis is endorsed by Modest Nonconceptualism.

A weaker version of premise (1) (which does not entail the Autonomy Thesis) does not support the argument from animal and infant perception, however. If we deny the Autonomy Thesis, all we can say is that there are animals and infants who have only limited conceptual powers, but who have perceptions with genuine content. The most we can guarantee for (2), then, is that this content is minimally nonconceptual. But since premise (3) states that adult human perception and animal and infant perception have only partly the same content, it is not clear that it follows that adult human perception has any nonconceptual content at all. For it might be that the overlapping contents of adult human perception and animal and infant perception are conceptual contents.

The Autonomy Thesis might be seen to aggravate the issue discussed in the previous section, the relation between what a perceptual experience can represent and what the subject is able to appreciate in thought. It states that a subject who completely lacks the ability to conceptualize any aspect of her environment is nonetheless able to perceive her environment. As I have indicated above, this is

[24] See Peacocke (2003, 2014, 33).

unproblematic for Modest Nonconceptualism. My view involves an account, which makes no appeal to concept possession, of how the subject's experience can be her openness to the world. The conceptualist criticism of the Autonomy Thesis—if the subject cannot cognitively appreciate something, she cannot be presented with it in experience—is just another version of the conceptualist claim under debate: the claim that there is no genuine content-bearing perceptual experience without conceptual awareness. As long as there is no independent argument for this claim, there is no obstacle for the truth of the Autonomy Thesis.[25]

So I propose we assume for now that premise (1) is true. There are animals and infants who do not meet the Generality Constraint and therefore possess no concepts, but who have perceptual experiences with genuine content. By the state-to-content principle (S2C) I introduced and defended in Chap. 3, (2) follows from premise (1). If a subject possesses no conceptual abilities that she could be required to exercise to undergo her perceptual experiences and if her experiences have genuine content, then this content must be nonconceptual.

### *6.2.3 Motivating Premise (3): Content Overlap*

The controversial claim involved in premise (3) is that not only do the respective animals and infants have perceptual experiences with genuine content, this content is supposedly of the same kind as the content of the perceptual experiences of adult humans. Peacocke tries to provide support for this claim by appeal to intuition. He finds the denial of premise (3) just too hard to swallow, for it comes down to the claim that other species, for example cats and dogs, whose brain structures and perceptual organs are very similar to ours, do not have perceptual experiences just like ours. The denial of premise (3)

> entails that the following cannot be literally true: that the animal has a visual experience as of a surface at a certain orientation, and at a certain distance and direction from itself, in exactly the same sense in which an adult human can have a visual experience with that as part of its content. (Peacocke 2001a, 260)

Common sense indeed seems to tell us that animals can perceive their environment just as humans can. When I am looking at the same tree from the same perspective as a cat, most people would agree that the cat and I have the same kind of visual experience. Unfortunately, our intuitions might simply be wrong. We cannot ask animals whether they have phenomenally conscious perceptual experiences just like humans since they cannot speak. Maybe they just have some sort of "perceptual sensitivity". (McDowell 1994a, 64)

But there is a stronger point underlying Peacocke's argument. We normally use empirical methods to test whether an animal's perception is similar to that of an

[25] For my full account, see Chap. 8.

adult. The perceptual organs and brain structures underlying adult human perception and the perception of higher animals are very similar; this is normally taken to be evidence for how similar their perceptual states and their contents are. An example for the role of empirical research in this context is that scientists argue that dogs cannot perceive the differences between some colors that humans can experience based on behavioral tests with dogs and on the make-up of their eyes. (See Lindsay 2000, 128–132.)

By contrast, the conceptualist argues that animals do not have perceptual experiences with the same kind of content as humans, just because there is an *a priori* connection between concept possession and the possibility of perceptual states with genuine content. Thereby, he implies that actual similarities or differences between human and animal perception, which can be studied by empirical investigation, are completely irrelevant to the similarity of human and animal perceptual content. This is extremely implausible. The question of whether animals, infants, and adult humans have the same perceptual states with the same kind of content cannot be decided by *a priori* reasoning alone. If there are empirical studies showing that the brain structures and behavior involved in animal, infant, and human perception are very similar, then our theories of perceptual content have to accommodate these results. That is to say, if there is sufficient empirical evidence for shared perceptual content, then premise (3) is true.[26]

Bermúdez (2003c, 84/85) presents what might seem to be empirical evidence against premise (3). He cites empirical research pertaining to both animals and human infants showing that they have different expectations of object behavior than adult humans and therefore different underlying principles of what counts as an object. Contrary to what Bermúdez suggests, this does not show that animal and infant perception has a different kind of content than adult human perception. Even if the visual field is parsed differently in animal and infant perception as compared to adult human perception, this is compatible with infant, animal, and adult human perceptual content being of the same kind. For all the latter claim amounts to is that they are constituted by the same kind of nonconceptual elements, objects or properties, as opposed to Fregean senses.[27] And clearly, what the studies cited by Bermúdez show is that animals, infants, and adult humans all perceive objects even if they have slightly differing expectations concerning the behavior of objects.

Given the empirical evidence, then, we have strong reasons to believe that conclusion (4) is true. Animals and infants have perceptual states with nonconceptual content; adult human perception has, in part, the same kind of content; so adult human perception has at least partly nonconceptual content.

[26]McDowell would probably oppose this claim, seeing as he opposes the conflation of *content* as it is used in the cognitive sciences and a genuinely philosophical notion of content. I will discuss this issue in Chap. 8.

[27]It might also mean that these elements are represented as part of a spatial, as opposed to a propositional subject-predicate structure

### 6.2.4 The First Objection: Abandon the Generality Constraint

Now, let us turn to objections against the argument. First, the conceptualist might argue that premise (1) is false. He might claim that animals and infants who have genuine perceptual experiences also possess concepts. He can combine the following two claims: Animals and infants who have genuine perceptual experience have limited inferential and recognitional abilities. Limited inferential and recognitional abilities without full generality of thought are sufficient for concept possession. That is, the conceptualist can oppose my claim that the subject's meeting the Generality Constraint is a necessary condition for concept possession.

I concede that, without the Generality Constraint, it is *prima facie* unclear whether premise (1) is true (cf. my exposition of premise (1) above). As a defense of the first premise, we need an argument for this constraint. Several possible lines of argument come to mind:

(a) It is essential for something to be a property that it can be instantiated by different objects; a concept of a property has to reflect the property's independence of its instances. What makes such a concept a concept of a property is the fact that it can (in principle without limits) be combined with concepts of objects to form new thoughts (corresponding things can be said of the concept of an object).

(b) If a subject cannot distinguish an object or a property from others independently of the context, she cannot be said to be able to re-identify the object or property. For instance, to possess the concept of a kin-group member, I have to be able to re-identify the corresponding property in different situations, whether a chimpanzee instantiates it or a cat. So, to have the ability to re-identify a property in different situations, I have to be able to think about it independently of its instantiations. Vice versa, to be able to re-identify an object is to be able to recognize it in different situations in which it instantiates different properties. It follows that meeting the Generality Constraint is a necessary condition for having conceptual recognitional abilities, which the conceptualist accepts as a condition for concept possession. (See Priest 1991, 176.)

(c) Similarly, the ability to draw inferences presupposes that the thinker meet the Generality Constraint: How are concepts related to a thinker's ability to draw inferences? The same conceptual ability—to think of an object or property—can be exercised several times (and in having different beliefs) as the thinker draws a particular inference. Correspondingly, a single concept (a Fregean sense) can appear and reappear in different premises and in the conclusion that a reasoning process is based on.[28] An inference can lead the thinker to beliefs concerning states of affairs that are not currently instantiated in her presence. But this is to say that concepts (both in the sense of conceptual abilities and of Fregean senses) have to be reusable and recombinable independently of whether the corresponding properties

[28] See Sects. 3.4.2 and 7.3.

are instantiated, or of whether the corresponding objects have the properties in question. To meet the inferential constraint, a thinker has to meet the Generality Constraint as well.

(d) Full understanding of what an F is—and therefore possession of a concept *F*—requires that the subject understand what it would be for different objects to be F. If a subject can (apparently) apply *F* only in one context to one object, she obviously does not understand what it is to be F and therefore does not possess the concept. To possess a concept, therefore, is to meet the Generality Constraint.

The conceptualist can reply that this defense is problematic, first, because it equates thought with language, and second, because it requires full generality where partial generality is sufficient. The view of concepts behind part (a) of the defense assumes that thought is just like language. This line of thought was inspired by Evans's argument for the Generality Constraint (cf. Evans 1982, 102/103), which in turn is based on Strawson's statement that

> the idea of a predicate is correlative with that of a range of distinguishable individuals of which the predicate can be significantly, though not necessarily truly, affirmed. (Strawson 1959, 99)

Strawson makes a purely linguistic point. He speaks of characteristics of predicates, which are linguistic entities, and should not be confused with concepts. Clearly, a predicate has to be applicable to more than just one object (even if this does not yield true sentences). This is how language works. But in language we literally have reusable items that can be moved and recombined to form new sentences, and once they can be recombined at all, they can be recombined without limits. This is not necessarily the case in thought. My opponent might argue that all I can appeal to are conceptual abilities, and it is an open question whether, if we have them, we can exercise them in all possible contexts.

Things are not as simple as this reply suggests. After all, in Sect. 3.4.2, I have argued that the content of thought consists in Fregean propositions. Fregean propositions are complexes of Fregean senses, which are reusable items that can be recombined without limits. So, the same argument can be made as in the linguistic case that it is essential for concepts of properties that they can be applied to different objects. Nonetheless, it might be objected that Fregean senses are introduced based on the subject's conceptual abilities, and that a subject can have such abilities even if she cannot employ them in a broad range of contexts. This leads to the second conceptualist reply.

Second, the conceptualist might concede that concept possession requires some generality, but not the full generality that the Generality Constraint posits. He could then go on to claim that the relevant animals and infants have cognitive abilities with the required limited generality. A subject has to be able to re-identify an object or a property only in some, but not in all situations (defense (b)). She has to be able to draw certain, but not unlimited inferences (defense (c)). Finally, it is good enough for concept possession that the subject has an incomplete understanding of what a certain object or property is, i.e., she only has to understand what it would be for a certain object to have some, but not all properties, and vice versa (defense (d)).

Alva Noë, for example, suggests that a monkey possesses the concept of a kin-group member in virtue of treating its relatives in a differential way even if it does not possess any concepts that are inferentially related to kinship, such as a concept of the biological basis of kinship (contra the inferential constraint). Nor does the monkey have to be able to apply its concept of a kin-group member to humans or to other animals to possess the concept (contra the recognitional constraint). The fact that the monkey can identify its kin-group members and act appropriately towards them is sufficient for it to possess a limited concept of a kin-group member. (See Noë 2004, 187.) Similarly, Gennaro (2012, Chap. 7/8) suggests that animals and infants possess partial concepts of a broad range of things. For they meet his condition on concept possession (p. 144), which requires only discriminatory and recognitional abilities as well as the ability to have intentional states involving the concept.

Concept possession, on this view, is a matter of degree. There is a whole spectrum of concept possessors, ranging from very sophisticated adult humans to infants and other animals with only limited conceptual capacities. If this is true, the argument from animal and infant perception fails. For premise (1) is false: Those animals and infants who clearly have perceptual content similar to ours will have conceptual abilities, however limited. In order to defend the argument, the nonconceptualist has to give a reason why concept possession is an all or nothing affair—as it is if we accept the Generality Constraint.

The conceptualist's reply neutralizes most of the nonconceptualist defenses. However, I believe that there is no way to explain the ability of adult humans to draw inferences that does not involve the full generality of concepts that is required by the Generality Constraint. What constitutes the inference from *this man is tall* to *someone is tall*, for instance, is that the concept *tall* shows up in just the right combinations in the premise and the conclusion. The same is true of concepts at the level of conceptual abilities. My ability to think of the property of being tall can be exercised in undergoing different beliefs; it thereby makes the inferential transition to *someone is tall* possible. Nothing can count as a concept unless it is reusable in this way.

But once a concept is able to show up in more than one place or in more than one combination, there can be no limits at all to the premises, conclusions or combinations it can be used in. If a concept shows up in genuine inferences, it thereby has to be untied from its instances. So a subject's meeting the inferential constraint presupposes her meeting the Generality Constraint as well. There might be some practical hindrances to full generality, such as problems with a subject's brain chemistry that prevent conclusions from being drawn or propositions from being contemplated (see Peacocke 1992, 43). But once we have a genuine conceptual capacity—an ability to draw certain inferences—there cannot be any principled limits to the thoughts it can be used to form.

This reply leaves the problem of what we should say of animals and infants who are apparently capable of re-identifying objects or of drawing limited inferences. This is not an insurmountable problem, as there are theories of the cognitive abilities of animals that do not involve appeal to concepts. Bermúdez (2003c), for instance, explains animal reasoning from excluded alternative, *modus ponens*, and *modus*

*tollens* without presupposing that they possess basic logical concepts. In a similar vein, Susan Hurley suggests that subjects who possess no concepts may nonetheless be restricted by rational constraints. (See Hurley 2001.)

Moreover, the (Modest) Nonconceptualist claim that concept possession does not gradually progress from, say, the dog's barely grasping a certain concept to the adult human's fully mastering the same concept fits nicely with psychological dual-process theories.[29] These theories draw a distinction between two kinds of cognitive system, or two varieties of cognitive processing: between implicit and explicit cognitive systems or processes. Implicit processing is taken to be, for instance, fast, unconscious, automatic, and language-independent. Explicit processing, by contrast, is supposed to be slow, conscious, controlled, and linked to language, among other things.

Piccinini (2011) holds that humans share implicit cognition with other animals; but explicit cognition, which is tied to linguistic abilities, is uniquely human. He argues that two different kinds of mental representations (or concepts) are employed in the explicit and implicit cognitive systems, viz. explicit and implicit concepts. Explicit concepts have much greater representational powers than implicit concepts—they explain human abilities such as the ability for conditional and counterfactual thought or the ability to think of unobservable, non-existent, abstract, or randomly thought-up objects.[30]

Putting this distinction to work for the Modest Nonconceptualist concerns, then, I propose that adult humans possess personal-level conceptual abilities in virtue of having an explicit cognitive system employing special representations. These underlie the conceptual abilities that play a role in the definitions of conceptual and nonconceptual states, in the definitions of state conceptualism and nonconceptualism, as well as in the state-to-content principle (S2C) introduced above in Chap. 3. Implicit cognitive processes can be appealed to in order to explain the limited cognitive (recognitional and inferential) abilities of animals and infants. These abilities are then distinct from the general conceptual abilities of human adults. So, it is possible to explain the cognitive abilities of infants and animals while maintaining that their perceptual experiences are fully nonconceptual.

Two comments are in order. First, Piccinini speaks of concepts even in the case of implicit cognition. This does not indicate a problem for my claim that animals with only implicit cognitive systems are not concept possessors. I reserve the title of 'concept' for explicit concepts and the personal-level cognitive abilities they make possible. This is an acceptable strategy in the debate presented here, for all participants in the debate agree that the full-fledged general abilities under discussion are conceptual abilities. Seeing as the limited cognitive abilities of animals and infants are of a different kind, they are in that sense *not* conceptual. I would be happy to call their cognitive abilities as well as the underlying representational vehicles 'proto-concepts', or something the like.

[29] See, e.g., Evans (2008) and Evans and Stanovich (2013).

[30] Similarly, see Evans and Stanovich (2013, 236).

Second, it might be doubted that infants—as well as some of the higher animals—lack an explicit cognitive system. But at least to the extent that such a system is tied to linguistic processing, it should be clear that they do not, or at least that their explicit cognitive system is not mature enough to be put to use yet.

Setting things up in this way also helps the Modest Nonconceptualist deal with a further conceptualist comeback. Gennaro (2012, 205/251) denies that inferential abilities are needed for partial, implicit concept possession and argues that the relevant animals and infants possess such undemanding concepts. According to Gennaro, inferential reasoning shows up only at the level of conscious thought. While such inferential abilities might be required for the possession of conscious, explicit concepts, then, they are not needed for the possession of unconscious, implicit concepts and thoughts. Consequently, my argument above that the inferential requirement delivers the Generality Constraint, and thus guarantees that there are animals and infants who possess no concepts, but have content-bearing experiences, is blocked.

However, if concepts in the sense addressed in the nonconceptualism debate relate to explicit conceptual representations, but not to the representations processed in the implicit cognitive system (or in implicit processes), then premise (1) can be defended. For, as Gennaro allows, the relevant animals and infants do not possess conscious, explicit concepts tied to genuine inferential abilities. On the other hand, I am not opposed to a requirement on content-bearing conscious experiences of animals and infants that their experiences have to tie in with some kind of centralized, action-guiding *implicit* cognitive processing. I would simply insist that the representations involved in such an implicit cognitive system are to be distinguished from the concepts that the participants in the nonconceptualism debate are interested in, viz. either the conceptual abilities involved in conscious thought or the conceptual representations underlying such abilities, or the components of the contents of thought. My suggestions in this respect—which are weaker than Gennaro's higher-order thought theory—can be found in the previous section as well as in Chap. 8.

What makes my distinction between genuine explicit concepts and mere implicit representations (or proto-concepts) attractive, to my mind, is that it solves a problem raised in Sect. 5.4. There, I asked how Gennaro can bring together his view of the understanding as active in a Kantian sense with his claim that thoughts and concepts may be unconscious, and thus their exercise beyond the subject's control. The answer is that genuine explicit concepts *are* under the subject's control, for they are the representations underlying the subject's actively exercised conceptual abilities. If we distinguish from this the implicit representations involved in what Gennaro calls "unconscious thought", it is unproblematic that their exercise is not under the subject's active control.

### 6.2.5 *The Second Objection: Mere Perceptual Sensitivity*

So, the first conceptualist objection to premise (1) fails. At any rate, only philosophers with a very liberal view of concept possession would be willing to attack this premise. But the central proponents of conceptualism have rather high demands on what it takes to possess a concept. McDowell, for instance, thinks that without full rationality or the full-fledged ability to draw inferences and reassess her judgments, a subject is not a possessor of concepts. He tries to counter the argument by attacking the claim inherent in premises (1) and (3) that the animals and infants under consideration have experiences with genuine content. He attempts to account for the perceptual similarities between animals and infants, on the one hand, and adult humans, on the other, by appeal to a perceptual sensitivity that we all have in common. He claims,

> [w]e do not need to say that we have what mere animals have, non-conceptual content, and we have something else as well, since we can conceptualize that content and they cannot. Instead we can say that we have what mere animals have, perceptual sensitivity to features of our environment, but we have it in a special form. Our perceptual sensitivity to our environment is taken up into the ambit of the faculty of spontaneity, which is what distinguishes us from them. (McDowell 1994a, 64)

According to the nonconceptualist, there is only one possible explanation for the fact that adult humans, human infants, and non-human animals all undergo the same kind of perceptual states: All of these states have the same kind of content. McDowell's alternative explanation is that adult humans have perceptual sensitivity in common with human infants and with non-human animals. But the perceptual sensitivity of adult humans is transformed by their conceptual abilities—instead of being a mechanism that enables subjects to react to their environments appropriately (but nothing more), their perceptual sensitivity produces mental states with a conceptual content. He claims that human infants, as they grow older, turn from "mere animals" into concept possessors (McDowell 1994a, 125).

As adult humans, we are able critically to reflect on our perceptual states and revise our beliefs in the light of this if necessary. Thanks to our conceptual abilities and our rationality we can build up an objective view of the world.[31] This is to say that our perceptual states have content; we can truly appreciate what is happening in the world. Without conceptual abilities, animals and human infants can do nothing more than react to their environments; they are so tied up in them that they cannot be said to have more than simple perceptual sensitivity. (See McDowell 1994a, 114–123.)

According to McDowell, then, animal and human infant perception has no content, and *a fortiori* it does not have the same kind of content as adult human perception. My conclusion (4)—the content of adult human perception is partially nonconceptual—does not follow.

I have two objections to McDowell's notion of perceptual sensitivity. First, if animals and infants do not have experiences as we do, what else does their

[31] I will discuss this topic at length in Chap. 8.

perceptual sensitivity amount to, especially seeing that they are not supposed to be mere Cartesian automata? Imagine a scale which orders live beings with respect to how sophisticated their sensitivity to their environments is. We can plausibly place plants at one end of the scale and adult humans at the other. The—albeit limited—sensitivity of plants towards their environment is evidenced by the fact that they grow towards the light. At the other end of the scale, adult humans have highly advanced perceptual and even conceptual awareness of the world around them. Animals and infants should—intuitively—be placed somewhere in the middle between these extremes. My worry is that McDowell cannot do this. He does not provide us with a detailed account of what perceptual sensitivity without genuine content consists in. So it is hard to conceive of what is supposed to distinguish animals from plants, or what is supposed to make it true that animals, but not plants, have perceptual sensitivity to their environment in common with adult humans.

Second, there is a tension between two of McDowell's claims. On the one hand, adult humans share perceptual sensitivity with animals and infants. On the other hand, there is a stark contrast between both sides. While adult humans have perceptual experiences with genuine content, all that animals and infants have is the ability to react appropriately to current needs. It seems to be nothing more than a terminological maneuver to call both of these things 'perceptual sensitivity'. The problem is aggravated by another claim of McDowell's—he emphasizes that perception "does not even make a notionally separable contribution to the co-operation" between perception and thought. (McDowell 1994a, 9) That is to say that, in the case of adult humans, we cannot even conceptually distinguish between perception and thought and their contents. Perceiving is simply a different way of actualizing one's conceptual abilities. If this is true, perceiving (in human adults) cannot also be a kind of perceptual sensitivity just like the one that animals and infants have, for the perceptual sensitivity of animals and infants does not involve content, much less conceptual content.

McDowell (2007, 343) tries to respond to this problem in the following way: He thinks that "[t]he claim that [perceptual] [...] capacities and skills are shared comes to no more than this: there are descriptions of things we can do that apply also to things other animals can do." For instance, we can describe both a cat and a human as perceiving their environment and as reacting appropriately when they walk through a hole in a wall that blocks their path. But the fact that both these situations fit the same description does not entail that the human adult's situation can be exhaustively so described.

> The human being's response is, if you like, indistinguishable from the cat's response *qua* response to an affordance describable in those terms. But it does not follow that the human being's response cannot be unlike the cat's response in being the human being's rationality at work. (McDowell 2007, 343)[32]

[32] 'Response to an affordance' here means 'reaction to a possibility for action', i.e., in this case, the cat's and the human's walking through the hole in the wall, which makes it possible for them to bypass an obstacle in their path.

At one level of description, adult human and cat exhibit the same kind of perceptual sensitivity in this situation. Whereas this kind of description says all there is to say about mere animals, more can be said about adult humans at another level of description. Human perception and the resulting actions can be described as rational and as interaction with a world that humans can appreciate to be mind-independent; this is why perceptual experience of human adults has genuine, conceptual content. The perceptual sensitivity of humans is completely transformed when they become concept possessors. McDowell seems to think that it is unproblematic that adult humans fit both kinds of descriptions, but that only the first of them is true of animals and infants.

I find McDowell's talk of 'descriptions' in this context obscure. What is at issue is whether adult humans, animals, and infants all have perceptual experiences with nonconceptual content or not; this question cannot be answered satisfactorily by considerations of how we can or cannot describe their interactions with their environments. If McDowell's ontological message is that the (mere) perceptual sensitivity of humans is transformed by their rationality into a completely different capacity involving genuinely content-bearing perceptual experiences, then it still seems to be no more than a terminological matter to say that it is the same thing as the perceptual sensitivity of animals and infants, at one level of description. Moreover, the first objection I mentioned above is strengthened by this strategy: If it is all just a matter of description, why can we not describe plants in the same terms of perceptual sensitivity? So, as it stands, I do not see how McDowell's response can dispel my objections against his idea of perceptual sensitivity.[33]

So, McDowell fails to give a convincing conceptualist account of the similarities between adult human, animal, and infant perception. If the conceptualist wants to accommodate the intuition that adult humans, human infants, and animals have something in common with respect to perception, he has to concede that they must share the same kind of perceptual content.

### *6.2.6 Results*

Let me summarize my discussion of the argument from animal and infant perception. The nonconceptualist appeals to animals and infants to show that adult humans have perceptual states with minimal nonconceptual content. Adding the plausible claim that for each adult human perceptual experience, there might be a corresponding animal or infant experience with partially the same content, the argument shows that *all* perceptual experiences of adult humans have nonconceptual content, and thus establishes the Modest Nonconceptualist's (General NC-ism$_{min}$)

[33]Related to the current point, one might worry that McDowell's view entails that animals cannot feel pain since they cannot have experiences with genuine content. He tries to avoid this consequence by ascribing a kind of "proto-subjectivity" to animals, but once again I find his arguments obscure. See McDowell (1994a, 119–121)

thesis. Her argument relies on a combination of the following claims: There are subjects of whom it is true that they have no conceptual abilities whatsoever and that they have perceptual experiences with genuine content. Moreover, their perceptual contents are partly identical with the contents of adult human perception. The weakest point of the argument consists in the tension between these claims. To say that animals and infants possess no concepts is to say that they are very dissimilar from adult humans; it is to grant them only very limited mental capacities. To say that animals and infants have perceptual contents, and even stronger, contents that are just like those of adult humans, is to say that they are very similar to adult humans; it is to grant them very sophisticated mental capacities.

Correspondingly, the conceptualist can attack the argument by resolving the tension in one of two directions. McDowell's emphasis on the differences between adult human perception and infant and animal perception—his denial of the claim that infants and animals have perceptual experiences with genuine content—is not very promising exactly because, at the same time, he tries to maintain a semblance of commonality between animal, infant, and adult human perception. To make the conceptualist view more consistent, he could give up on his notion of shared perceptual sensitivity, but would then be left with the implausible Cartesian view that animals and infants are mere automata.

The other conceptualist option is to abandon the demanding view of concept possession as tied to full-fledged rationality. He can argue that animals and infants resemble adult humans not just with respect to perception, but also with respect to concept possession. As I have shown, the only condition on concept possession of which it is *initially* plausible that animals and infants cannot meet it is the Generality Constraint. Concept possession stands and falls with this constraint. The most compelling argument for the Generality Constraint as a necessary condition on concept possession is that our human ability to draw inferences, which is a necessary condition for concept possession, entails full generality of thought. What enables adult humans to draw inferences is their ability to employ one concept in different premises and conclusions. But once a concept can be separated from the concept it was originally combined with to play this role, there can be no limits to the combinations it can be used in, so it can be exercised in a fully general way. This claim is not called into doubt by an appeal to implicit proto-concepts that can be possessed by creatures without inferential abilities, for these are not the genuine explicit concepts that play a role in the argument.

So, overall the argument from animal and infant perception is successful; it supports Modest Nonconceptualism.

## 6.3 The Argument from Concept Acquisition

The two previous arguments involved the claim that it is possible to have content-bearing perceptual experiences even if one does not possess the matching concepts (or any concepts at all, for that matter). The argument to be discussed in this

section makes a reverse point—it shows that we can make sense of the concepts we exercise in thought only if we assume a level of nonconceptual content that these concepts are based on. This consideration can be turned into an argument from *concept acquisition*: A subject would not be able to acquire empirical concepts unless she had states with nonconceptual content first. In this section, then, we will be concerned with human subjects and with their transition from pre-conceptual perceivers to concept possessors. In what follows, I will present the argument from concept acquisition, then discuss possible conceptualist responses, and finally defend the argument.

### *6.3.1 Introduction*

The basic worry driving this argument is how it is possible for a human individual to have conceptual abilities. There is a phylogenetic issue (how could a species evolve whose members have conceptual capacities?) and an ontogenetic issue (how could an individual acquire conceptual abilities in her lifetime?). With respect to the first question, the potential advantage for the nonconceptualist is the following. Her picture is that of a gradual development from individuals who interact with their environments without having content-bearing perceptual states to their descendants who have perceptual experiences with nonconceptual content to *their* descendants who have conceptual capacities and mental states with conceptual content in addition to this.

According to the conceptualist, the development of conceptual capacities throughout phylogenesis is abrupt. Members of a certain species start out with mere perceptual sensitivity (but have no perception of their environments with genuine content); their descendants abruptly acquire the capacity for full-fledged conceptual capacities. Considering that evolutionary explanations are most often gradual explanations, the nonconceptualist account of the development of our conceptual abilities has a *prima facie* advantage compared to the conceptualist account. The conceptualist's evolutionary story has a big gap to bridge between our ancestors' complete lack of content in perception on the one hand and our possession of full-fledged conceptual capacities on the other. Unlike the nonconceptualist, he cannot bridge this gap by appeal to an intermediate step of content-bearing perceptual states, which then enabled conceptual capacities to develop.[34]

[34]McDowell considers the question of the evolutionary explanation for the existence of humans as concept-possessors: "How has it come about that there are animals that possess the spontaneity of understanding?" (McDowell 1994a, 123) He takes this question to be about how there could be animals with conceptual abilities as well as about the worry how human culture could have developed. But he seems to think that this is not a very pressing question. He holds that human infants are originally just normal animals, who are only special because of their potential for concept acquisition; when they do acquire their first concepts, this is a part of their nature, or to be more precise, of what McDowell calls their "second nature." (McDowell 1994a, 84)

I will not say more about the nonconceptualist advantages in providing an evolutionary account of our conceptual capacities, but instead turn to the ontogenetic question raised in the previous paragraph.[35] Again, the nonconceptualist account of how an individual human acquires her first concepts is more gradual than the conceptualist one. According to the former, a human newborn has perceptual experiences with nonconceptual content; based on this perceptual awareness of her surroundings, the infant can later acquire conceptual abilities. The conceptualist, by contrast, claims that the newborn infant has nothing but a kind of perceptual sensitivity that does not involve content. From this starting point, she directly acquires conceptual capacities; as soon as she has these capacities, she is able to think and genuinely perceive the world around her. Growing up, a human individual undergoes a dramatic and abrupt change as soon as she acquires her first concepts, both with respect to perceptual experience and with respect to higher cognitive abilities.

Let me give an example of how the nonconceptualist account of concept acquisition can be applied. There is empirical evidence that infants as young as 3 months exhibit certain expectations towards the solidity, boundaries and (later) the spatio-temporal continuity of medium-sized physical objects.[36] According to the nonconceptualist, these children perceive objects, or, as Bermúdez says more cautiously, "they parse the visual array into bounded segments, even though they have no conceptual grasp of what those bounded segments are." (Bermúdez 1998, 72) Bermúdez suggests that we should speak of a subject perceiving objects (and thus of the experience having object-involving nonconceptual content) if she is sensitive to enough of those properties that are essential to being an object, such as being solid, existing continually through time, having a shape and mass, etc. (Bermúdez 1998, 72/73).

On the basis of this raw material, the child is in a position to acquire the concept of an object. To quote Bermúdez again,

> a (theoretical) understanding of the reasons for thinking that something exemplifies the concept of an object, together with an understanding of what inferences it is legitimate to draw from that fact, emerges from certain basic representational abilities that permit the subject to pick out the extension of the concept and that support certain expectations about how the things that fall under that extension will behave. (Bermúdez 1998, 74)

The idea is that first a child has to be able to track objects reliably in perception. Based on this ability, she can interact with objects and manipulate them. Her interactions with objects, in turn, will be a crucial step on her way to genuinely understanding what an object is, to reasoning about objects, and to being able to think about objects in the full sense of the word.

This example illustrates how the nonconceptualist can provide a detailed account of the 'mechanics' of concept acquisition: First, a subject acquires a perceptual

[35] Whether evolution counts in the nonconceptualist's favor depends on whether evolution necessarily happens gradually. There are evolutionary biologists who claim that evolution happens in leaps. If this is true, the conceptualist story may be equally compatible with an evolutionary account of our conceptual abilities as the nonconceptualist story. (Cf. Lennox 2015.)

[36] I have referred to these studies above in Sect. 6.2.

sensitivity (here in Bermúdez's, not in McDowell's sense) to a certain feature in her environment and thereby gains awareness of this feature—it enters into the nonconceptual content of her perceptual experiences. The subject is now nonconceptually aware of the presence of this feature. With the help of this ability, she can manipulate the respective feature in her environment, which in turn helps her to acquire the *conceptual* ability to think about this feature. Such considerations are used to argue against conceptualism by Roskies (2008), Roskies (2010), and Peacocke (2001a). Replies can be found in McDowell (1994a), Speaks (2005), and Gennaro (2012).

It seems that the conceptualist will have a harder time providing a detailed account of how an infant could acquire conceptual abilities, for instance the concept of an object. I do not think that this is a conclusive argument against the conceptualist, however. Both parties in the debate have to allow that a human infant undergoes radical changes in her first years; she does, after all, turn into someone who can speak and think about the world. Everyone will agree that this change is based on rapid maturation of the human brain in this period of child development, and that this is in turn owed to the child's interaction with her environment. The only difference is that the conceptualist will describe the child's interactions as involving mere perceptual sensitivity; the nonconceptualist will describe them as involving perceptual experiences with genuine content.[37]

### *6.3.2 Presentation of the Argument*

The real nonconceptualist advantage does not lie in the fact that her account is more gradual; it is that she can put her claim that our perceptual states have nonconceptual content to direct use in her explanation of concept acquisition. In perception, a subject is *aware* of certain features in her surroundings.[38] On the basis of this awareness, she can begin to understand what it is that she perceives and thereby start to form concepts. The assumption that the subject is already aware of her environment before she possesses any concepts helps to explain how she can acquire concepts in the first place. It helps explain concept acquisition as a *conscious, awareness-involving* process that requires a certain degree of cognitive sophistication on the part of the subject. Learning a concept is not something that just happens to a subject, on this view. It is a genuine cognitive achievement.[39]

[37]For a similar response, cf. Brewer (1999, 177–179).

[38]A note on my use of 'aware': I think that the expression 'awareness of one's environment' is per se neutral between nonconceptualism and conceptualism—the way 'awareness of' is normally used leaves it open whether there is only awareness when there are concepts. It is a substantial claim in need of argument that there is only conceptual awareness.

[39]This argument is put forth in detail by Roskies (2008) and criticized by Gennaro (2012).

The conceptualist cannot do justice to the plausible view that learning a new concept cannot be something that happens mindlessly. The perceptual sensitivity of a pre-conceptual subject consists of "proto-perceptions" and "proto-subjectivity", according to McDowell. (See, e.g., McDowell 1994a, 117.) As I understand him, the proto-perceptual and proto-experiential states of the subject do not involve anything like awareness of the world around her; they are only the channels through which the "input to a human animal's natural motivational tendencies" comes in. (McDowell 2007, 344) I take this to mean that, whatever it is that pre-conceptual human infants are perceptually sensitive to, it is not present to their minds, they are not conscious of it. It is therefore safe to say that there is no awareness prior to or other than conceptual awareness of the world—the conceptualist's endorsement of the claim that there is only conceptual content translates into the claim that there is only conceptual awareness. So whatever mechanisms are involved in a subject's learning her first concepts, they cannot involve awareness of what is going on around her. Concept acquisition, then, is not a cognitive achievement of the subject.

But learning a new concept *is* a cognitive accomplishment, which involves a rudimentary understanding, on the subject's part, of what is going on around her. After all, to possess a concept is to understand what the concept is of. The conceptualist view of concept acquisition conflicts with this claim—in particular, when an infant acquires her first conceptual abilities, she has no awareness of the world around her, since the only kind of awareness there is is conceptual awareness. Nonconceptualism, on the other hand, can easily accommodate this view of concept acquisition as a demanding mental process. When a subject learns her first concepts, she does this through the nonconceptual awareness she already has of the world around her. So conceptualism is false, and nonconceptualism is true.

Here is the argument:

1. If conceptualism is true, then all awareness is conceptual awareness.
2. If all awareness is conceptual awareness, a subject cannot rely on awareness in acquiring her first concepts.
3. If a subject cannot rely on awareness in acquiring her first concepts, then concept acquisition is not in all cases a cognitively demanding process that presupposes the subject's awareness of those things that she acquires a concept of.
4. If conceptualism is true, then concept acquisition is not in all cases a cognitively demanding process that presupposes the subject's awareness of those things that she acquires a concept of. (From (1)–(3).)
5. But concept acquisition is in all cases a cognitively demanding process that presupposes the subject's awareness of those things she acquires a concept of.
6. Therefore, conceptualism is false. (From (4) and (5).)

I have started to defend the first premise above—according to the conceptualist, there is only conceptual awareness. It might seem that the conceptualist can hold that subjects who have no conceptual capacities can be aware of their environments nonetheless; but I am not sure how one could defend this claim while denying that there is perceptual *content* for a subject who has no conceptual capacities. After all, saying that a subject is aware *of* something suggests that she is in an *intentional*

mental state, a state that presents the subject's environment to her and therefore has content. So I suggest that we accept premise (1).[40]

Premise (2) should be obvious: According to the conceptualist, before a subject acquires her first concepts, she has not yet reached a stage at which she can be said to be aware of the world around her. So in acquiring these first concepts, she cannot rely on any prior (necessarily conceptual) awareness. But this is just to say that the acquisition of her first concepts is not a demanding, genuinely mental process, the result of which could count as a cognitive achievement. It is not a mental process that involves the subject's awareness of those things that she brings under a concept. (Premise (3)) We can (4) conclude that, if conceptualism is true, then concept acquisition is not, in all cases, a demanding cognitive process that presupposes the subject's awareness of her environment.

Premise (5) I have tried to make plausible above. We should view concept acquisition as concept learning, as an act of understanding, and therefore as a cognitively demanding process, which essentially involves the subject's mental access to what is being learned. Concept learning is a mindful undertaking, not a process that happens automatically or, as Roskies (2008, 643) puts it, is "a brute causal process".[41] It follows that conceptualism is false.

The argument from concept acquisition, if successful, will only support (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$). It only aims to show that *before* concept acquisition, perceptual experiences are nonconceptual. It is silent on the issue of whether all perceptual experiences, in particular those of concept possessors, are nonconceptual.

### *6.3.3 The First Conceptualist Response: Innate Concepts*

As there seems to be no way for the conceptualist to attack the first four premises, the only avenue open to him is to deny premise (5), or at least the claim implicit in (5) that *every single* concept is acquired in a cognitively demanding way. On the one hand, the conceptualist might argue that our first concepts are *innate*. They are not acquired, thus not learned in a cognitively demanding way, but *activated* as the human brain reaches a certain degree of sophistication. On the other hand, he could argue that the acquisition of our first concepts is not a very demanding affair, but that this should not come as a surprise. After all, human infants are just at the beginning of their cognitive development, and they simply are not able to perform very sophisticated cognitive tasks. It is unproblematic to assume that the acquisition of our first concepts is quite *undemanding*.

[40]This might be a weak spot of the argument. Note that McDowell himself claims that "[P]erceptual sensitivity to the environment need not amount to awareness of the outer world", which I take to mean that perceptual sensitivity without conceptual capacities does not entail the subject's awareness of her environment. (McDowell 1994a, 119)

[41]The terminology is from Fodor (1981, 273).

First, let me deal with the suggestion that our first concepts are innate. I do not think that a nativism of the strength required to rebut the argument is a very attractive position to take at all. A moderate nativist position seems quite plausible. The *core* concept nativist claims that only a certain number of our most central concepts are innate—for instance, our object concept, our concepts of small numbers, or some of our psychological concepts are often taken to be innate.[42] All other concepts we possess draw on our innate concepts or are acquired in experience. This view is not going to solve the problem of concept acquisition for the conceptualist. For while it says that some of our concepts are activated, not acquired, it does rely on perceptual input for the acquisition of many of our concepts. These plausibly include many of our first concepts, for instance our color concepts or shape concepts, or concepts of our parents or of particular actions such as, say, giving or drinking. For acquired concepts such as these, we still have good reason to hold that they have to be acquired in a cognitively demanding way and that therefore conceptualism is untenable.

Roskies (2008, 647) distinguishes *compositional* concept nativism as a further nativist option for the conceptualist. On this view, there is a broad base of innate concepts, from which *all* our other concepts are constructed. The idea is that we have a foundation of simple, or atomic, concepts which are innate and just need to be activated. By combining these concepts, we can construct all of our complex concepts. The compositional theorist needs just enough concepts in the concept base to to construct all of a thinker's concepts.

Even leaving to one side the issue of whether many of our concepts are plausibly compositions of other concepts,[43] this view cannot help the conceptualist. On the one hand, if too few concepts are part of the foundation, then not all of our complex concepts will be constructible from them. So some concepts will have to be acquired, and the original problem resurfaces. On the other hand, if we want to ensure that all concepts are constructible from the concept base, we will have to assume that there are potentially unlimited numbers of innate basic concepts. For there are very many different situations in which a child may grow up, and even more concepts that may be activated as her first concepts, from which she will then go on to construct her other concepts. And while I have set the argument up as an argument about the first concepts a subject acquires, there are plausibly many more concepts that are not fully constructible from other concepts, such as concepts of a certain shade of color. Further, there is a very broad range of complex concepts that a subject may come to possess in her lifetime, and many many more she could have possessed had she grown up in different circumstances. The concept

[42] A view along these lines is defended by Gennaro (2012, 189–199). I find his claims about undemanding implicit concept acquisition more challenging and will therefore focus on them below.

A helpful exposition of the core cognition view/core concept nativism and empirical evidence for it can be found in Samet and Zaitchik (2014).

[43] Fodor (1981) emphasizes this problem, which leads him to maintain that all of our lexical concepts are not compositional and thus innate—I will not address this radical view here.

base has to be broad enough to cover all of these potential concepts the subject might have constructed. The problem is aggravated by the fact that the conceptualist will need a (perceptual-demonstrative) concept for every aspect of every humanly possible perceptual experience; it seems highly unlikely that many of these can be put together from concepts previously possessed by a subject. Compositional concept nativism, then, can escape the argument from concept acquisition only by putting too many concepts in the concept base to be believable. It is thus not an option for the conceptualist.

So I suggest that we look to the other conceptualist objection, the claim that the acquisition of our first concepts is not a very demanding cognitive process.[44]

### 6.3.4 *The Second Conceptualist Response: Undemanding Concept Acquisition*

The most plausible account of concept acquisition as an undemanding cognitive process—or as a form of conditioning, which does not presuppose the subject's awareness of her environment prior to learning her first concepts—can be read into McDowell's view that children start learning concepts by learning their native language. He calls this "initiation into conceptual capacities." (McDowell 1994a, 84) He claims that this initiation is a normal part of coming into maturity. Our eyes are opened to the requirements of reason in our upbringing, and thereby we become able to decide what to think and do (instead of being directly determined by our environments). The mechanism by which humans turn from mere animals into concept-possessors, according to McDowell, is the learning of a language.

> In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene. (McDowell 1994a, 125)

Language embodies mindedness, and by learning a language, a human infant acquires a mind and concepts at the same time.

How can this be turned into a version of the second response to premise (5)? Let's assume that human infants acquire their first conceptual abilities via learning a language. It might be argued that they learn their first words not because they have a prior understanding of the world that is reflected in their linguistic abilities, but that at first, language learning is just a form of conditioning. So without having genuinely conscious experience of the world (that is to say, being aware of what is going on around her), a human infant learns her first words. By beginning to learn—in a completely undemanding sense of 'to learn'—a language, the child is confronted with a symbolic system that incorporates conceptual relations. At some

[44] For a more detailed criticism of concept nativism in combination with conceptualism, cf. Roskies (2008, 642–648).

point, she will make the (tremendous) transition from merely reacting appropriately to certain words to beginning to appreciate the conceptual, inferential, and logical relationships that they bear to each other. At this point, she will have acquired her first concepts. The 'mindedness' and cognitively demanding processes first enter the scene the moment she starts to understand the words she has learned, i.e. the moment she acquires her first concepts.

As infants, when we begin to learn our native language, we are conditioned to react appropriately to linguistic cues without understanding what we are doing—without understanding the meaning of the sounds that we react to, or even being aware of these sounds. For example, when an infant first learns to bring the ball back to her father upon the command, 'Give me the ball,' she does not understand the meaning of these sounds. Instead, she is conditioned to display this behavior in reaction to 'hearing' them. According to the conceptualist, the child is not even aware of the sounds or of the ball in front of her. For as long as she does not possess the corresponding concepts, she cannot have any awareness of these things. The infant will be conditioned to react appropriately to quite a few commands, questions, and statements in this way before starting to understand any of them. But at some point, she will start to understand the words she has been merely reacting to before; she will thereby also understand the logical relations between these words (as they are used in different sentences); that is to say, she will acquire the standard conceptual abilities—the ability to draw certain inferences, to re-identify things and to think certain thoughts.

In acquiring these abilities, she will then (finally) become aware of her surroundings. She will be aware of those things that she has, in the past, only been able to interact with appropriately. This is true of those things, at least, that she has learned the words for. They will become the first elements of the content of her perceptual experiences.

I do find this alternative to concept learning as a demanding cognitive process more convincing than the nativist story. It might be seen as an middle course between the (false) dichotomy of either conscious concept learning or brute causal process. This is suggested by Gennaro (2012, 206), who insists that some of our first concepts may be acquired *implicitly*. According to him, this process is not brutely causal, since it is a psychological process and a kind of learning, despite the fact that it is unconscious.[45] Nonetheless, this conceptualist option faces a fatal problem, with respect to the a child's acquisition of her first *perceptual-demonstrative* concepts, which I will present next.

[45]Should I say that only implicit proto-concepts (see Sect. 6.2) can be acquired unconsciously/implicitly, and that genuine explicit concepts can be acquired only consciously? I am not sure that this is the correct view. For example, when children learn their first genuine concepts, they plausibly are not aware of the fact that they are acquiring concepts. The most natural account seems to include their perceptual awareness of their surroundings, but I do not think that the account I have just presented, on which they acquire their first explicit concepts without awareness, is incoherent.

### 6.3.5 Acquiring Perceptual-Demonstrative Concepts

Let me now explain why no conditioning account of perceptual-demonstrative concept acquisition is possible. Recall that this particular kind of demonstrative concept, introduced above in Sect. 4.1.3, does not require the subject's ability to re-identify the object or property that falls under it and is thus fit to match the fine-grained content of perceptual experience. Accordingly, my argument here is especially devastating: The conceptualist needs perceptual-demonstrative concepts to deflect the argument from fineness of grain. To be clear, then, I concede that premise (5) might not be defensible against the conditioning response for *every* type of concept. I argue here that it can be defended for perceptual-demonstrative concepts, however. The original argument will then have to be rephrased by replacing 'concept' with 'perceptual-demonstrative concept' in the premises.

It is conceivable that, at first, a child learns to react appropriately to certain words without understanding what they mean, or without understanding that they are words with a meaning at all. I think it is even possible to imagine this process if we also assume that the child is not aware of her surroundings. There will have to be an unconscious process that is initiated through conditioning, which will result in the child's behaving a certain way. This seems acceptable for general, context-independent terms such as 'mom', 'dad', 'no', 'yes', 'eat', 'ball', 'bed', etc. The same is not true of perceptual-demonstrative concepts and the corresponding demonstrative expressions, however.

First off, the child has to be conditioned to react appropriately to something that will vary with context (The dad might say, 'Give me that,' while pointing at a ball or while pointing at a stuffed animal, for example.) While this seems pretty hard to do if you are not aware of what you are doing, it is probably not impossible—you will be conditioned to react not just to a sound (that you are not aware of), but to a combination of sound and gesture (that you are not aware of). On this account, when you begin to learn your native language and make the switch to understanding your first words, you understand the role that 'that' plays in language. You learn that you can apply this expression to different things, depending on context. We might say that you learn the general pattern in which demonstrative concepts function. But what about acquiring *particular* perceptual-demonstrative concepts?[46]

Here is the problem: There are two things that are characteristic of the perceptual-demonstrative 'that'. First, it can be applied to new things in new situations never perceived before by the subject. For instance, when a child sees a rocket for the first time, she is able to wonder, 'What is *that*?' Thereby, she will exercise her perceptual-demonstrative concept *that* of the rocket that she has acquired in that

[46] Alternatively, the conceptualist might hold that we have an innate grasp of this pattern, an innate demonstrative capacity that enables us "to track objects in space and time." Gennaro (2012, 197) It is plausible that subjects have an innate *general* ability to demonstrate things. But it is not plausible that they possess a particular innate demonstrative concept for every single object or feature that they are able to demonstrate.

moment. Second, a perceptual-demonstrative concept can be actively applied to something only if the subject is perceptually aware of it. Exercising such a concept is an activity that involves higher cognitive processes; it makes no sense to say that the subject exercises her perceptual-demonstrative concept 'blindly', as if she were pointing at the rocket without being aware of it, and nonetheless able to wonder what *that* is.[47]

Now what can the conceptualist say about these two requirements on perceptual-demonstrative concepts? The subject cannot apply such concepts to something that she is not aware of, and she is aware only of things she already possesses concepts for, according to the conceptualist. It is unproblematic, then, that she is able to perceptually-demonstrate things she possesses prior general or other (non-perceptual) demonstrative concepts for. But, and this is the problem for the conceptualist, it is impossible for her to use her expression 'that' in new situations to perceptually-demonstrate new things or properties, for she is not aware of them. So she does not meet one of the requirements for (full) possession of perceptual-demonstrative concepts. This means that the content of her perceptual experiences will never be able to reach the fine-grained determinacy of detail that is characteristic of human perceptual content. The rephrased premise (5), then, can be defended: The acquisition of perceptual- demonstrative concepts is always a process that presupposes the subject's awareness of the things or properties that she acquires perceptual-demonstrative concepts of.

My argument is related to the central argument in Roskies (2010). She points out that the content of a particular demonstrative concept is fixed via a demonstration, which is to say, via the subject's focusing her attention on what the demonstrative is supposed to refer to. When the subject focuses her attention, this is an intentional act, something she does at will, not just something that happens to her. But the subject would not be able to execute an intentional action unless she was aware of what this intentional action is directed at. The subject can only willingly focus her attention on something that she is aware of. So, forming a demonstrative concept of something (which includes, in some situations, applying one's demonstrative ability to something new) requires the subject first to be aware of what she forms a concept of.

In response to Roskies's argument, Gennaro (2012, Chap. 7) argues that concepts can be, and indeed often are, acquired implicitly and without the subject's prior awareness of her surroundings. His claim vis-à-vis the argument concerning *demonstrative* concepts in Roskies (2010) is, similarly, that they do not require the focus of *conscious* attention in order to be formed, but may be formed via unconscious "*preattentive* perceptual mechanisms." (p. 218) Correspondingly, I expect that he

[47]I emphasize here that it is *perceptual*-demonstrative concepts that are relevant because it is obviously possible to think about things demonstratively that one is not perceptually confronted with. Perceptual-demonstrative concepts, by contrast, are concepts that I can only exercise when I base them directly on my perceptual awareness of my environment. Note that Roskies (2010) focuses on the conceptualist's problems with demonstrative, but not with *perceptual*-demonstrative concepts.

would also reject premise (5) of my argument, according to which perceptual-demonstrative concept acquisition is always cognitively demanding—although he insists that concept acquisition, on his picture, is a "cognitive achievement." (p. 212) He claims (p. 181) that a perceiver may unconsciously acquire new concepts of heretofore unknown objects in a split second after encountering them. Gennaro supports this claim by citing empirical evidence that subjects often unconsciously acquire concepts through "implicit learning." (Gennaro 2012, 206)

How do I reply to Gennaro's point? First off, while I have already granted the possibility of concepts that subjects can acquire blindly, I do not think that the same can be claimed for perceptual-demonstrative concepts. It just seems incoherent to say that the child has an, as it were, blind spot with respect to a certain object or property, but is able to acquire and instantaneously exercise a directly perception-based, demonstrative concept in a conscious thought (such as, *what is that?*) with respect to this object or property she is unaware of.

I think the best that Gennaro could say to make his claim palatable is to argue (as indeed he does) that even when a child is faced with an as yet unknown object, she will typically possess other, more general concepts of it, which she may have acquired by implicit learning (or conditioning, as elaborated above). For the rocket, the child might for instance possess the concepts *silver, longish, pointy object*.[48] Further, he might argue that at the moment that the child acquires the perceptual-demonstrative concept of the rocket, she has the concept available for application in the perceptual experience itself. Either way, she will exercise concepts for the rocket in undergoing her experience. She will thus be aware of the rocket after all and will seeingly be able to wonder, 'What is that?'

My reply to these suggestions is that they make it hard to understand how the child could wonder, 'What is that?', when facing the rocket. Imagine a small child who only possesses the general concepts *round* and *object* that apply to the rocket she is confronted with. (Recall that I have argued that she has to meet the Generality Constraint to possess a genuine concept, so that it cannot be argued that she possesses a lot of concepts early on, albeit partially.[49]) Now her perceptual experience will present her with a round object. Assuming further that she possesses the concept *ball*, for instance, and is familiar with other round objects such as balls, she will not be able to realize that she is confronted with something new. For she sees a round object, which will look familiar to her—we can imagine that she has a visual experience as of a ball. So she would not have any cause to wonder *what that is* in response to her (very limited) experience of the rocket. Moreover, the conceptualist has to explain her acquisition of the particular concept *that* which picks out the rocket, as opposed to the further concept *that* representing a ball or more generally

[48] He allows that infants after birth may have rather 'empty' conscious perceptual experiences: They will experience only those features that they possess innate or can immediately acquire (partial) concepts of. Their experiences will become more and more differentiated as they acquire more and more concepts that can enter their perceptual contents.

[49] See Sect. 6.2.

a round object. On the other hand, it is hard to deny that even very young children sometimes ask what unknown objects are. So, even if the child's possession of some general concepts ensures that she is aware of her surroundings in principle, this is not sufficient to explain how she can acquire a perceptual-demonstrative concept of a novel object such as the rocket.

Note that the conceptualist can*not* respond that he presupposes a less demanding understanding of concepts as unconscious implicit concepts, for these are the concepts needed for unconscious metathoughts. Recall that on Gennaro's higher-order thought theory, unconscious metathoughts lead to conscious experiences when directed at unconscious perceptual representations. Implicit concepts have very undemanding possession conditions, so that they are available to young children much more easily than explicit concepts.

So why can't the conceptualist argue that the child has a detailed experience of the rocket in virtue her implicit general concepts? As I have argued in Sect. 6.2, the participants in the nonconceptualism debate are only concerned with genuine conceptual abilities and the *explicit* conceptual representations underlying them. On this understanding of concepts, perceptual experiences that involve unconscious metathoughts and thus implicit *proto*-concepts (as I have called them) are still nonconceptual mental states. So perceptual awareness is nonconceptual after all, contrary to the conceptualist claim embodied in premise (1), and conceptualism comes out false.

On the other hand, conceptualism cannot be defended by claiming that the same explicit demonstrative concept that the child exercises in wondering, 'What is *that*?', is also exercised in her experience, so that she is perceptually aware of the rocket.[50] One might try to argue that the child, while unaware of the rocket, unconsciously and instantaneously acquires a perceptual-demonstrative concept of it, then becomes perceptually aware of *that* (the rocket) in her experience, and is then able to wonder, 'What is that?'

This defense is still problematic with respect to the intuition that the child does not acquire the perceptual-demonstrative concept blindly, but in response to her awareness of the rocket *initially*. For it reverses the order of events: On the account, the child first acquires the concept, and then becomes perceptually aware of the rocket, and is only then able to ask what *that* is. But plausibly, as soon as the child possesses a perceptual-demonstrative concept which she has just acquired in response to a certain perceptual state, she is instantaneously in the position to ask what that is. Her ability to do so does not hinge on the independent process of her perceptual-demonstrative rocket concept's entering her perceptual experience and thus removing her blind spot. Imagine that, due to some interference, the concept does not manage to enter her experience. According to the current proposal, she therefore does not become aware of the rocket, but she possesses the

[50] I am not sure that Gennaro would mount this defense, since he is "not as enamored with the demonstrative strategy as McDowell and Brewer are." (Gennaro 2012, 175)

perceptual-demonstrative concept of the rocket. This result is incoherent: This is not how perceptual-demonstrative concepts function.[51]

Thus, while Gennaro's strategy—defending unconscious concept acquisition—appears to threaten the argument initially, it does not hold up in the end. First, unconscious concept acquisition remains problematic when it comes to perceptual-demonstrative concepts. Second, explicit general concepts that young children may already possess are not sufficient to explain the conscious acquisition of perceptual-demonstrative concepts of novel objects. Third, implicit proto-concepts are not fit to defend the conceptualist view that all awareness is conceptual, for they are not the concepts that the conceptualist is after.

### *6.3.6 Results*

To conclude, the conceptualist's response to the argument from concept acquisition fails. One consequence of his overall position is that subjects cannot be aware of their environments before they acquire their first concepts. But this results in the unpalatable claim that in some situations the acquisition of perceptual-demonstrative concepts, which requires the subject to be perceptually aware of what she demonstrates, cannot be based on the subject's prior perceptual awareness of those things that she acquires concepts of.

I have argued that the conceptualist cannot present a convincing alternative account of how we acquire our first concepts (particularly, our first perceptual-demonstrative concepts). Concept nativism is either useless for the conceptualist or implausible. The view that children are conditioned to learn, or implicitly learn, their first concepts without any prior awareness of the world might be defensible for general concepts, but is not tenable for perceptual-demonstrative concepts, which have to be applicable in new situations with things never perceived before. All plausible accounts of perceptual-demonstrative concept acquisition presuppose that the subject is already aware of those things that she acquires concepts of. The result is that the argument from concept acquisition supports (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$), even if not the stronger claim (General NC-ism$_{min}$) endorsed by the Modest Nonconceptualist.

[51] Again, Gennaro could say that the demonstrative concept involved in the child's experience is a mere implicit concept, but this the nonconceptualist can grant as before. On the other hand, as I have argued in Chap. 5, genuine explicit concepts cannot be exercised unconsciously and without the subject's control in experience. Even if Gennaro could argue that genuine demonstrative concepts constitute the content of perceptual experience, he would then run into the same problems with the phenomenology of hallucinations that I pointed to above in Sect. 4.1.6.

# Chapter 7
# The Epistemological Objection

My presentation of a whole host of problems for conceptualist views might suggest at this point already that conceptualism is simply an untenable position. However, there are also some strong arguments that support conceptualism. In order to argue for Modest Nonconceptualism, I will therefore show that arguments that appear to support conceptualism and refute nonconceptualism fail.

The most prominent of these is an epistemological argument put forth by McDowell and Brewer, which I will discuss in this chapter. According to this argument, only the assumption that perceptual experiences have conceptual content can account for the fact that perception plays a crucial role in justifying belief about the external world.[1] The roots of the argument can be traced back to Wilfrid Sellars's myth of the given (Sellars 1956).

According to the second of these arguments (to be presented in Chap. 8), to qualify as genuine content, perceptual content has to be conceptual. That is, our perceptual experiences can be *about* the world only if they present us with an objective world. This, in turn, presupposes that their content is conceptual.

As the title of this chapter suggests, we are now leaving the area of philosophy of mind proper and entering the realm of epistemology. In pinning down the issue (why is it that nonconceptual content apparently cannot justify empirical beliefs?), I will have to touch on several purely epistemological themes, such as the controversy between epistemological internalism and externalism and the problems of foundationalism.[2]

[1] Since we are worried about the justificatory role of perception here, I will only be concerned with the justification of empirical belief that is based on input from the senses. I will completely ignore issues such as the justification of *a priori* belief. This argument relates to the epistemological worry from Sect. 3.4.2 and to the importation model of perceptual justification introduced in Sect. 3.2.

[2] A classical version of internalist foundationalism is defended by Chisholm (1977); externalism is defended, e.g., by Dretske (1981) and Goldman (1976).



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In what follows, I will start with the myth of the given and the ensuing dilemma as the central problem for foundationalism and show that conceptualism constitutes a foundationalist reply to this problem. The objection against nonconceptualism then consists in the claim that conceptualism is the only way out of the dilemma for the foundationalist; the nonconceptualist cannot escape it.

## 7.1 The Myth of the Given

One good way to unpack the objection to nonconceptualism is to start with the myth of the given. Sellars (1956) tries to isolate the myth, unfortunately without explicitly stating what it consists in or providing an easily traceable argument against the so-called given. Sellars's fundamental claim is that there cannot be any non-inferential knowledge, that there cannot be any beliefs that have a credibility which is not derived from other beliefs. The myth of the given is the rejection of his claim, it is the idea that there is a set of beliefs which do not derive their credibility from other justified beliefs, but which are non-inferentially justified. This set of beliefs is supposed to be the foundation of all empirical knowledge, the set of beliefs that all other beliefs can be inferred from—"the ultimate court of appeals," as Sellars (1956, 293) calls it. Sellars labels this view 'the myth of the given' because it involves the idea that some facts are simply given to us (so that they can serve as the basis of all further justification).

### *7.1.1 Some Epistemological Background*

Let me explain this idea of the 'given' in more detail. First, we have to get clear on what a normal case of empirical knowledge looks like. On the standard definition, an instance of knowledge consists in a justified true belief.[3] Leaving aside the question of what it is for a belief to be true (I am assuming a correspondence theory of truth) and presupposing that it is well understood what a belief is, one might worry about what it is for a belief to be *justified*. One standard answer is that there is something about this belief that makes its truth probable. Plausibly, justification is relevant to us as believers and agents because justified beliefs are truth-conducive.[4]

Now there are two ways to understand this, one leading to internalism and the other to externalism. On an externalist reading, the factor that makes the truth of the belief probable makes it *objectively* probable. This factor does not have to be accessible to the person who holds the belief. According to reliabilism[5] the mere

[3] I will ignore the Gettier problem for the standard analysis of belief. See Gettier (1963).

[4] See BonJour (1985, 7/8) and Alston (1989, 232).

[5] See Goldman (1976).

fact that a belief is the result of a reliable belief-forming process is sufficient for it to be justified. Assuming that a subject's perceptual system works properly and that it reliably leads to the formation of accurate beliefs, any of these beliefs will be justified. (Note that the fact that a belief is the result of a reliable process will make it likely to be true.)

For example, my belief that there is a computer screen in front of me right now is the end-result of a reliable process involving my visual perception of a computer screen located in front of me, which is reliably caused by an actual computer screen in front of me. So my belief that there is a computer screen in front of me is justified even though I am not aware of the fact that it is the result of an objectively reliable process.

On the internalist reading, by contrast, I have to have cognitive access to my justifier, to whatever it is that makes the truth of my belief probable.[6] There are different ways to understand what it is to have access to this factor. But the basic idea is that I have to be able to grasp what it is that makes my belief likely to be true for it to be justified. Not only does there have to be a reason for me to hold a certain belief; this reason has to be *my* reason for holding the belief.

An additional difference to the externalist view is that my justifier is not required to raise the objective probability of the truth of my belief.[7] Rather, what counts for the internalist is that, as far as I can tell, my justifier raises the probability of my belief. In the following, when I say that a reason makes the truth of a belief likely, I will thereby mean this subjective probability, where the reason makes the truth of the belief probable *in the light of what else the subject believes*, or *as far as the subject can tell*. So it is not good enough for me to believe that there is a computer screen in front of me because of a reliable belief-forming process; instead, for instance, I have to have to justifiably believe that this belief is the result of a reliable belief-forming process. Alternatively, I have to have access to some other reason why this belief is likely to be true.

One motivation for internalism is the idea that, in order for me to know something, *I* should have a reason to believe that it is true, and that externalism does not guarantee this. On the externalist picture, what am I going to answer the skeptic who asks whether I really know that there is a computer screen in front of me? All I can say is that *if* this belief is the result of a reliable process, then it constitutes knowledge. But this does not help me determine, from my internal perspective, whether my beliefs are really formed as a result of a reliable process. To give a satisfactory answer to the skeptical question, I have to believe with justification something that indicates that this belief is likely to be true, for example by having the justified belief that it is caused by a reliable process.

Another motivation for internalism is the idea that justification and knowledge have to do with how the subject *ought* to conduct her epistemic affairs. If a subject

[6] See BonJour (1985) and Chisholm (1977). I will get to mentalist versions of internalism—paradigmatically defended by Conee and Feldman (2004)—in Sect. 7.4.

[7] This is convincingly argued by Feldman (2004, 155).

takes great care in collecting evidence and in thinking through the inferential relations between her beliefs, she has done everything she can to arrive at well-justified beliefs.[8] She has fulfilled her epistemic duties, and the result is that her true beliefs are justified and therefore constitute knowledge. Justifying a belief is a matter of meeting epistemic obligations, such as trying to arrive at true beliefs; epistemic obligations apply only if the subject has cognitive access to the fact that she is (or is not) fulfilling them.

What does the internalism/externalism distinction have to do with the myth of the given I sketched above? According to one version of internalism, I have to be able to justify any of my empirical beliefs with the help of further justified beliefs. For this is just what it means for me to have access to the reasons of a belief of mine—to be able to enter a *mental state* that constitutes this access. But this is not enough; this further mental state itself has to have some kind of authority so that it can justify the belief in question; it has to be justified. The issue underlying Sellars's myth of the given is what kind of mental state the further mental state might be and how we can understand the authority it needs to have in order to be able to play a justificatory role.

Typically, the further mental state that does the justifying is a belief. Example: ($B_1$) *Angela Merkel is chancellor of Germany* might be justified by the belief ($B_2$) *all the newspapers claimed that Merkel won the elections of 2009*. How does the further belief acquire its justification? Normally, it will be justified by yet another belief ($B_3$) that makes its truth probable, e.g. by ($B_3$) *I read a lot of newspapers after the elections, and they all claimed that Merkel won.* The problem that is starting to emerge is that, with every new belief that is brought up as a source of justification, the question arises again of how this belief can be justified. And yet another belief will have to be produced to provide its justification, for a belief that is not itself supported by a good reason cannot convey justification to another belief. If we restrict the kind of mental state that can serve as justifier to beliefs and if we restrict justification to justification via inference from other beliefs, we slip into an infinite regress. It follows that none of our empirical beliefs is tantamount to knowledge. Skepticism ensues.

Foundationalism proposes a simple solution to this problem. The version of foundationalism that I am interested in allows for non-doxastic mental states to

[8] Again, I will mostly speak of inferential relations and the like obtaining between mental *contents*, but sometimes also of mental *states* standing in such relations. I will say that beliefs are justified because of the (typically) inferential relations obtaining between their contents and the contents of other mental states. I will say that mental *contents* can be the premises or conclusions that are involved in the justification of the beliefs whose contents they are. Also, I will sometimes speak of perceptual contents as the subject's epistemic reasons, and sometimes of perceptual experiences.

I presume that, for justification of a belief, we need a logical relation of the right kind between its content and other mental contents, but also a basing relation between the belief and the other relevant mental states. See, e.g., Firth (1978) and my sketch of propositional justification in Sect. 3.4.2. Note further that, while the content of the justifying mental state plays an essential role in justification, the mental state it is a content of is also crucial. For instance, an imagery experience is typically unfit to be an epistemic reason, no matter its content.

justify beliefs and for there to be *non*-inferential justification. There is a level of *basic* beliefs, beliefs that cannot and need not be justified by appeal to further beliefs. These basic beliefs gain their authority from our perceptual experiences. For instance, my belief that there is a computer screen in front of me is justified by my belief that I now have a visual experience of a computer screen in front of me. This belief itself derives its justification from my visual experience of the computer screen in front of me.

It should be clear in which respect it is not just beliefs that can justify belief, on this view—perceptual experiences can play a justificatory role as well. It is a little more complicated to bring out in which respect the relevant justification is not inferential. Inferential justification is the kind of justification that a belief can receive from a belief it is *inferred* from. Above, I claimed that for a belief to be justified is for it to be likely to be true. According to internalism, the subject has to have access to the factors that raise the subjective probability of her belief. One way to put these things together is to conceive of justification as consisting in the fact that the subject can provide an argument for the belief in need of justification. The belief content itself is the conclusion that has to be shown to be likely to be true in light of the subject's other beliefs. The contents of the additional beliefs that justify the belief in question are the premises that show that this belief (or, rather, its content) is probably true.

The foundationalist can make two distinct claims as to why the justification of basic beliefs itself is not inferential. For one, she can hold that, while perceptual experiences can certainly justify beliefs based on them, they do not provide this justification via an inference. There is some other kind of relation between experience and belief that constitutes the belief's justification. Basic beliefs themselves are non-inferentially justified. On the other hand, the foundationalist can claim that the contents of perceptual experiences are the premises that support certain belief contents, and thereby justify the corresponding empirical beliefs based on them. The justification of basic beliefs is inferential after all. On this view, it is the perceptual experiences that have non-inferential epistemic authority, for we obviously do not infer to our perceptual experiences from other mental states.

Now we have arrived at what Sellars (1956) calls 'the given': In perception, we are confronted with certain states of affairs.[9] These states of affairs are given to us, which is why our perceptual experiences (or our beliefs that are directly based on them) have epistemic authority that is not derived by inference. And it is on the basis of these perceptual experiences that we build up all of our empirical knowledge.

There are two versions of this view, depending on which states of affairs are supposed to be given in experience. According to one version, what is given in experience are *worldly* states of affairs,[10] so that I have a direct route to justified

[9] Another version of foundationalism claims that we are not confronted with states of affairs, but with objects, properties, and the like. For ease of exposition, I talk here only about perception of states of affairs. More on what we perceive in Sect. 7.3.

[10] These states of affairs, if they obtain, are identical with facts.

beliefs about the external world. (This is largely equivalent to the position that McDowell takes in *Mind and World*.) According to the other, more traditional version of foundationalism, what is given are states of affairs concerning the content of my perceptual experience and nothing beyond. So I can acquire basic beliefs about the contents of my perceptual states, but have to draw further inferences to get to beliefs about the external world. (This version of foundationalism is defended by BonJour (2001).)

The next thing we have to get clear on is what is mythological about the assumption that states of affairs might be given to us in perceptual experience, which can then serve to justify empirical belief. As I understand Sellars, his fundamental worry is that, independently of having a linguistic/conceptual understanding of the world, there cannot be any awareness of the world at all. Underlying this claim is his distinction between the 'logical space of reasons' and some kind of 'logical space' of physical/empirical facts that fall under empirical descriptions. The logical space of reasons is the space in which we justify beliefs, and it is governed by rationality. Sellars claims that trying to get from entities under an empirical description to the logical space of reasons constitutes a naturalistic fallacy (Sellars 1956, 290/291). Sellars's worry is echoed in McDowell (1994a). It will be discussed in more detail in Sect. 7.2.

### *7.1.2 The Dilemma for the Foundationalist*

For now, let me present a slightly different argument against the given that also originates in Sellars (1956), but is found more explicitly in BonJour's work (BonJour 1985, 69).[11] The problem arises when we examine the supposedly justificatory relation between perceptual experience and basic belief more closely. Above, I have introduced doxastic justification as inferential justification. What is presupposed in equating justification with providing an argument is that the contents of the beliefs that play the justificatory role have the right kind of form to be the premises of the required argument. That is, their contents have to have *propositional* form. They have to have a truth value, so that they can make the truth of the conclusion probable. Further, there has to be an account of *how* the conclusion is entailed or made probable the premises, for instance because the premise contents have elements that can show up in the conclusion. Moreover, as I have stated above, these beliefs themselves have to be justified and thus subjectively likely to be true. Any old belief (for example one that I make up on the spot) cannot serve as a justification for another belief; it has to be one that is itself credible.

So, what equivalent to these features of justification via belief can we find in the relation between perceptual experience and basic belief? As in the standard model of *inferential* justification, we first need to make intelligible how the

[11] Also, see Davidson (1986/2008, 126/127).

epistemic authority of perceptual experience can be passed on to basic belief; secondly, we need to make intelligible how perceptual experience itself comes by its epistemic authority. Both issues are especially pressing since we are dealing with an internalist picture of justification: The subject has to be able to grasp both how the perceptual experience makes the basic belief's truth probable *and* why the perceptual experience has epistemic authority itself.[12]

The answer to this question will depend on how the world is given to us in experience, or rather on how we *take in* (or grasp) what is given to us in experience. The foundationalist might want to hold that to take something in in experience is to undergo a cognitive state, something that is very much like having a belief. She might add that the content of experience and the content of belief are of the same kind (or at least that experience content is propositional and evaluable as true or false). On this picture, the justification of a basic belief via a perceptual experience can be exactly analogous to the justification of a belief via another belief. So the first element of justification is easy to come by.

But the second element, the epistemic authority of experience, is highly problematic. If to grasp something in experience is, at bottom, just to have yet another belief, the regress of justification cannot stop at this place. We may well wonder how this new cognitive state itself is justified. As long as it is a mental state with a content that can be true or false, and as long as it is a mental state that I can hold rationally or irrationally, it is open for me to wonder whether this mental state is really justified.

If, on the other hand, the foundationalist claims that taking something in in experience is not at all similar to having a belief, the second element of justification is easily supplied. Imagine that what we take in in experience is nothing beyond raw feels or qualia, phenomena that do not have correctness conditions and that do not purport to represent the world. If so, it does not seem to make sense to wonder whether a perceptual experience is justified or not. It is simply something that I undergo. The regress of justification certainly does not continue from a perceptual experience conceived in this way; no further justification is necessary or even possible.

[12]Recall that the myth of the given is a problem raised for foundationalism as a version of internalism. Throughout this chapter, I will take internalist foundationalism to be the default position both for the conceptualist and the nonconceptualist. For the conceptualist's epistemological objection discussed in this chapter arises out of the myth of the given. Moreover, on the standard externalist views, at least, the content of perceptual experience, be it conceptual or not, has no particular justificatory relevance.

Also, see my claim that the majority of the central figures in the debate are foundationalists and internalists in Sect. 3.4.2. As a conceptualist, it would be unwise to give up on these theoretical commitments, for they are the source of the epistemological objection. As a nonconceptualist, endorsing externalism or coherentism would be a very straightforward way to reply to this objection. However, this kind of reply is not very interesting. I think that we should put the nonconceptual content of experience to use; consequently, Modest Nonconceptualism endorses foundationalism and, to a certain degree, internalism.

However, it is not clear how this kind of taking-in could provide the subject with a reason to hold an empirical belief—as Davidson (1986/2008, 157) argues, the only relation that can exist between an experience conceived in this way and a belief is a *causal* relation. Being a reason for a belief means making the truth of this belief probable from the subject's perspective. And something like a raw feel, which has no truth value and no propositional structure, cannot have any bearing on the truth of a belief content from the subject's perspective. It does not have the right shape to be the premise in an argument supporting (the content of) a belief.

The objection against the foundationalist takes the form of a dilemma: On the first horn of the dilemma, it is possible for perceptual experience to justify basic beliefs, but then it is itself in need of justification (which is to say that the regress continues). On the second horn, perceptual experience is in no need of further justification, but it is incapable of playing a role in the justification of basic beliefs.

Traditionally, the issue has often been put in somewhat different terms, involving the idea of *acquaintance*. Let's concede that mere raw feels cannot be relevant for the justification of a belief. What we need in order to make sense of justified basic beliefs is a prior instance of *knowledge*, a mental state that is not only capable of being justified, but is actually justified. Since we cannot at this point appeal to knowledge that is in any way mediated by further beliefs (that would be inferential knowledge), it has to be a state of knowledge that has immediate epistemic authority. Foundationalists at this point often appeal to *knowledge by acquaintance*, in which a subject knows facts in virtue of being directly confronted with them in consciousness.[13]

As an example, think of my visual experience of the computer screen in front of me. That it looks as though there is a computer screen in front of me seems to be directly before my consciousness. If I have this visual experience, I do not have to worry about further justification of my belief that it looks as though there is a computer screen in front of me, since I can hardly be wrong about the contents of my own conscious states—I am directly acquainted with their contents.

The myth of the given then concerns the question of whether acquaintance is a kind of cognitive state with propositional content; if so, it is able to justify basic beliefs, but is in need of justification itself. If, on the other hand, acquaintance is a non-cognitive taking-in of a content, it does not need to be justified, but it is unintelligible how it could provide justification for basic beliefs (and it is not clear how it can be said to be a state of knowledge). For in this case the content of acquaintance cannot be propositional, and it is not clear how it can have a bearing for the subject on the question of whether a certain belief is probably true or not.

[13] See, e.g., Russell (1959).

### 7.1.3 The Conceptualist Solution: Taking the First Horn of the Dilemma

The conceptualist position can be seen as an attempt to escape the dilemma sketched above. The conceptualist claims that experiences have conceptual and propositional content and are therefore capable of supporting basic beliefs. Experience content has the right kind of structure to serve as a premise in an argument; it is the kind of content that can be the content of a belief, so the subject herself is in a position to grasp it as her reason.

The conceptualist has to address the problem raised on this horn of the dilemma: How do perceptual experiences come by their epistemic authority? He has several things to say about this. For one, he claims that experiences are not belief-like states that we can arrive at via inferential reasoning. There is no point in looking for further beliefs that could justify our perceptual experiences. Recall that McDowell holds that we do not have control over our experiences as we do over our thoughts. Conceptual abilities are not *actively exercised* in experience as they are in thought, but *passively actualized* in experience (McDowell 1994a, 9/10).[14] This might make one wonder how this sort of abilities could be the same as the conceptual abilities that we actively exercise in our thinking. McDowell explains that

> the capacities that are drawn on in experience are recognizable as conceptual only against the background of the fact that someone who has them is responsive to rational relations, which link the contents of judgements of experience with other judgeable contents. (McDowell 1994a, 11/12)

Perceptual experience plays an essential role in making our beliefs about the world rational. But only something which involves the (albeit passive) actualization of conceptual capacities can make a belief or a judgment rational.

Even if the conceptualist is right about this, this leaves the question of the experience's epistemic authority. If it is not generated by further justification, how can it come into the picture at all? (Remember, we are talking about justification that is cognitively accessible to the subject.) McDowell's answer is that,

> [i]n a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*. *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgement: it becomes the content of a judgement if the subject decides to take the experience at face value. So it is conceptual content. But *that things are thus and so* is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are. Thus the idea of conceptually structured operations of receptivity puts us in a position to speak of experience as openness to the layout of reality. Experience enables the layout of reality itself to exert a rational influence on what a subject thinks. [. . .] *That things are thus and so* is the conceptual content of an experience, but if the subject of the experience is not misled, that very same thing, *that things are thus and so*, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world. (McDowell 1994a, 26)

[14] I complained about this idea above in Sect. 3.1 and in Chap. 5.

What we take up in veridical experience are the facts themselves that reality is made up of; these facts are passed on to our empirical beliefs if we take our perceptual experiences at face value. Worldly facts have conceptual structure, and they provide *veridical* experiences with their epistemic authority, with their ability to justify empirical beliefs that are based on them.[15] It might be objected that, in hallucination, the subject clearly does not take in 'worldly facts', and that hallucination is introspectively indistinguishable from veridical experience. If perceived facts are indistinguishable for the subject from hallucinated non-facts, then it is not cognitively accessible to her whether her perceptual experience is a taking-in of facts and therefore has epistemic authority, or not. It follows that the subject does not have cognitive access to whether she takes in facts in her perceptual experience and therefore is not justified even if she does.

In order to come to terms with this accusation, McDowell embraces epistemological disjunctivism (McDowell 1994a, 111–113). Veridical experiences have conceptual contents in that they take up worldly facts; hallucination cannot take up worldly facts, but McDowell thinks that this should not worry us. He claims that, as long as it is not unintelligible that we are open to facts in the way he suggests, there is no problem for his position.[16]

This, then, is the conceptualist answer to the myth of the given: Perceptual experience can justify empirical belief because its content is conceptual and propositional; perceptual experience itself has epistemic authority because, if veridical, it takes up worldly facts and thereby it is rationally constrained by the world. I do not find the second half of the answer (how experience acquires its epistemic authority) completely clear, especially in the context of internalism, but maybe a better way to put it is as follows. In a situation in which the subject has a veridical perceptual experience of her environment, her experience puts her in direct touch with the world—a world that consists of facts. If this is the case, there cannot be any further issue of epistemic authority—what authority could we ask for over and above the fact that experience enables us to grasp directly what is going on in the world?

After providing a solution to the myth of the given along these lines, the conceptualist turns around and accuses the nonconceptualist of falling into the myth. The nonconceptualist, in claiming that experience content is nonconceptual, arguably has no way of explaining how experiences can provide reasons for belief. She takes the second horn of the dilemma. For her nonconceptual experiences, the question of epistemic authority might not arise, but, on the other hand, they can play no role in making the truth of a belief probable from the perspective of the subject, or so it seems.

[15] According to McDowell, it is not just justification of empirical belief that is unintelligible without this assumption, but also how our empirical beliefs get to have a *content*. They cannot be about the external world unless the external world exerts a rational influence on them (via experience). Cf. the content worry in Sect. 3.4.2.

[16] He elucidates his view more in other writings, e.g. McDowell (1982/2009). I will not press this point here.

So much for the epistemological background and the conceptualist way out of the myth of the given. In what follows, I will discuss the corresponding conceptualist objection to nonconceptualism. His objection, that perceptual experience, if its content is nonconceptual, cannot justify belief, comes in three guises: First, his claim that the 'space of reasons' cannot extend beyond the 'space of concepts', second, the idea that nonconceptual and non-propositional content does not have the right kind of 'format' to constitute a reason, and third, the strong internalist thesis that reasons have to be recognized as such by the subject. I will spell out the Modest Nonconceptualist account of how these challenges are to be countered and of how nonconceptual contents can constitute reasons for empirical beliefs. At the same time, Modest Nonconceptualism will provide a way to deal with the myth of the given.[17]

## 7.2 The First Objection: The Logical Space of Reasons

### *7.2.1 Clarifying 'Logical Space'*

To understand the first of the conceptualist objections, let us get clear on the notion of a *logical space* (of reasons, of nature, or the like).[18] The expression 'logical space' shows up in Sellars (1956), as I mentioned in the previous section, and it is extensively used by McDowell (1994a). It is not absolutely clear what either Sellars or McDowell mean by it, so let me propose my own interpretation.

When we try to understand a certain aspect of the world, we often do this by constructing theories (or at least folk theories) that draw a certain picture of the world. The theories themselves involve certain concepts, some of which are concepts of the objects and properties in the world that we are trying to understand. There will probably also be concepts of theoretical entities that we use to explain the aspect of the world we are interested in. By saying that these concepts are organized to form a theory, I mean to say that the entities that the theory is a theory of are seen to be related to each other in certain ways, or that they are seen to be unified by the kind of relationships they bear to each other. We conceive of the entities we are trying to understand *as* standing in certain relations with each other.

Now let's see how this idea can be applied to the area of human thought and, more specifically, to belief, conceptual abilities, and knowledge. When trying to understand our cognitive activities, and especially when trying to answer the

[17]The arguments to be discussed in this section are put forth by McDowell, Brewer, and, with qualifications, Byrne, on the conceptualist side (see e.g. McDowell 1994a; Brewer 1999, especially Chap. 5; Byrne 2005). Peacocke (1992) and Heck (2000) provide some nonconceptualist responses.

[18]Let me clarify my use of the term 'logical space' in this context. It is not used in the same way as it is used by Wittgenstein or Carnap. It should be read as '*conceptual* space', for it is used to bring out how certain entities seem to be related with each other depending on how we conceive of them.

questions of how we are able to have empirical beliefs and how knowledge is possible, we conceive of our cognitive states as standing in *rational* relations with each other. What defines the content of a certain mental state is (at least in part) how it is inferentially related to other mental states. What makes a belief an instance of knowledge is the fact that it is inferentially supported by other beliefs. To use a Davidsonian phrase, our ascriptions of propositional attitudes are governed by a "constitutive ideal of rationality." (Davidson 1980, 223) So, if our purpose is to understand human mental life with the help of a theory of rationality, we are thereby constructing a logical "space of reasons", a set of entities that we understand as being related via a certain kind of *normative*, viz. *rational* relations. We conceive of the elements in this space of reasons as things that a subject can infer to, or eliminate if they contradict other beliefs in the system.

As a clarificatory note, I take it that, in the first instance, *rational* relations as conceived by McDowell are relations between (bearers of) conceptual contents, where one justifies another. They are a kind of logical or inferential relations. They are rational relations in that believing one conceptual content can make it epistemically rational to endorse another. They are *normative* relations in that we should believe what is made rational in this way. They are *semantic* relations because rational constraints from experience to belief and the possibility of rational belief revision are a precondition for empirical belief content.[19]

To contrast this with our (folk) theory of the natural world in general, especially as influenced by the natural sciences, the defining type of relation we take objects to bear to each other in this area is causal or, more generally, law-like. When we try to understand chains of events in the world around us, we conceive of them as causally related, as under an *empirical* description. Normative relations are irrelevant to an understanding of the world on this picture; there is no right or wrong, either an event is caused by another, or it is not. With this kind of theory, we construct what McDowell (1994a, 75) calls a "realm of law". There might be many other logical spaces of this kind—certain aspects of the world, that we, in conceptualizing them, take to be related to each other in certain ways.[20]

The logical space of reasons and the logical space of law discussed in this section largely correspond to the distinction often used in philosophy of mind and in

[19]McDowell applies his thoughts to action as well; I will not deal with this here.

[20]One ambiguity in this metaphor is the question of whether the 'space' is part of the world itself that we are trying to understand, or whether it is part of our conceptual scheme that we put together to understand the world. Clearly, it is not our *concepts* of thoughts or of things in the world that are rationally or causally related to each other. But do we only conceive the corresponding entities to be causally or rationally related to each other, or are they *really* so related? A similar question can be raised with respect to Davidson's anomalous monism—see Davidson (1980). One and the same token event can fall under a mental type and under a physical type. The question is whether we should be nominalists about types, which is to say that it is just us classifying the token differently, or whether we should be realists about types. If so, the types do really exist in the world. McDowell, at least, does not enlighten us as to how we should understand his talk of 'logical space'. I will not pursue this issue any further because it is not relevant for the conceptualist objection.

cognitive science between personal and subpersonal levels of explanation. The point of personal-level explanations is to explain and predict subjects' behavior in terms of what makes it rational; the point of subpersonal-level explanations, by contrast, is to give an account of the neural processes, information-processing, etc. taking place in a mind-endowed subject's brain (as part of an account of the world as law-governed).

### *7.2.2 The Argument from the Logical Space of Reasons*

After the clarificatory remarks, let's turn back to the argument against nonconceptualism. Here it is in McDowell's words:

> The idea of the Given is the idea that the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere. The extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought. But we cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgement is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts: relations such as implication or probabilification, which hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities. [. . .]
> But when we make out that the space of reasons is more extensive than the conceptual sphere, so that it can incorporate extra-conceptual impingements from the world, the result is a picture in which constraint from outside is exerted at the outer boundary of the expanded space of reasons, in what we are committed to depicting as a brute impact from the exterior. [. . .] In effect, the idea of the Given offers exculpations where we wanted justifications. (McDowell 1994a, 7/8)

The nonconceptualist—as an internalist foundationalist—tries to explain the justification of beliefs that are based on perceptual experience as follows: There is a computer screen in front of me, which causes my experience of the computer screen. The computer screen is represented (nonconceptually) by my visual experience. I form the belief that there is a computer screen in front of me because I undergo the visual experience. My reason for my belief, what makes my entertaining this belief rational, is my visual experience with its specific nonconceptual content. So first, there is a causal step from the actual computer screen to my experience of it, which represents the computer screen to be in front of me. Second, there is a rational transition from my experience of the computer screen to the belief that there is a computer screen in front of me. This transition can either be explicated as a kind of inferential relation, or the nonconceptualist has to come up with an alternative account of how a belief can be rationally based on a perceptual experience.

The conceptualist claims that this nonconceptualist project is doomed to fail because it relies on a *conceptual confusion*, on the idea that something, while we are conceiving of it as being part of the logical space of natural law, can *under that very same description* play a role in the logical space of reasons. On the one hand, the nonconceptualist describes perceptual experience as a phenomenon that is caused by things in the subject's environment, something which simply happens to the subject, an impingement from the natural world on the senses. On the other hand, she wants this very same phenomenon, under the very same description (as

something nonconceptual), to be a player in the conceptual realm. It is supposed to be able to enter rational relationships with elements of the logical space of reasons. But we have to decide which perspective we want to take—the normative-rational one or the nomological-empirical one. On the first perspective, experience can only come into view if it is seen to have conceptual content; on the second, it is legitimate to think of perceptual experience as a nonconceptual phenomenon, but then we cannot even begin to answer questions about justification.

To put it a different, realist, way, something can be relevant to the justification of a belief only if it has properties which enable it to be rationally related to this belief. Empirical properties, such as the property of being caused by something in a subject's environment, can as a matter of principle not be properties in virtue of which a mental state can enter rational relations with a belief. But the property of having nonconceptual content, according to McDowell, is just such an empirical property. If perceptual experience is to play a role in the justification of empirical belief at all, it has to do so in virtue of a normative property that it has, because of its *conceptual* content, the only kind of content that can be responsible for a mental state's standing in rational relations with other mental states. To claim the opposite is to commit a naturalistic fallacy, to draw normative conclusions from empirical facts. (Cf. Sellars 1956, 257.)

When we think of perceptual experience as caused by things in the external world, all we do is give an empirical description of it. We merely describe what experience is like as a matter of fact. But when we justify an empirical belief, we try to say why the subject *ought to* hold this belief. If our answer to this normative question comes down to saying that, as a matter of fact, this is how she came by the belief (the outside world caused the subject to undergo a specific experience, which caused this specific belief), it is still not clear why the subject ought to hold the belief. Our question as to why it is *rational* to hold this belief has not been answered.

The nonconceptualist strategy fails because it conceives of perceptual experience as something empirical and then attempts to use it to provide an answer to the normative question of how beliefs are to be justified. But all this can result in, as McDowell puts it, are "exculpations"—it is true of the subject that it is not her fault that she holds the beliefs she does, for she was caused to have these beliefs. But if asked *why it is rational* to hold her beliefs, she has nothing to say.

This argument supports content conceptualism (C-C-ism), the view that, necessarily, all perceptual experiences have conceptual content, if we add the plausible assumption that every element of the content of all our perceptual experiences can, in principle, enter rational relations with belief. When something enters the content of my perceptual experience, it is possible for me to entertain a belief that bears a rational relation to it. Often, a belief can be rationally based on a perceptual experience; sometimes (recall the waterfall illusion in Chap. 5) an experience may rationally elicit a belief that what is perceived simply could not be the case. But if only conceptual items exhibit the genuine normativity required for entering rational relations with belief in the first place, any aspect of any perceptual content has to be conceptual, and experience cannot have nonconceptual content.

This can be put by saying that conscious perceptual experience, just like belief, must be a personal-level state. It is the kind of state that is appealed to in explanations of rational behavior and that is available to the subject. So, perceptual experience and its content must exhibit normativity and thus be conceptual. This normativity is due to the fact that perceptual experience is a personal-level state, a state that can rationalize an agent's beliefs and behavior. Again, if the argument works, perceptual experience, as a personal-level state, can have only conceptual content.[21]

An apparent reply to McDowell is as follows: Of course it is rational for the subject to believe what she does. She believes that there is a computer screen in front of her, this belief was caused by her experience of the computer screen in front of her, and the experience itself was caused by the computer screen in front of her. She believes the truth because of her causal connections with her environment, so what more could we ask for?

This reply cannot be given by the *internalist*, however. The subject has to have access to the fact that makes her belief that there is a computer screen in front of her rational, which is to say that she has to have access to the fact that her belief was caused by her experience, which was caused by the computer screen, and *also* to the fact that this makes her belief rational. The result is that it is not the experience (alone) that makes her initial belief rational, but (also) her belief that her belief was caused by her experience etc. This second belief is itself in need of justification. If we go down this road, we have to say goodbye to foundationalism.

Compare the conceptualist's situation. Perceptual experiences have conceptual content, which is to say that they have just the kind of content that can be used to justify empirical beliefs. They are elements of the space of reasons, and they are therefore able to justify beliefs. Their very contents can be taken up by empirical beliefs, and thereby they can be brought under rational scrutiny. The subject can take up a certain perceptual content in thought and thereby evaluate whether this content should be endorsed or not, when checked up against the background of her other beliefs and the rational relations that it bears to them. On top of this, the perceptual experience itself is rationally constrained by the external world, as the fact that there is a computer screen in front of me itself is taken up in a veridical experience.

### *7.2.3 A Defense of Nonconceptualism: The Logical Space of Content*

However, the picture is not quite as simple as the conceptualist (the way I presented him so far) makes it out to be. For there are more than two logical spaces relevant here: The notion of nonconceptual content is itself a normative notion. Think

[21] For a helpful presentation of McDowell's views, see Bermúdez (2005, 41–51).

back to how I introduced the notion of content back in Sect. 2.1: Contents have correctness conditions. That is, it has to be possible for a content to be correct or incorrect. Without the possibility of misrepresentation, it makes no sense to speak of representation.

Under a completely empirical description, we can say no more than that, for instance, a bee's waggle dance has a certain duration and that a particular food source is a certain distance away from the hive. We can add a description of a causal chain of events: The bee flies from the food source back to the hive, then flies and waggles in a particular pattern, then other bees fly to the food source. To say that the duration of the bee's waggle dance represents (or misrepresents) the distance of the food source is to introduce a *normative* constraint—if all goes as it *should*, the waggle dance correctly represents the distance of the food source from the hive. To use the spatial metaphor, by talking about content, we have already left the logical realm of law and have entered the logical space of content, which is a normative space in its own right.[22]

The conceptualist can reply in two ways. First, he can deny that the nonconceptualist's notion of content is a normative notion. He might argue that the notion of content that the nonconceptualist has in mind is *naturalizable* content. Consequently, it can be reduced to non-normative, empirical phenomena, so it cannot itself be something normative. Second, the conceptualist can concede that there may be a normative realm of content, but maintain that it does not involve the right *kind* of normativity. The normativity required for justification is only guaranteed by conceptual and propositional content.

To pursue the first reply, the conceptualist has to argue that nonconceptual content can be reduced to, or identified with, nothing but naturalizable empirical 'content'. But a reduction of genuinely normative content to 'content', conceived of in empirical terms, is impossible. McDowell, for instance, rejects what he calls "bald naturalism", the idea that the normative space of reasons is reducible to the empirical space of law (McDowell 1994a, xviii). The conceptualist concludes that—if it is legitimate to call nonconceptual content 'content' at all—nonconceptual content cannot amount to genuine content involving *normative* constraints. Claiming that normative mental content is constituted by nothing but empirical states of affairs is just another way of committing a naturalistic fallacy. So nonconceptual content is part of the logical space of law. It cannot be relevant to the justification of empirical belief.

McDowell (1994a, 55,121) makes this move.[23] He allows for talk of nonconceptual content as an empirical notion in the cognitive sciences, but thinks that it is a confusion to hold that a demanding philosophical notion of content can be understood in the same terms. He thinks that it is a mistake to assume that

[22] See Heck (2000) for a suggestion along these lines.

I thank Gualtiero Piccinini for suggesting the bee dance example.

[23] Similarly, Gennaro (2012) allows nonconceptual content only as subpersonal content, but not as consciously available content that can come into the picture in personal-level explanations.

> the contentfulness of our thoughts and conscious experiences ... [can] be understood as a welling-up to the surface of some of the content that a good psychological theory would attribute to goings-on in our cognitive machinery. (McDowell 1994a, 55)

McDowell (1994b) sketches several arguments as to why the notion of content as it is used in the cognitive sciences cannot be identified with his demanding philosophical notion of content, which I will deal with in Chap. 8. For now, let me stick with his argument that we cannot reduce genuinely normative content to merely empirical phenomena.

The nonconceptualist can respond in one of two ways. First, she can follow Burge (2010, 298), who argues that the notion of content that is employed in the cognitive sciences, in particular in perceptual psychology, is a demanding normative notion which will resist attempts for reduction as well. Nonconceptual content, as I introduced it above, is normative, for it is defined by its correctness conditions, by the fact that it can be correct or incorrect. On this view, it is unproblematic to identify the genuinely normative content of perceptual experience with the—also genuinely normative—content that cognitive scientists talk of.

I do not find this reply satisfying, however. Think of it again in terms of the distinction between a personal and a subpersonal level of explanation. We can interpret McDowell as calling our attention to the fact that it is illegitimate to conflate our talk of content that we introduce to come to terms with phenomenally conscious perceptual experience with the talk of content that cognitive scientists employ in the context of subpersonal information-processing and transformation of symbols in the perceptual modules. I believe that McDowell's point is correct: Without further argument, at least, we cannot import elements of one level of explanation to another.[24]

A better way to reply to McDowell's objection, which is the route taken by Modest Nonconceptualism, is to note that it is directed at the project of naturalizing content—according to which personal-level content is constituted by content ascribed at the subpersonal levels of explanation. His criticism does not touch accounts of personal-level nonconceptual content that make no reductive claims, however. For the question of whether there is personal-level nonconceptual content, conceived of in a robust normative way, is in itself completely separate from the issues raised by naturalistic theories of content.

Looking back at the battery of arguments for nonconceptualism presented here—the arguments from phenomenology, content, and concept possession, none of which relies on assumptions about reductionism or anti-reductionism—even a philosopher who respects the autonomy of personal-level explanations might be compelled to defend nonconceptual content, conceived of as a normative personal-

[24] An additional problem of this strategy is that to insist on genuinely normative content at the subpersonal level merely pushes McDowell's criticism back a level—for the reductive physicalist, at least, it is still an open question how a genuinely normative notion of content can be explicated in empirical terms.

level phenomenon.[25] In a nutshell, a philosopher who talks of genuinely normative nonconceptual content in personal-level explanations is not committed to conflate this talk with talk of nonconceptual content (which may well not be normative in this sense) at the subpersonal levels.

To conclude, there is no good reason to reject the idea of genuinely normative nonconceptual content of (personal-level) perceptual experience: A kind of content that is defined by the conditions under which it represents the world correctly, but that is not constituted by conceptual elements. Peacocke's notion of scenario content, which I explicated above in Sect. 2.1.2.4, is a clear example of a robustly normative notion of nonconceptual content. Correspondingly, the normative space of content extends farther than the space of concepts. And it is open to the (Modest) Nonconceptualist to claim that an item in the space of content can bear justificatory relations to an item in the space of concepts. She cannot be accused of committing a naturalistic fallacy, for she is not trying to draw normative conclusions from empirical premises.

At this point, the suggested second conceptualist reply comes into play. The conceptualist can claim that the kind of normativity involved in nonconceptual content is not the right kind of normativity to ground justificatory relations and that only relations in the logical space of conceptual and, in particular, propositional content can be justificatory relations. To see how this claim can be motivated, let's abandon the realm of spatial metaphors and turn to the second version of the epistemological argument.

## 7.3 The Second Objection: Reasons Must Have Conceptual and Propositional Format

### *7.3.1 The Argument*

In this section, I will investigate the conceptualist claim that only conceptual and propositionally structured contents have the right kind of format to support other contents via inferences, so that only mental states with conceptual, propositionally structured content can bear justificatory relations to empirical beliefs. This objection is especially threatening to my Modest Nonconceptualism, for I identify perceptual content with scenario content, which is both nonconceptual and non-propositional.

The objection is developed by Brewer (1999) and briefly stated in Huemer (2001, 74). The problem it is based on can be found in BonJour (1999). Interestingly, McDowell (2009b, 131) does not develop this kind of objection, for he holds that a perceiver's epistemic entitlement to her perceptually based beliefs is *not* due to an inference from the perceptual experience to the belief. Instead, according to him,

[25]Crane (2001) might be seen as an example of a contemporary philosopher who draws a distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual content, but who rejects reductionism.

in "making observational judgments, what matters is the rationality exemplified in judging whether things are thus and so in the light of whether things are (observably) thus and so." (McDowell 1998, 405) This connects back to his disjunctivist commitments.[26] Perhaps because of McDowell's silence on this topic, nonconceptualist replies are few and far between—my defense is an attempt to spell out suggestions made by Heck (2000) and Peacocke (2001a).[27] Heck (2000, 511) explicitly admits that he has no account of how an inferential transition (or something the like) from experience to belief might work. In this section, I aim to provide such an account.

Now, let me turn to the argument. I want to start by motivating the claim that all epistemic justification is inferential. Plausibly, what justification does is make the truth of a belief probable for the believer. Why should I believe that p in the face of a certain consideration? Because, given the consideration, it is probably true that p.

In principle, tying justification to making a belief's truth probable can be given an externalist reading: The reliabilist might say that reliable belief-forming processes lead to *justified* beliefs exactly because they *tend* to lead to true beliefs, so that it is likely that a belief based on such processes will be true. On this suggestion, it is irrelevant what kind of content perceptual experience has—as long as it is part of a reliable process, it will lead to justified beliefs, and can thus be said to justify them.

I do not wish to deny that this would be a way for the nonconceptualist/non-propositionalist to avoid the objection against her view. I will not pursue this strategy, for I find the idea attractive that it is the specific *content* of a perceptual experience that has a bearing on whether a belief based on it is justified or not. For instance, why should I believe that there is a computer screen in front of me? Because I have a visual experience representing the computer screen to be in front of me.

When it comes to a mental state with a certain content making the truth of another mental state with a certain content probable *in virtue of its content*, the natural way to think about it is in terms of inferences involving the contents as premises and conclusion. The premises in inductive or abductive inferences raise the probability of the conclusion; the premises in a deductive inference guarantee the truth of the conclusion, given that they are themselves true.

On the assumption that all justification is inferential, we need entities that can enter inferential relations, or play the role of premise or conclusion in an argument, in order to justify. The premises from which we can infer a certain conclusion (and

[26]Moreover, McDowell believes that the inferences potentially involved here would be inferences from the premise *p* to the conclusion *p*, say. He calls this the " 'stuttering' form" of inferences (McDowell 1998, 405). Also, he wants to allow for perceivers to hold beliefs rationally on the basis of an experience without consciously reasoning towards the beliefs from their experiences (see McDowell 2009b, 129). I will address these issues below.

[27]Other philosophers dealing with the objection, whose replies I find unsatisfactory, are Chuard (n.d.) and Hopp (2011). Hopp's criticism is confusing because he runs his discussion of this objection together with a discussion of the objection from access internalism. (See my Sect. 7.4.)

thereby justify the corresponding belief) must, first, be truth-evaluable. For only truth-evaluable entities can have a bearing on the truth or falsity of a proposition.

Second, I assume here that the belief that is to be justified has a propositional content that is constituted by Fregean senses. So the same must be true of the content of a perceptual experience that is fit to support the belief. To make sense of the idea that the belief content is the conclusion of an inference, the premises doing the supporting must have elements of the same kind as the conclusion. Since the Modest Nonconceptualist agrees that belief contents are constituted by Fregean senses, she will have to concede that the same is true of perceptual contents.

To elaborate on this some more, we should think of inferences that have Fregean propositions as their conclusions as involving premises that have Fregean senses as their *recombinable* constituents. These constituents can show up in different premises and in the conclusion, and thereby make the steps in the argument supporting the belief in question possible. To have this sort of constituents (and to be truth-evaluable) is to be propositionally structured; to be of epistemic significance, then, experience content must consist in Fregean propositions.[28]

For a better overview over the argument:

1. If a mental state M is fit to justify a belief B, then M's content is fit to be a premise in an inference, the conclusion of which is the content of B.[29]
2. The content of any belief B is a Fregean proposition (a truth-evaluable compound of re-combinable Fregean senses).
3. If a mental state M's content is fit to be a premise in an inference whose conclusion is a Fregean proposition, then M's content is itself a Fregean proposition (a truth-evaluable compound of re-combinable Fregean senses).
4. Therefore, if a mental state M's content is fit to justify a belief B, then M's content is itself a Fregean proposition. (From (1) to (3))
5. All perceptual experiences are mental states that are fit to justify beliefs.
6. All perceptual experiences have Fregean propositions as their contents. (From (4) and (5))[30]

[28]To be completely clear, let me add three qualifications. First, there might be propositions that consist of only one element, but are nonetheless truth-evaluable. Arguably, the proposition expressed by 'it is raining' consists only of one element, for there is no subject that 'is raining' is predicated of. Second, the propositionalist need not claim that all elements in an inference *actually* appear in more than one place. All he needs to hold is that the elements constituting a Fregean proposition are *in principle* recombinable—there might be cases of valid inferences in which no elements are reused at all, as in an inference from a necessary falsehood to some other proposition. Third, I am not claiming that it is *sufficient* for a valid inference that the same elements appear in different places (think of the non-valid inference from not-Fa to Fa). Rather, I try to make plausible the idea that recombinability is, *prima facie*, a *necessary* ingredient to inferential transitions between Fregean propositions.

[29]This is related to the "Premise Principle" in Pryor (2005, 189).

[30]As it stands, the conclusion embodies a claim about the *actual* content of experience. The argument supports the conceptualist's view only if this conclusion is a necessary truth. For, as argued above in Sect. 3.3, his claim is that perceptual experience and its content are necessarily

First off, let me clarify the *inference* that M's content is supposed to be fit for, according to the argument. First, there are two distinctions that make no major difference for the argument. One distinction can be drawn between a situation in which two mental states (and their contents) are inferentially related in virtue of a subpersonal process that is guided by certain inferential rules and a situation in which the subject consciously draws an inference from one mental state to another. This distinction makes no difference for the validity of the argument. Either way, the conceptualist can argue that for the first mental state to justify the second, the first has to have a Fregean proposition as its content if the second does.

To take the more demanding situation, in which the subject consciously draws inferences to her perceptual beliefs, to be the standard situation would not sit well with the phenomenology of perceptual belief. In all but very exceptional cases, we seem to arrive at our perceptually based beliefs without any extra effort, as would be involved in consciously drawing an inference from the experience to the corresponding belief.

A further distinction could be drawn in the following way: A subject can have two beliefs $B_1$ and $B_2$ which happen to be logically related, but for which it is not true that $B_2$ plays any role for the subject's believing $B_1$. This propositional justification works without adding a basing relation between $B_2$ and $B_1$.[31] No matter whether we conceive of justification as (merely) propositional or as doxastic, however, the argument will go through. For it is equally plausible on either understanding that, if the content of the conclusion state is a Fregean proposition, the same has to be true for the premise state.

A third, more relevant distinction is between *being* a premise in an inference and *providing* a premise in an inference. I phrased premise (1) above to state explicitly that the mental state's content has to be fit to *be* a premise. In other places, I spoke more vaguely of experience *providing* a premise. It should be clear that the nonconceptualist has no problem conceding this much: Even if perceptual experience has nonconceptual and non-propositional content, this content can provide a conceptual (and propositional) premise, for example if it can provide the subject with a belief that is a premise in an argument for the belief in question. So, the conceptualist needs to make the stronger claim that the content of the experience itself has to *be* the premise in the argument that justifies the belief. As we will see, this is the first conceptualist commitment that the nonconceptualist may attack.

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conceptual. If it can be argued that premises (1)–(3) are conceptual and therefore necessary truths, this is unproblematic. Premise (5) has to be restricted to content-bearing perceptual experiences. I am not sure that I find it equally plausible for each of these premises that they state conceptual truths. At any rate, the argument as presented works as an objection to nonconceptualism, a view concerned with the content of our actual experiences. The only version of nonconceptualism not threatened by the argument is the strange variety mentioned above in Sect. 3.3 that requires no more than that, possibly, some perceptual experiences have nonconceptual content.

[31] See Sect. 3.4.2. If we add that the subject's endorsement of $B_2$ leads to her endorsement of $B_1$, this gives us doxastic justification.

### *7.3.2 The Modest Nonconceptualist Reply*

#### 7.3.2.1 Options for the Nonconceptualist

How can the nonconceptualist reply to this argument? Let's leave the option of denying premise (5)—that perceptual experiences can justify beliefs—to one side. Also, let's leave premise (2) untouched: the shared assumption that all beliefs have Fregean contents.

This leaves premises (1) and (3) as possible points of attack. There are two ways the nonconceptualist can attack premise (1), the claim that if a mental state is fit to justify a belief, then its content is fit to be a premise in an inference. One, the nonconceptualist can concede that justification is always inferential: There has to be a premise, a Fregean proposition, from which the relevant belief can be inferred. Unlike what the conceptualist believes, however, this Fregean proposition need not itself *be* the content of the justifying mental state; all that is required is that the proposition bear an appropriate relation to its content, a relation that would still have to be explicated. The contents of the justifying mental state, on this reading, *provide*, but cannot be identified with the premises that are involved in justifying the belief. Premise (1) above would then have to be rephrased as

> 1*. If a mental state M is fit to justify a belief B, then M's content is *appropriately related to* a premise in an inference, the conclusion of which is the content of B.

On this way of attacking premise (1), we end up with a view of justification that demands no actual inferential step from the experience that does the justifying to the justified belief. Instead, a proponent of this view might require that the experience *provide* the subject with a reason. That is to say, if challenged, the subject has to be in a position to say that her belief is justified by her experience—she has to be able to form a belief whose content is the premise of the argument in question. She has to be in a position to form this belief because she has the experience.

Proponents of this view have to tell something like the following story: My experience of the computer screen located in front of me justifies my belief that there is a computer screen in front of me because it puts me in a position to form the belief that it looks as though there is a computer screen in front of me. The content of this belief has the right propositional structure to serve as a premise in an inference to the belief that there is a computer screen in front of me, and if someone were to ask me how I can be sure that there is a computer screen in front of me, I would be able to produce this argument. There are some philosophers who suggest this kind of objection to the conceptualist argument.[32]

This view is unsatisfactory. To begin with, I am not sure how to spell out this 'providing' or 'being put in a position to form the relevant belief' in a convincing way. Moreover, I think it is crucial that the content of the justifying mental state itself should be rationally related to the content of the justified belief and that the

[32]Cf. Byrne (2005) and Chuard (n.d.). The proposal is criticized by Brewer (1999).

transition from the first mental state to the justified belief should take place in virtue of this normative/rational relation, i.e., that the belief be *based* on the justifying mental state. The view we are currently discussing cannot meet this requirement and will therefore not be taken into consideration.

Let's move on to the other way of attacking premise (1), denying the inferential nature of justification outright. M can justify B even if M's content is not a premise in an inference leading to B's content. If she takes this route, the Modest Nonconceptualist has to explain what other kind of relation of epistemic support experience might bear to belief, or how this relation can exist between entities whose contents are as different in kind as a scenario content and a Fregean proposition.

Let me note that it does not help the nonconceptualist to point to the way a truth-maker makes the truth of a belief probable. The fact that there is a computer screen in front of me makes my belief that there is a computer screen in front of me true; however, this is not the way in which an experience can contribute to the probability of the truth of a belief about the external world. The experience is on a par with the belief in that both are mental states that are directed at the external world; it is not the case that the belief is about the experience so that the taking place of the experience makes the belief true. (After all, the belief is about the computer screen.) Whatever the role of experience is in making a belief's truth probable for the believer, it cannot be analogous to the role of the truth-maker of the belief. This is why I find the following analogy (put forth by Ayers 2004) misleading: He compares the way the experience of a zebra contributes to the truth of a belief about the zebra with the way a zebra contributes to the truth of a description of the zebra.[33]

Alternatively, the nonconceptualist might claim that premise (3) is false and that a mental content can be a premise in an argument for a Fregean proposition without being a truth-evaluable compound that consists of Fregean senses. This strategy requires a very liberal understanding of terms such as 'inference', 'premise', or 'conclusion'. One thing that might be of help is that scenario contents have correctness conditions and are thus either correct or incorrect. This, one might think, is close enough to having a truth-value. The claim that a premise has to consist of the same kind of recombinable elements as the conclusion can be rejected if

[33]Cf. Ayers (2004, 248). Ayers' analogy is untenable for the nonconceptualist as a proponent of the content view, I think, but might be more appropriate for a proponent of direct realism and disjunctivism. There is a version of direct realism according to which perception has no content but (if all goes well) confronts a subject directly with her environment, for it is constituted by the perceived objects and properties. (See Brewer 2006.) Here, experience is central to justification, but not in the same way as belief. It is because it constitutes our direct access to the world that it is relevant for justification. As I understand Hopp (2011, Chap. 7), this is his view of perceptual justification. According to him, while belief is directed at the world, it is only in perception that the world (empirical states of affairs) are immediately present to the believer. In a perceptual experience matching a particular belief, "we ratify a truth-bearer by consulting its truth-maker." (p. 212)

By contrast, neither conceptualism nor nonconceptualism, taken as alternatives to direct realism, are in a position to give this explanation of the justificatory role of experience. Both views assume that experience has a content and they should not ignore the import that perceptual content might have for the justification of empirical belief.

the non-propositionalist can come up with a different account of how premises and conclusion have to be semantically related for a certain premise to support *just this* conclusion, not some random other conclusion.

At this point, my opponent may point out that neither option (denying premise (1) or denying premise (3)) is open to the nonconceptualist. In denying premise (1), the nonconceptualist loses her grasp of how the specific nonconceptual content of perceptual experience can be relevant for the truth of a belief with a related content. For in rejecting the requirement of an inferential relation between justifying mental state and justified belief, she bars the only route by which the correctness of the justifying mental state can be relevant to the truth of the justified belief *in virtue of its content*. Instead, she moves into the vicinity of externalists who hold, for instance, that a belief is justified if it is the result of a reliable process, or maybe of (somewhat deviant) coherentists, according to whom a belief is justified by an experience if the experience takes place in circumstances in which the subject believes that it is part of a reliable process leading to appropriate beliefs. But if the nonconceptualist picks one of these options, she changes her position, for this comes down to abandoning internalist foundationalism.

On the other hand, my opponent can argue that it is impossible to deny the truth of premise (3)—my suggested liberal understanding of what it takes to be a premise in an argument, that allows for correctness instead of truth, and does away with the requirement for recombinable elements, is simply unacceptable. If premise (3) captures what is required of a premise in an inference, nonconceptual/non-propositional content simply does not fit the bill, and the nonconceptualist cannot pick this strategy either.

My Modest Nonconceptualist solution to this apparent dilemma will be to provide an account of justification that will allow for experience content to bear justificatory relations to belief content, but not in the form of a traditional inference. I will explain how the relation between an experience and a belief can be such as to make the truth of the belief probable—there can be correctness-truth transitions from perceptual experience to belief. I will also explain how such correctness-truth transitions can be due to the content of the experience itself, in that the belief content is rationally sensitive to the content of the experience.[34] I am tempted to call this kind of relation a "quasi-inferential relation", a phrase which was coined by Wright (2002a, 148). But as a matter of caution, and to emphasize that this justificatory relation really is quite different from standard inferential relations, I will instead speak of *c*ontent-*s*ensitive *c*orrectness-*t*ruth *t*ransitions between perceptual experiences and beliefs, or *CSCT transitions*.[35] As it turns out,

[34]Peacocke (2001a) makes a very similar point; he likens the relations between perceptual experience and belief to truth-preserving relations in logic. See Heck (2000) for a similar view. Despite the differences noted above, Modest Nonconceptualism also bears some similarities to the view defended by Hopp (2011), as the worldly states of affairs that a belief is directed at play a central role in both accounts of perceptual justification.

[35]Depending on context, I will sometimes also talk of '*CSCTTs*'. I am grateful to Niko Strobach for insisting on this point.

then, the Modest Nonconceptualist will reject premise (1)—some mental states (viz. experiences) are fit to justify beliefs not because they are fit to be premises in an inference, but in virtue of their ability to enter content-sensitive correctness-truth transitions. So it is not the case that if a mental state is fit to justify a belief, its content is thereby fit to be a premise in an inference to the belief's content. Instead, it may be the case that its content is thereby fit to participate in a content-sensitive correctness-truth transition that also involves the relevant belief content.

#### 7.3.2.2 Adequacy Conditions on Theories of Perceptual Justification

In pursuing this strategy, I need to explain how the justificatory relation between an experience and a belief can be sustained if not by appeal to an inference. As stated before, the interest of inferential relations and arguments for justification consists in the fact that premises, via the inferential steps in an argument, make the truth of the conclusion probable in the light of other beliefs of the subject. What is needed, then, is a kind of correctness-truth transition that is *not* an inferential relation, i.e., a correctness-truth transition that does not involve Fregean propositional contents which are rationally related because the same kinds of elements appear in the premises and the conclusion.

What is of interest here is a way in which something with a representational content can have a bearing on the truth of a belief. A central claim of conceptualism as well as nonconceptualism is that experience represents the world, as opposed to being a mere raw feel with no representational content. The relation between an experience and a belief can consist in a correctness-truth transition if my undergoing an experience with nonconceptual/non-propositional content $q$ makes the truth of my belief that $p$ probable, given that my experience itself is likely to be correct. It is the correctness of the experience (a property that is neither ascribable to a raw feel nor to an object in the external world) that has a bearing on the truth of the belief. This is an essential ingredient to perceptual justification.

But this is not sufficient to capture the specific justificatory role of experience. The transition to a belief must take place in virtue of the *content* of the perceptual experience, not because of some other of its properties. What needs explaining is not, for instance, a process by which we take in certain qualitative data about ourselves and draw inferences to external facts based on these data. It is a process by which the perceptual experience itself is, without further intermediaries, rationally connected to the belief that is justified by it.

To make this point clearer, compare two different ways a belief might be justified by an experience. First scenario: the subject perceives the computer screen in front of her to be rectangular, and, based on this, she directly forms the belief that the computer screen is rectangular. Her belief is justified because of what her experience represents. Second scenario: the subject experiences chest pain that radiates to her left arm. She knows enough about heart attacks to realize that she is about to have one herself. That is, she can apparently infer from the symptoms she experiences to the fact that she is going to have a heart attack; the quality of her experience justifies her belief.

It is wrong to try to unpack our standard perceptual situation (including how perceptual experience justifies belief) along the lines of the second scenario. We do not draw inferences from beliefs about some qualitative features of our experiences to our perceptually-based beliefs. What our experiences represent directly takes us to beliefs with corresponding contents. Moreover, what our experiences represent *justifies* our beliefs with corresponding contents *all by itself*, without the need for second-order beliefs about the relevant features of our experiences.

This leads to the second point. The *specific content* of my experience must be relevant to the specific content of my belief that is justified by the experience. Think about standard inferential justification: It is something about the specific content of my belief, *the cat is orange*, that justifies my belief, *there is something that is orange*; part of what connects these beliefs (and what explains the rationality of the move from one to the other) is that their contents involve the Fregean sense *is orange*.

By contrast, we might say that the move from the belief, *the cat is orange*, to the belief, $2 + 2 = 4$, is a truth-truth transition, just because the latter belief is necessarily true, so it is true whenever the former belief is. But there is no semantic connection between the contents of the beliefs, so the belief about the cat does not make the mathematical belief rational in any sense that can be used to explain epistemic justification.

Let me further illustrate my point with a thought experiment. Imagine that Suzie is oblivious of the fact that she is being manipulated by a bored deity in the following way. First, the deity manipulates the connections in Suzie's brain in such a way that, whenever she has a visual experience as of a black cross, she believes that Angela Merkel is in Berlin, and that, whenever she has a visual experience as of a green circle, she believes that Angela Merkel is in Paris. Whenever Suzie sees a black cross and therefore believes that Merkel is in Berlin, our bored deity simultaneously relocates Merkel to Berlin. Whenever Suzie sees a green circle and comes to believe that Merkel is in Paris, the deity relocates Merkel to Paris.

In this scenario, Suzie's visual experiences are correct and reliable. Moreover, that the experiences are correct guarantees the truth of her beliefs, thanks to the deity's intervention. Yet, intuitively, her beliefs that Merkel is in Berlin or, respectively, in Paris, are not justified by her experiences. This is because the content of her beliefs is completely unrelated to the content of her visual experiences.

What we need for a successful account of perceptual justification, then, is a story of how the specific content of a perceptual experience can be relevant to the justificatory status of a belief with a (semantically related) specific content. To be of use to the Modest Nonconceptualist, this story has to make do without an appeal to Fregean senses that constitute both the perceptual content and the belief content based on it.

To sum up: For a convincing account of the justificatory relation between experience and belief (an account of how there can be content-sensitive correctness-truth transitions (CSCTTs)), the Modest Nonconceptualist needs (a) a notion of experience content that is tied to correctness (or truth) conditions; (b) an account of how the transition from perceptual experience to belief can be a correctness-truth

transition; (c) an account of how there can be *unmediated rational transitions* from experience to belief due to the content of experience, not to some other property of experience about which we reflect; and (d) something that can play the role that concepts play in standard inferences and provide a *semantic tie* between experience and belief content.[36]

#### 7.3.2.3 The Modest Nonconceptualist Account of Perceptual Justification

So how can perceptual experience bear justificatory relations to perceptually based belief even if it does not have a propositional and conceptual content? How can experience meet requirements (a)–(d)?

As we have seen, satisfying requirement (a) is no problem for nonconceptual content. It is defined by correctness conditions. (See, again, my presentation of the notion of scenario content in Sect. 2.1.2.4.)

Given that nonconceptual content can meet condition (a), it is easy to see how it can also meet condition (b). The relation between a perceptual experience and a perceptual belief (and their contents) can constitute a correctness-truth transition because it involves two states with correctness or truth conditions. Plausibly, for a perceptually based belief to be justified, the following has to hold: The belief's truth (or the truth of its Fregean content) is probable if the perceptual experience that it is based on (or its scenario content) is correct.

For example, if my visual experience of a computer screen located in front of me is itself correct, it guarantees the truth of my perceptually based belief that there is a computer screen in front of me. What remains is the additional question of how my perceptual experience manages to make *just this* belief likely to be true, a fact that I will try to explain in my explication of how nonconceptual content can meet requirement (d).

How can the justificatory relation between the experience and the perceptual belief be immediate, according to Modest Nonconceptualism (as is required by (c))? The CSCT transition from a perceptual experience to a perceptually based belief does not involve any conscious (analogues of) inferential steps. Let me follow Peacocke's explication here. According to him, given an experience with a certain content, I find it "primitively compelling" to exercise my corresponding conceptual

[36] A further requirement might be added. For it might seem that, if perceptual content meets the above requirements, then the same will be true of the information that is processed in my retinas as I am looking at the computer screen. The correctness of the respective informational state of my eye guarantees that my belief that there is a computer screen in front of me is true. Still, it sounds very odd to say that the informational states of my retinas justify my empirical beliefs. Here is one reason why: My perceptual experience is a (phenomenally) conscious mental state. I am conscious of the representational content of my experience merely by undergoing the experience. So this experience and its specific content can be *my very own* reason for believing that there is a computer screen. I will get to this issue, which relates to the epistemological worry from Sect. 3.4.2, in the following section; I will cast doubt on the retina's capacity for genuine representation in Chap. 8.

abilities so as to form a belief that represents, at least in part, the same external states of affairs as my experience.[37] The question that still has to be answered is how I can be compelled to exercise just the right conceptual abilities, given that the CSCT transition is not a standard inference which involves the same kind of conceptual items on both sides of the inference, which takes us to crucial point (d).

So how can the semantic relation between experience and belief content be established if it is true that they are not both constituted by the same kind of conceptual entities? Think again of the example of my perceptual experience representing a computer screen to be located in front of me and of the belief that there is a computer screen in front of me. What both of these mental states have in common is not that they are constituted by the same kind of entities as regards what is *internal* to the subject, but that they both represent the same *external* state of affairs.

It is possible for there to be a semantic relation between a perceptual experience and the belief based on it because both mental states represent the same worldly states of affairs. This we might call their *externally individuated* content. That the subject's experience correctly represents certain states of affairs obtaining in her environment has a logical import for whether her belief, which is directed at some of the same states of affairs, which are constituted by the same objects instantiating the same properties, is true. It is in virtue of the experience's own content that I form the belief that is directed at these states of affairs in the first place. This is a semantic relation between externally individuated contents that can underwrite a correctness-truth transition. In virtue of this relation, (with the added ingredient that, as far as the subject can tell, the experience is probably correct)[38] the experience justifies the belief.

For example, my visual experience represents the computer screen to be in front of me; it represents it to be rectangular and to have a certain size and color; it represents the letters on the screen to have certain shapes, colors, and sizes, and many additional details I will not enumerate here. Sometimes, in virtue of having this kind of experience, I form the belief that there is a computer screen in front of me. In the standard cases I am talking about, my experience causes me to form this belief.

When confronted with an experience representing the computer screen to be located in front of me, I find it primitively compelling to form a belief representing that the computer screen is in front of me. The obtaining of the state of affairs represented by my experience makes it probable (even guarantees) that the state of affairs represented by my belief obtains as well. So, if I undergo the perceptual experience, I am justified to form the belief.[39] This is true unless I have defeating

[37] See, e.g., Peacocke (1992, 13). I introduced this idea in Sect. 2.2.1.3.

[38] More on this in Sect. 7.3.3.4.

[39] Markie (2005, 349) brings up an interesting worry about this sort of claim. (For this issue, also see Hopp 2011, 100.) For instance, how can my experience representing the computer screen to be located in front of me make my belief that the computer screen is in front of me rational, given

reasons not to take my experience at face value, as, for instance, when I undergo the Müller-Lyer illusion and believe that it is an illusion. In this case, the obtaining of the state of affairs represented by my visual experience guarantees that the state of affairs, represented by my belief, that the two lines in the diagram differ in length, obtains as well. But in the light of my beliefs it is *not* probable that my experience is correct in the first place, that the state of affairs represented by it obtains.[40]

Experience and belief have (partly) the same external content. The idea is pretty straightforward in situations in which both mental states are veridical, for instance, if the computer screen represented by experience and belief is indeed in front of the perceiver. In this situation, my experience and belief both represent (partly) the same obtaining worldly states of affairs, so in this sense, they clearly both have the same content, as long as we blank out the differences in content that are internal to the subject: Perceptual content consists in a spatial property type and belief content in a Fregean proposition.

The Modest Nonconceptualist distinction between internal and external content corresponds to differences between an extensional and an intensional understanding of 'content'[41]: Both Fregean propositions and scenario contents are intensional mental contents, and both of them are shaped to a great extent by internal facts about the thinker or perceiver. Extensional views of content include Russellianism and the view that equates content with possible worlds. These kinds of content consist in items 'out there' in the world; facts about the subject's internal states are not directly significant for such contents. Likewise, worldly states of affairs, which I take to be instantiations of properties in the subject's environment, are extensional or external contents.[42]

But what do experience and belief have in common in a situation in which they are not veridical, e.g. in a case of hallucination? The externally individuated content that both experience and belief have in common is the state of affairs that *would obtain* in the subject's environment if the experience and belief *were* veridical. This is how, in case of illusion or hallucination, experience and belief can have the same externally individuated content. They can represent the same states of affairs, and therefore a perceptual experience can have a bearing on the belief based on it.

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that both have the same external content? Circular reasoning, in which the conclusion is supported only by itself, is not normally taken to make a conclusion rational. See also McDowell's claim, mentioned above, that this is a "stuttering" form of inference.

My reply is that the point of this transition is not for the subject to arrive at completely new and surprising beliefs from her perceptual experiences, but for certain external contents to become available to her belief-forming and action-guiding processes.

Note again that my perceptual experience represents a myriad of details that my belief leaves out. To be exact then, experience and belief have only partially the same external content.

[40] Again, see Sect. 7.3.3.4 for more details.

[41] Thanks to Assaf Weksler for suggesting this.

[42] For this view of states of affairs, see Armstrong (2009). Note that the actual world scene that gives the correctness conditions of the scenario content of a perceptual experience is just such an instantiation of the spatial type constituting the scenario content.

In what follows, I will use the term 'external content' for externally individuated content as I have just specified it.[43]

McDowell (2007, 248) refers to the same distinction between 'internal' and 'external' content by contrasting the form and the matter of a content. Two contents can be materially identical, though formally distinct. In my example, the matter of my belief and of my experience of the computer screen's being located in front of me is partially the same, but their form is different, according to the nonconceptualist.[44]

I want to emphasize that the proposed CSCT transitions are not transitions from a correct perceptual content to a true belief content in which no relevance can be attributed to the content of the perceptual experience. It is the specific content of my perceptual experience that leads to my forming the corresponding belief. When I am primitively compelled to exercise the right concepts and to form the corresponding belief in the face of my perceptual experience, the external content is (partially) preserved. This is how there can be a correctness-truth transition between perceptual experience and belief. If the scenario content of the experience is correct, the Fregean content of a belief that is correctly based on it is (probably) true. The way my perceptual belief represents my environment to be will then be made probably true by the way my perceptual experience represents my environment to be.[45] As Heck puts it,

> 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. (Heck 2000, 504/505)

Let me conclude my defense against the second epistemological objection. The Modest Nonconceptualist faces the apparent dilemma that she cannot deny the conceptualist's premise (1) (if a mental state is fit to justify a belief, then its content is fit to be a premise in an inference, the conclusion of which is the belief's content)

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[43] What about perceptual experiences of impossible or contradictory states of affairs, such as the waterfall illusion or an experience of an Escher print? In my discussion of the waterfall illusion and of some synesthete's visual experiences in Chap. 5, I argued that it is possible to have perceptual experiences with contents involving incompatible properties, but impossible to believe a contradiction. The external content of such an experience consists in the states of affairs that would obtain in the subject's line of sight, say, if the experience were veridical—even if the only situation in which this could happen is an impossible one.

Note that this does not conflict with my claim in Chap. 5 that it is impossible to believe a contradiction. For talk of the impossible state of affairs that would have to be obtain for the experience to be correct does not imply that anyone can genuinely *believe* what would have to be instantiated in order for the experience to be correct.

[44] He claims that it is not problematic for the conceptualist that a cat, for example, can be said to have perceptual content with a certain matter, in this sense. I am not sure why this would be unproblematic, unless he thinks that the 'content' involved here is not genuine—see Chap. 8.

[45] Again, for internalist justification, we need to add that, as far as the subject can tell, the experience is probably correct.

Relating this to my discussion of the first version of the epistemic objection, we can see that the normative bearing that a scenario content has on the Fregean content of a belief comes in through the states of affairs represented by the scenario content and by the Fregean proposition.

without abandoning her internalist foundationalist commitments, but that she cannot deny premise (3) either (that potential premises in inferences to Fregean conclusions are themselves Fregean propositions), so that nonconceptual/non-propositional content cannot play the role of a premise since it does not fit the bill.

I argued—against the inferentialist claim stated by premise (1)—that a belief can be justified via a content-sensitive correctness-truth transition from a perceptual experience to the belief. On the Modest Nonconceptualist picture, the justifying transition takes place in virtue of the specific nonconceptual/non-propositional and conceptual/propositional contents involved. This is feasible because perceptual content is (a) defined by correctness conditions, because there can (b) be correctness-truth transitions such that the probable correctness of an experience makes the truth of a belief probable, because (c) the subject is primitively compelled to form appropriate beliefs in response to her experiences, and because (d) there can be a semantic relation between perceptual experience and belief because both can have the same external content. So a belief content can, for instance, be required or made probable by a perceptual content even if we are concerned with two internally different kinds of content.

My CSCTT account of perceptual justification allows me to complete my defense against the critics, as promised in Sect. 3.4.2. Modest Nonconceptualism respects the principle of believability because the subject can believe what she sees as far as the *external* content of her visual experience and belief goes. Experiences and beliefs can be, and often are, directed at the same worldly states of affairs. As to the importation model of perceptual justification, I concede that Modest Nonconceptualism has some similarities to it: The correctness-truth transition relies on the relation between the states of affairs represented by the experience and those represented by the belief. These states of affairs, conceived as the external content of experience and belief, constitute a kind of content that both have in common. On the other hand, I do insist on distinct internal contents to account for the subject's perceptual and cognitive take on the world, respectively. Finally, I can do justice to the Publicity Constraint because our need for intersubjectively shared content in accounts of linguistic communication and of action can be met by the external content of our mental states.

Let me address one worry about Modest Nonconceptualism immediately, before tackling four further problems in the next few sections. Back in Sect. 3.4.2, I claimed that it is not acceptable for participants in the nonconceptualism debate to ascribe two distinct phenomenal contents to perceptual experience in order to answer to the content worry, the epistemological worry, and the phenomenological worry. Let me be clear that my view does not violate this requirement. Internalistically conceived content corresponds as closely as possible to how the world strikes the perceiver. Externalistically conceived content consists just in those states of affairs that a mental state is directed at or which it represents. So, Modest Nonconceptualism does not amount to saying that experience has two distinct phenomenal contents that are on a par with each other, or that, for instance, the experience has a Fregean content and, on the side, a Russellian content. Rather, my view is that when we start by looking at how the world strikes a perceiver, we should first acknowledge a kind

of content that stays true to *how* the world strikes the perceiver. Second, however, we can acknowledge that *the world* strikes the perceiver. We can understand the relevant section of the world as a kind of external content that an experience and a belief may both be directed at. In a sense, the external content is swallowed up by the internal content, for the former consists of the states of affairs which, by striking the perceiver in a particular way, make up the latter.[46]

### *7.3.3 Problems for the Modest Nonconceptualist Account*

Four important problems that can be raised for the CSCTT account of perceptual justification will be addressed and rebutted in the following. The first is concerned with the limitation of external contents as justifiers of basic beliefs with Fregean contents. The second is based on the worry that, given that the contents of experience and belief differ internally, it is not clear how their external contents can be held constant. The third problem relates to my argument in Sect. 3.4.2 that belief contents are conceptual and propositional because they are involved in inferential relations. The final problem is whether the Modest Nonconceptualist account is compatible with the possibility of defeat for perceptual justification.

#### 7.3.3.1 The First Problem: Justificatory Limitations of External Contents

There might be some doubts about whether external content can account for all the aspects of basic belief content that can be justified by perceptual experience.[47] One fact about perceptual content that is obvious from introspection is that it is normally, if not necessarily, egocentric. For instance, my visual experience represents the computer screen, and it represents it to be *in front of me*. Similar things are true of typical basic beliefs about my environment. I believe, for example, that there is a computer screen in front of *me*.

Such egocentric elements of basic belief contents or of perceptual contents are easy to account for on an intensional view of content. On a Fregean view, e.g., they can be captured by a specific, indexical *mode of presentation* of the perceiver. Moreover, a scenario content is a spatial type defined by its origin and axes starting from it, along which the properties constituting the content are arranged.[48]

[46] Recall that for scenario content, the state of affairs represented just is the instantiation of the spatial type that the scenario content consists in.

[47] Thanks again to Assaf Weksler for raising this issue and pointing me towards a solution.

[48] Also, see Peacocke's elaborate account of positioned scenario contents and of how a first-person concept can be acquired based on them (Peacocke 1992, 64–73). His most recent thoughts on this can be found in Peacocke (2015), where he deals explicitly with the justification (or entitlement, as he says) of first-person thoughts on the basis of nonconceptual perceptual experience.

Unfortunately, they may cause trouble for my external content: Any theory of perceptual justification has to be able to explain how perceptual experience can justify basic beliefs about *me*, not just beliefs about *the perceiver*. After all, the most natural case is that my perception of the computer screen in front of me justifies my beliefs that there is a computer screen in front of me or that I am looking at a computer screen. The justification of these beliefs seems to be direct, and there seems to be no need for additional inferences (taking me from beliefs about the perceiver to beliefs about me) for these basic beliefs to be justified.

My opponent might argue, then, that an account of justification relying on external content cannot do the trick—an account of the justification of basic indexical and egocentric beliefs requires reference to internal aspects of the thinker or perceiver, e.g. by introducing indexical modes of presentation; but perceptual justification, according to the Modest Nonconceptualist, can only rely on external contents; so I cannot provide an account of the justification of the indexical and egocentric aspects of basic belief.

I think this is a serious issue; but let me suggest a solution for it. Internal aspects of content, such as modes of presentation, are not needed for egocentric content. An extensional understanding of content can accommodate this requirement because it is possible for external content to be *centered*. As an example, take a centered possible world, an entity that Andy Egan describes as follows: "A *centered world* is to a possible world what a map with a 'you are here' arrow added is to an arrowless map. Centered worlds single out not just a way for the world to be, but a location within the world." (Egan 2006, 518)[49]

So what is needed, on the Modest Nonconceptualist account, for the possibility of direct perceptual justification of egocentric basic beliefs? The external contents of my perceptual experience as well as of my basic belief have to have a center that is independent of an exercise of indexical concepts. It is highly plausible that they do—perceptual experience does not represent the world in the way an "arrowless" map does, treating each represented item equally; instead, its content is constituted by a center (the perceiver's location), in relation to which things are represented to be close by or far away, for instance. This is why scenario content, which accommodates these data, is much better suited to match perceptual experience than a Russellian proposition.

Think back to my elaborations in Sects. 2.1.3 and 3.4.2 about how the content we ought to ascribe to experience is constrained by the subject's perceptual perspective on the world.[50] What an experience represents is restricted by its phenomenology, by how the world strikes the subject in experience. This narrows down which *states of affairs* may be represented as an experience's external content, for it is never the whole world that strikes the subject a certain way, but only her very limited

[49]Note that Peacocke suggests that his scenario contents bear similarities to possible worlds propositions. See Peacocke (1992, 240/241).

[50]Recall that this was motivated by, for instance, the transparency intuition, the intuition that perceptual experience is our openness to the world, and the phenomenological worry underlying the nonconceptualism debate.

surroundings. In visual experience, for instance, what strikes me is things and their properties in my field of vision, things that are not obscured by other objects and that are not too far away. Moreover, I visually experience perceiver-relative properties, such as the distance of objects from myself, or that they are on my left or my right side. Finally, I experience these objects and properties in relation to a center (viz. myself).

This suggests that the scenario content's centered structure is reflected in the states of affairs that are its instantiations. According to Peacocke, the scene that instantiates the scenario, if it is correct, consists in "the volume of the real world around the perceiver at the time of the experience, *with an origin and axes in the real world fixed in accordance with the labeling in the scenario.*" (Peacocke 1992, 64, my emphasis) Plausibly, then, perceptual experience represents *centered states of affairs*. These are states of affairs concerning the perceiver's immediate environment, involving her location (Peacocke's center) and the relations (captured by Peacocke's axes) in which objects and properties stand to her. A perceptual experience can justify beliefs that pick out some of these states of affairs, e.g. the egocentric/indexical belief that there is a computer screen in front of me.

The Modest Nonconceptualist solution to the problem, then, is to point out that the external content or matter of perceptual experience and of basic belief is constituted by perceiver-dependent, or centered, states of affairs. Perceptual experience represents things that are in the vicinity of the perceiver, and it represents them to be far away or close by, to be bigger or smaller or more or less loud, depending on the distance to the perceiver, and so on. Finally, it represents everything in relation to the subject and her location. Even the *subject matter* of perceptual experience includes such perceiver-relative properties (and thus consists in centered states of affairs), independently of the form of perceptual content. Representation of such perceiver-relative states of affairs can be passed on to basic beliefs. A belief content that can be expressed by 'there is a computer screen in front of me' will have an egocentric external content as well, in that it concerns the computer screen that the perceptual experience locates to be right in front of the subject.

A related worry is that different Fregean contents are fit to justify different beliefs, even if they correspond to the same worldly state of affairs.[51] As I argued in Sect. 3.4.2, Mary Jane's belief that there is a superhero in front of her is justified by her belief that Spiderman is standing in front of her, but not by her belief that Peter Parker is standing in front of her. Yet as far as the external content of these beliefs is concerned, it consist in one and the same state of affairs.

Analogous cases can be construed for perceptual justification. Imagine that Mary Jane has a visual experience of Peter Parker, all dressed up in his Spiderman outfit, coming up to her. Does this justify her belief that there is Spiderman, or rather her belief that there is Peter Parker? Given that the external content of her experience guarantees or makes probable the truth of either belief, it would seem that it justifies

[51] Thanks to both Timothy Williamson and Susanne Mantel for raising this issue.

both of them. But we are imagining that she is not aware that Peter Parker is Spiderman, so that for her, the belief that there is Peter Parker is not perceptually justified, even though the belief that there is Spiderman is.

For my reply, the following two factors are relevant. First, we have to be clear on which properties are represented by experience as part of its external content; second, it is relevant which recognitional concepts the subject is able to (or primitively compelled to) exercise in immediate reaction to a particular perceptual experience. As to the first factor, it may be (a) that only strictly perceptible properties such as shade of color, brightness, or shape are represented; (b) that objects such as men, rocks, or chairs are also represented; (c) that even sophisticated properties or objects are represented, e.g. computer screens, husbands and wives, or BMWs.[52] Accordingly, it may be (a) that Mary Jane's experience represents a moving blue and red surface with a particular pattern and a certain (humanoid) shape to be in front of her, or (b) that her experience represents a human figure in blue and red clothes to be in front of her, or (c) that her experience represents Spiderman in his blue and red Spiderman suit to be in front of her.

As to the second factor, Mary Jane may be able to exercise, in immediate reaction to her experience, the recognitional concept *Spiderman* or the recognitional concept *Peter Parker*.[53] Which recognitional concept she possesses depends on which judgments she finds primitively compelling to make, given a visual experience of a man in a Spiderman outfit.[54] Plausibly, her *Spiderman* concept is a concept that she is primitively compelled to exercise in beliefs such as *there is Spiderman* when she sees Spiderman. The same is not true of her *Peter Parker* concept, unless she knows of his secret identity and is used, in personal encounters with Spiderman, to think of him as Peter Parker.

Here is my solution of the problem, then. If experience represents only strictly perceptible properties, there is no problem for the Modest Nonconceptualist account. For in this case, Mary Jane's external perceptual content by itself is not sufficient to justify her Peter Parker belief—the obtaining of the state of affairs represented by her experience does not make the obtaining of the state of affairs represented by her *Peter Parker* or her *Spiderman* belief terribly likely. She will need additional background beliefs, such as *something that looks like this is Spiderman (Peter Parker)*.

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[52](a), (b), and (c) are not supposed to comprise clearly distinct categories. Rather, the idea is that there is a spectrum of properties and objects, from very basic to very sophisticated, that experience can be conceived to represent. Siegel (2006) discusses which properties are represented by experience and draws similar distinctions.

[53]She will certainly be able to exercise other concepts, such as the perceptual-demonstrative concept *that*, for instance in the belief *that is a guy in a costume* or the recognitional concept *superhero*, as in the belief *a superhero is coming up to me*. This is not problematic, however, for this gives us a *belief* from which Mary Jane can infer to beliefs about Spiderman or Peter Parker. That is, we can appeal to standard inferential justification and thus to the Fregean senses involved in the respective belief contents to explain why her *Spiderman* belief may be justified even though her *Peter Parker* belief is not.

[54]More on this in the next section.

The situation is more difficult in cases (b) and (c), where her experience indeed represents a state of affairs that makes it likely (or guarantees) that the state of affairs represented by her belief obtains.[55] In these cases, the second factor comes into play. If she possesses the recognitional concept *Spiderman*, but not the recognitional concept *Peter Parker* that is tied in with visual experiences of a man in certain blue and red clothes or, respectively, Peter Parker in his Spiderman outfit, then her experience in cases (b) and (c) is fit immediately to justify her belief that there is Spiderman, but not her belief that there is Peter Parker. Plausibly, which of Mary Jane's perceptually based beliefs are justified is constrained by the recognitional capacities she can bring to bear on her perceptual experiences.[56]

But what of the fact that, nonetheless, the correctness of her experience in cases (b) and (c) makes probable or, respectively, guarantees the truth of her *Peter Parker* belief? I want to say that, similarly to propositional justification, her external perceptual content stands in the right kind of relation to the content of her belief that there is Peter Parker so that the former *can* in principle justify the latter. However, if she does not possess the relevant recognitional concept, she cannot appropriately base her *Peter Parker* belief on her visual experience.[57]

#### 7.3.3.2 The Second Problem: Maintaining the Same External Content

A further issue for the Modest Nonconceptualist account is that it remains mysterious how a subject can manage to form beliefs whose contents correspond to the contents of the experiences they are based on. How does the believer manage to maintain the same external content, assuming that the experience and the belief based on it are internally as different as the nonconceptualist takes them to be? After

[55]In the Marvel universe, if Mary Jane is in fact facing a man in that particular blue and red outfit, then this is probably Peter Parker/Spiderman, so it is *probably* the case that there is Peter Parker/Spiderman. If Spiderman in his Spiderman outfit is in front of her, this *guarantees* that there is Peter Parker/Spiderman.

This constitutes a further difference between the Modest Nonconceptualist's and Hopp's accounts of perceptual justification: According to Modest Nonconceptualism, the most basic form of perceptual justification can take place between experiences and beliefs that are not concerned with strictly the same states of affairs. According to Hopp (2011, 212), immediate perceptual justification works only if the states of affairs that the belief is directed at involve the very objects present in perception.

[56]It is also relevant whether her experience is probably correct, as far as she can tell. Depending on what her experience represents, different beliefs will be able to cast doubt on the trustworthiness of her experience. I leave out this complication here.

This reply also deals with speckled-hen type objections: The hen and its say 45 speckles may well be represented by my visual experience, but this does not help me acquire justified beliefs about the number of speckles as long as I lack the recognitional concepts.

[57]Further complications can be introduced by considering the justificatory relevance of Fregean senses that may be elements of the minimally nonconceptual contents of perceptual experience. I will leave this issue to one side.

all, aside from the environmental states of affairs that are represented, the two kinds of mental states have two different kinds of content. Here again, the difference to standard inferential transitions is salient. The same content cannot be maintained by simply using the same conceptual components twice.

Let me illustrate this objection with an example. If I draw an inference from the belief *there is a computer screen in front of me* to *computer screens exist*, I can rely on the same conceptual component *computer screen* to make it possible for a semantic, and thereby inferential, relation to hold. If I move from an experience with, say, the scenario content representing a computer screen to be in front of me to the Fregean proposition *there is a computer screen in front of me*, there is nothing internal to me that can explain how I manage to think about the same state of affairs that I experience.[58]

The problem might be relatively easy to solve if all contents involved in the logical relation were dependent on systemic representations.[59] According to this distinction, experiences involve systemic representations and therefore owe their content to the system they are a part of and to the system's evolutionary history. Content-sensitive transitions between contents of systemic representations, if such there are, might plausibly be taken to be hard-wired into the system. What can be represented is fixed phylogenetically, and so are the transitions between such contents.

Beliefs, on the other hand, are based on what Dretske calls acquired representations. Their contents depend on facts outside the system—they are determined ontogenetically, by what the system learns during its lifetime. Consequently, the nonconceptualist will have to provide an account of content-sensitive transitions that result in mental states whose contents are not hard-wired, but contingent on what the subject has learned during her life. It is not clear from birth which concepts this will be. So how does the subject manage to move from a perceptual content to a belief content made probable by it?

An answer to this question can be provided if we keep in mind that we acquire our concepts on the basis of our perceptual experiences.[60] Let's see how Peacocke's account of perceptual concepts, which I introduced in Sect. 2.2.1.3, handles the problem. Perceptual concepts are concepts that are completely based on perception or, more closely to Peacocke's account, whose possession conditions can be captured by talking about a subject's cognitive reactions to specific perceptual experiences (viz. those experiences that the concept is based on).

According to Peacocke, that a subject possesses a *perceptual* concept, for example the concept *round*, means that she will be primitively compelled to believe of an object that is represented to be round in her visual field that *that's round*. The

[58] What is it that remains constant in the case of inference between two beliefs? I claim that it is the Fregean sense as well as the conceptual ability the subject exercises. See Sect. 3.4.2.

[59] Cf. Dretske (1995), who distinguishes acquired and systemic representations.

[60] Peacocke and Burge make use of this fact. See Peacocke (1992, 8; 80), Peacocke (2001a), and Burge (2003, 540–542).

subject's perceptual concept *round* is *defined* as the concept she will be compelled to exercise in those situations in which her experience represents there to be something round. The fact that she exercises this concept in this way in the apparent presence of round things makes it the concept it is. It is rational for the subject to move from the perceptual experience to the belief *that's round* because it is the specific content of the experience itself that defines the concept *round* that she employs in her belief. The transition from the experience to the belief is a CSCTT because the perceptual concept involved in the belief is itself defined by the specific experience, its content, and its specific correctness conditions.

In a similar vein, Burge stresses the fact that the reference of our most basic perceptual concepts is fixed via our perceptual experiences that our perceptual beliefs are based on. We correctly conceptualize elements of a perceptual experience if the reference of the experience is preserved in the belief. The perceptual concepts (especially their reference) are *constituted* by the perceptual experiences that they are conceptualizations of. That is to say, as long as I correctly conceptualize my perceptual experience of something round, the reference and meaning of my perceptual concept *round* is parasitic on what my perceptual experience represents (Burge 2003, 540–542).

What can we learn from these accounts? Well, there is no need to worry about how we can manage to have a belief about what we experience. Even though we move from one sort of internal content, involving a certain kind of component, to another sort of internal content, involving a completely different kind of component, external content can be preserved. For our perceptual concepts are acquired on the basis of certain experiential contents; a perceptual concept's reference is parasitic on the external content of the corresponding perceptual experience. To find out how to individuate a specific perceptual concept, we have to find out in the presence of which perceptual experiences the subject is willing to judge this concept of an object. It is true that which perceptual concepts a subject acquires, what her concepts are *of*, depends on the subject's ontogenetic history. But what these concepts are of is determined by the experiences they are based on; this is how she knows how to employ the right perceptual concepts in response to her perceptual experiences.

#### 7.3.3.3 The Third Problem: Conceptual Content by Parity of Reasoning

Above, in Sect. 3.4.2 and in Chap. 5, I claimed that one of the reasons why we should assume that thought content has a conceptual and propositional structure is that thoughts, and particularly beliefs, are involved in inferential relations. We need to assume that concepts are involved in thought to explain how one belief can be inferentially related to another. In this section, I claim that the contents of perceptual experience stand in justificatory relations to the contents of perceptually based beliefs. Shouldn't I then say that perceptual experience has conceptual and propositional content also?

This differs from the second objection, to which I have already responded, according to which the only way to account for the justification of beliefs with

Fregean content is to assume that all contents involved are Fregean propositions. The current objection tries to point out an inconsistency in the Modest Nonconceptualist treatment of experiential content and of concepts.

In reply, note first that what is at stake here are not inferential relations, but content-sensitive correctness-truth transitions. A CSCTT is a kind of semantic transition that relies only on external content, not on the recurrence of the same kind of conceptual items in premises and conclusion. But why can't we just stick with conceptual content for all mental states and do without the complicated CSCTT account of perceptual justification?

Let me leave to one side the phenomenological worry, which by itself backs the ascription of nonconceptual and non-propositional content to perceptual experience. Instead, I want to emphasize that there are some relevant differences between transitions from belief to belief and transitions from perceptual experience to belief. While any belief content can play the role of conclusion as well as premise in an inferential relation, perceptual contents can serve only as starting-points to CSCT transitions. Relatedly, I can infer from the falseness of a belief (that I once accepted based on some other beliefs of mine) to the falseness of some of my original premise beliefs. For instance, imagine that at a certain time in his life, Otto believes that everything his parents tell him is true. His parents tell him that God exists, so he believes that God exists. If he later comes to believe for independent reasons that God does not exist, he can 'flip' his original inference and conclude that, since it is not true that God exists and his parents told him that God exists, not everything that his parents tell him is true. Otto's belief that his parents always tell him the truth is replaced by its negation.

Compare this with the Müller-Lyer illusion. When Otto is first confronted with the Müller-Lyer drawing, he directly comes to believe (via an unconscious CSCTT, I claim) that the two lines in the drawing are of different lengths. When he learns later in life that the lines are really of the same length, he cannot, by way of 'flipping' the transition, come to have an experience of the Müller-Lyer drawing that represents both lines to be the same length. He can certainly draw other conclusions—for instance, he can realize that he cannot always trust his senses—but it is simply impossible to arrive at a certain perceptual experience as (the CSCTT analogue of) a conclusion.[61]

The contrast between inferential justification and justification based on CSCT transitions can be strengthened by drawing a somewhat different picture of the relation between perceptual experience and perceptually based belief: Instead of likening a CSCT transition to an inference, it might be more appropriate to say

[61]This is not do deny that our concepts can influence what we see or hear, for instance, when we learn a new language or look at ambiguous figures. But this phenomenon is distinct from making a CSCT transition to an experience. Also, Otto might believe that he must have not looked at the drawing properly; but if he looks at it again, the perceptual illusion will not simply disappear, as did his cognitive illusion that his parents always tell the truth.

In addition, recall Peacocke's aforementioned example of my inability to have a perceptual experience of an object *o* that is green and in an almost completely dark room. See Sect. 3.4.1.2.

that the cognitive system 'translates' from one representational format to another so as to make a certain content accessible for inferential processing. Or, to avoid the representationalist language, our conceptual abilities are anchored in certain aspects of our perceptual contents. When I have a perceptual experience with a certain content, I find it primitively compelling to exercise certain conceptual abilities of mine to form a belief with a content corresponding to the content of my experience.

The result then, is not a "quasi-inferential", but rather a 'translational' relation between experiential contents and belief contents. Such a relation is nonetheless a semantic relation; if the translation is done correctly, the perceptual experience justifies the belief, and the correctness of the experience will make the belief's truth probable.[62]

Either way, it should be clear that perceptual experiences are not integrated into our inferential web of belief in the same way as beliefs. So it is appropriate that CSCT transitions rely on different mechanisms than inferential transitions, and that the Modest Nonconceptualist ascribes nonconceptual and non-propositional content to perceptual experience.

#### 7.3.3.4 The Fourth Problem: Perceptual Justification and Epistemic Defeat

The fourth challenge addressed in this section comes from Martin (2001).[63] It is to explain the *defeasibility* of perceptual justification. That a certain belief is defeasibly justified means that it is justified as long as no defeating reason is invoked that interferes the justification of the belief, either via rebutting evidence (supporting the negation of the belief content) or via undercutting evidence (showing that what is taken to support the belief cannot plausibly do so).

Here is an example of defeasible belief. (See Martin 2001, 445.) Otto's belief that there is a fire in the copse is *defeasibly* justified by his beliefs that there is smoke rising from the copse and that smoke means fire. For if Otto acquires a defeating reason, for instance via the belief that Martin is trying out his new smoke machine, he will stop being justified in believing that there is a fire in the copse. While he retains the two premise beliefs, the defeater prevents him from making the transition to the conclusion that there is a fire in the copse; moreover, it prevents the transition, if he were to make it, from conveying justification to the conclusion.

$B_1$ There is smoke rising from the copse.
$B_2$ Smoke means fire.

[62] This is hinted at in Heck (2000, 511).

[63] Martin criticizes Brewer's conceptualist account of perceptual justification. I will try to extend the issues he raises to my CSCTT account of perceptual justification. My response to this problem is similar to that presented by Hopp (2011, 216–219). Note again that Hopp's view generally differs from Modest Nonconceptualism in that he does not take experience and belief to be on a par as representational states directed at the world.

The transition to

$B_3$ There is a fire in the copse.

is blocked by

$B_4$ Martin is trying out his new smoke machine in the copse.

The explanation is that ($B_2$) is only a rough-and-ready generalization; it states by no means that there is a necessary connection between smoke and fire. It allows for exceptions, in which smoke does not mean fire. If Otto has reason to believe that such exceptional circumstances are in place (e.g., if he believes ($B_4$)), he is not justified to move from ($B_1$) and ($B_2$) to ($B_3$). ($B_4$) blocks this transition. Even if he were to move from ($B_1$) and ($B_2$) to ($B_3$), he would not be justified in holding ($B_3$), for his justification is defeated by ($B_4$).

Plausibly, perceptual justification is defeasible just as belief-based justification: Our perceptual experiences justify our perceptually based beliefs, unless we have reason to believe that our senses are misleading us or that what experience represents is not the case. Take the Müller-Lyer illusion. Naïve Otto's visual experience, which has a scenario content including lines A and B, of which line A is longer than line B, justifies his belief that line A is longer than line B. However, if he looks at the Müller-Lyer drawing and if he justifiably believes that both lines in the drawing are exactly the same length, he is not justified to believe what his experience represents, viz., that line A is longer than line B. His perceptual justification for this belief is defeated.

Per default, experience

$E_1$ —which represents line A to be longer than line B—

justifies Otto to believe

$B_3'$ Line A is longer than line B.

($B_3'$) has (in part) the same external content as ($E_1$); so the correctness of ($E_1$) requires the truth of ($B_3'$), and ($E_1$) justifies ($B_3'$). But if he has reason to believe

$B_4'$ The Müller-Lyer drawing merely makes it *look* as though line A is longer than line B even though they are equally long,

then ($E_1$) fails to justify ($B_3'$).

How does the defeating reason manage to destroy the justificatory power of Otto's CSCT transition to the belief that one line is longer than the other? In the current context, it does not help to suggest that there is an analogy between inferential justification and justification based on CSCTTs. One might suggest that ($E_1$) is analogous to ($B_1$). But even if this is true, there is no equivalent for ($B_2$) in the CSCTTs case. For Otto does not consciously infer from how the world appears to him, combined with a belief that,

$B_2'$ Normally, the world is as it appears,

to the belief ($B'_3$), *line A is longer than line B*. Rather, on the basis of his perceptual experience ($E_1$), he is primitively compelled to believe ($B'_3$).

I have claimed that ($B_4$) destroys Otto's defeasible justification for ($B_3$) because it entails that the rough-and-ready generalization ($B_2$) does not apply in Otto's specific circumstances. If there is no such generalization (such as ($B'_2$)) involved in justification via CSCT transitions, how can perceptual justification be defeasible at all, as it seems to be? It is not even true that the defeating evidence has a direct effect on the justifying perceptual experience itself, for Otto's visual experience of the Müller-Lyer drawing remains unchanged even after he adopts ($B'_4$) and realizes that it is just an illusion. (See Martin 2001, 349.)

To come at it from a different angle, the Modest Nonconceptualist claim is that an experience justifies a belief if the experience, if it is correct, makes the belief's truth probable (in virtue of their external contents). This relationship between an experience and a belief obtains no matter whether the subject acquires a defeater or not. As a consequence, it seems implausible that a defeating belief of the subject should be able to destroy the belief's perceptual justification.

The Modest Nonconceptualist can handle this challenge in the following way. Her account is that, per default, Otto's visual experience ($E_1$) justifies his perceptually based belief ($B'_3$) via a CSCT transition from the visual experience to the belief. For the justification acquired by default procedure, Otto does not have to reflect on whether he can trust his senses, on whether his perceptual experience represents the world correctly. He does not even need to be *able* to do so. Small children can be justified in their perceptually based beliefs before they are able to have beliefs about their own perceptual experiences or about their beliefs. In situations of this default kind, it is sufficient that in the light of the subject's other beliefs, his perceptual experience is probably correct or, in other words, as far as he can tell, nothing casts doubt on the authority of his visual experience.

This suggestion gives a very weak spin on the internalist claim introduced above in Sect. 7.1, that a justifier has to make a belief's truth likely, as far as the subject can tell, to justify it. For it reads the 'as far as the subject can tell' element here as a 'the subject is not aware of any reason not to trust her experience'. This claim is still compatible with internalism, though, for instance with the dogmatist variety of internalism which states that

> when you have an experience as of *p*'s being the case, you have a kind of justification for believing *p* that does not presuppose or rest on any other evidence or justification you may have. (Pryor 2000, 532)

Also, all will appear right to a subject who exercises immediately perception-based concepts when he is primitively compelled to do so, as when he acquires the belief that this is round when visually confronted with a round object. In this weak sense, the experience will make the truth of the belief likely, from the subject's perspective.

But this default situation changes when Otto forms a belief such as ($B'_4$), *the Müller-Lyer drawing merely makes it* look *as though line A is longer than line B even though they are equally long*. When he acquires this belief, he is in a position to reflect on the credentials of his perceptual experience, and he is obligated to do so.

($B'_4$), in a rational subject, will kick off a completely new reasoning process, involving second-order reflection on the subject's perceptual states and beliefs. Default perceptual justification does not require second-order reflection; defeating reasons for perceptual justification do. When Otto learns that ($B'_4$) is true, he will (and should) follow through something like the following reasoning process. While Otto looks at the Müller-Lyer drawing, ($E_1$) together with ($B'_4$) will lead to his embracing

$B'_1$ It looks as though line A is longer than line B.

Further, he will form the belief ($B'_2$), *normally, the world is as it appears*. The inference that Otto would normally be allowed to draw from ($B_1$) and ($B'_2$) to ($B'_3$), however, will be blocked by his realization that ($B'_4$) is true. So the defeating evidence plays a similar role in inferential justification and in justification via CSCTTs after all. In both cases, the defeating belief (($B_4$) and ($B'_4$), respectively) makes it rational for the subject to believe that a certain generalization (($B_2$) and ($B'_2$), respectively) does not apply in his current circumstances. If the subject were to draw the conclusion despite the defeating reason and embrace ($B_3$) or ($B'_3$), respectively, neither of these beliefs would be justified. What undermines their justification is not that any of the premises in the inference are false (($B_1$)/($B'_1$) or ($B_2$)/($B'_2$)), but that these generalizations allow for exceptions and that a further belief (($B_4$)/($B'_4$)) indicates that the subject's current circumstances are exceptional. That is to say, it is now not the case that the experience is probably correct, as far as the subject can tell. Instead, in the light of his other beliefs, it is likely that his experience is inaccurate. So, thanks to the defeater, his experience loses its justificatory powers.

The difference that remains is that, in the case of defeat of justification via CSCTTs, there is an additional perceptual experience that represents, in our example, line A to be longer than line B. This experience does not suddenly disappear when Otto realizes that it is illusory. And the perceiver's default inclination to make the CSCT transition to ($B'_3$) does not disappear either. What changes is which kind of attitude towards this experience and inclination is rational. Where, under normal circumstances, it is rational simply to believe one's senses, it is rational in the presence of defeaters such as ($B'_4$) not to take the step from the perceptual experience to the belief directly based on it. ($B'_3$) is therefore not justified.

Let me sum up the Modest Nonconceptualist defense against the second epistemological objection. Despite their different kinds of content, perceptual experiences can be reasons for perceptually based beliefs. There can be content-sensitive correctness-truth transitions from perceptual experiences to beliefs, which, in the absence of defeaters, make the truth of the relevant beliefs likely from the subject's perspective and thus justify the beliefs in question. Because nonconceptual content is defined by correctness conditions, it can, if correct, make the truth of a belief with a corresponding conceptual content likely. Even if there is a difference in 'format', both contents, individuated externally, can be semantically related. The subject can make correct transitions from experiences to beliefs with appropriately related external contents because the subject's perceptual concepts are anchored in the relevant perceptual contents. Even external contents can be egocentric, so that the justification of perceptually based egocentric beliefs is not problematic. Finally,

perceptual content remains nonconceptual, on the Modest Nonconceptualist picture, as there are significant differences between the ways belief contents are inferentially tied into the subject's web of beliefs and the ways in which perceptual contents are connected to the belief system via CSCT transitions.

Maybe at this point in the discussion, the conceptualist will concede that format of content is not an insurmountable obstacle for perceptual justification. But even if he makes this concession, he can increase the pressure and object that, on the nonconceptualist picture, perceptual reasons are not the *subject's* reasons and therefore irrelevant for justification. For a reason really to be *my* reason and thus to be relevant for internalist epistemic justification, it has to be cognitively accessible to me. And this is possible only if the reason consists in a conceptual content. This final version of the epistemological argument will be my topic in the next section.

## 7.4 The Third Objection: An Argument from Cognitive Access

So far, I have related the epistemological objection against nonconceptualism to Sellars's myth of the given, the claim that something that is not itself conceptual and propositional cannot bear justificatory relations to a belief content. I have defended nonconceptualism against McDowell's argument from the distinction between a space of normative reasons and a realm of empirical law. In the previous section, I have provided an account of perceptual justification via CSCT transitions from perceptual experiences to perceptual beliefs. Still, the Modest Nonconceptualist account will not put the conceptualist's epistemological concerns to rest. Part of what motivates the conceptualist is that he has a very demanding view of what it takes to justify (or to be someone's reason for) a belief. That is to say, conceptualists are typically *access* internalists with respect to epistemic justification. In this section, I will investigate whether their acceptance of access internalism is well motivated, and whether access internalism, in turn, can be used to disqualify nonconceptualism as a viable view on epistemological grounds.[64]

### *7.4.1 Access Internalism and Conceptualism*

The starting point of the current version of the conceptualist argument is the claim that only something that the subject can *access cognitively* in the right way can be a reason for belief; in simpler terms, only something that the subject can think about

[64]The argument is put forth or defended by Brewer (1999, 2005) and McDowell (1994a, 1998, 2009b). Critical discussion can be found in Byrne (2005), Peacocke (2001a), Chuard (n.d.), Lerman (2010), and Hopp (2011).

or believe can be an epistemic reason.[65] Why would a philosopher accept such a view of justification? Why not be an externalist and say that I can have reasons for my beliefs that I have no cognitive access to? There are several answers that the conceptualist provides: (i) reasons must motivate the believer; (ii) they have to be rationally evaluable; and (iii) they have to be articulable.

(i) Brewer appeals to the fact that reasons must *motivate* the believer. My epistemic reason is supposed to move me to accept the belief I now hold. So it cannot be something that is causally irrelevant to my holding this belief. Moreover, that the reason motivates my acceptance of the belief means that it involves motivating *mental states* of mine. But Brewer wants to draw an even stronger conclusion: What motivates me to accept a belief (when I am undergoing a justification process) is my *recognition* of my reason as a reason. Part of the causal explanation of why I form the belief in question must be that I somehow realize that I have a reason to do so (Brewer 1999, 155).

Why would Brewer add this extra condition, the very demanding idea that the subject has to recognize her reason as a reason? Note that this is a very strong reading of the internalist claim that reasons have to be accessible: Not only must the subject be able to think about, e.g., the content of her perceptual experiences; she also has to be able to grasp that perceptual experiences bear justificatory relations to the relevant beliefs.

Brewer's motivation is the following: Even when a subject acquires beliefs in accordance with objective epistemic rules, there are still two different ways this can be done. First, she can merely happen to acquire these beliefs in accordance with the rules; second, she can actually be guided by these rules. Being guided by the rules means that she actually realizes that her reasons are reasons, and that this realization plays an important role in why she acquires her beliefs. Only in this case does the fact that her reasons make her beliefs rational play a causal role for her acquisition of these beliefs. Otherwise, the fact that one mental state makes another rational is not relevant to an explanation of why the subject acquires the latter mental state. What guides the subject in the case in which she actually has a reason is her recognition of the reason as a reason. (See Brewer 1999, 165.)

Here is a quote in which Brewer tries to explain why we need the subject's own reasons in justification:

> [. . .] we are interested here not just in any old reasons which there may be for making judgments or holding beliefs—such as their simply happening to be true, or beneficial in some mysterious way to the subject's overall well-being—but only in reasons *for the subject* to do these things, to take things actually to be the way she believes them to be. These must be the subject's *own* reasons, which figure as such *from her point of view*, in virtue of her being in the sense experiential states which provide such reasons. (Brewer 2005, 219)

[65] What are reasons? In the current context, they are taken to be the contents (propositional or merely defined by correctness conditions) of mental states that play a role in justifying beliefs; derivatively, I will also speak of the mental states that have these contents as reasons.

Access internalism is introduced in Sect. 7.1.

Being the subject's own reason involves reason recognition because anything else would come down to her arriving at her belief at random, which is obviously not compatible with justification. She has to arrive at the belief as a result of the correct reasoning process, and she has to recognize this fact (see Brewer 2005, 220). Note that Brewer's argument leads to the slightly stronger claim that, not only do the reasons leading to the subject's belief have to be access*ible* to her, she has to *actually* access them as she is undergoing the relevant reasoning process.

McDowell makes a similar suggestion. He takes it that epistemic reasons have to be the subject's own reasons, which is to say that she has to form the corresponding beliefs because these reasons motivate *her herself*. It is her awareness of her reasons that gets her to accept the beliefs in question (cf. McDowell 1994a, 163). McDowell requires more than just that reasons have to be accessible—he suggests that, as the subject undergoes the reasoning process, she has to take actual note of her reasons, for otherwise they are not her own.

(ii) The second motivation for access internalism comes from McDowell: He says that to have a reason is, *eo ipso*, to be able to evaluate whether it really is a good reason and to evaluate the rest of one's belief system in the light of this reason. Rational relations have to be able to be revised if need be. To do so, the subject has to have cognitive access to the reasons at one end of these rational relations. Any rational relation (and therefore any elements constituting such a relation) has to be able to come under "the self-scrutiny of active thinking." (McDowell 1994a, 52)[66]

BonJour (2010b) makes basically the same point. He contends that "the basis for the justification is one that the person is able to (I) reflectively grasp and (II) to critically evaluate." (BonJour 2010b, 35) As a consequence, reasons have to be internal to the subject's first-person cognitive perspective. In order to critically evaluate a reason, I have to have this reason cognitively available to me in a strong sense. For instance, being able to go up to the bookcase and open the respective page in a dictionary does not make the information contained in the dictionary available to me in the required sense. Rather, I have to be able to access the justifying factors *by reflection alone*. To be able to critically evaluate a reason, I have to be able to actively notice the relevant elements of this reason; in *perceptual* justification specifically, I have to be able to actively notice all the relevant elements of my perceptual experience so that my experience can be a reason for my belief.

(iii) McDowell presents yet another argument why subjects have to be able to cognitively access their reasons. He says that "[i]n the reflective tradition we belong to, there is a time-honoured connection between reason and discourse." (McDowell 1994a, 165) For something to be a reason, it has to be possible to bring it up in conversation—it has to be articulable. This means that the reason can be given by the subject if she is asked to explain why she holds a certain belief. Being able to present a reason in this way presupposes that the subject can access the reason in her

[66]This argument also shows up in his recent McDowell (2009b, 129). McDowell puts special emphasis on the idea that no actual rational evaluation is needed, but only the capacity to assess one's reasons—apparently, his views in this respect have changed since *Mind and World*.

thoughts, that it is cognitively accessible. Leaving aside "time-honoured" traditions that may or may not carry any philosophical weight, McDowell's argument involves one aspect that is indeed relevant to the current discussion: It is plausible that, in standard situations, if a subject gives certain reasons for why she has a certain belief, these actually are her reasons. But if her true reasons are not normally cognitively accessible to her, she cannot normally articulate her reasons for her beliefs. A plausible theory of justification should not have this result.[67]

I have presented three motives for the conceptualist claim that we have to have cognitive access to our reasons: (i) reasons have to motivate the subject, (ii) they have to be able to come under rational scrutiny, and (iii) they have to be articulable. The claim comes in two degrees: the weaker claim is that reasons have to be accessible to the subject; the stronger claim is that they have to be accessed by the subject during the respective rational transition. The next step in the conceptualist argument is to claim that only mental states with conceptual content can be accessible to (or accessed by) the subject in the required way. Even if the nonconceptualist were to buy into the argument presented so far—what reason could there be for her to agree that the subject does not have the required access to her nonconceptual reasons?

There are three conceptualist arguments why the access requirement cannot be met by the nonconceptualist. One is based on McDowell's cyclist example (a), the next on Brewer's objections against second-order views of justification (b). The third argument, which I will only briefly discuss, relies on the claim that nonconceptual content is ineffable (c). Let's examine these arguments in turn.

(a) McDowell's cyclist example appears in the afterword to McDowell (1994a, 163–166) and is discussed at greater length in Brewer (1999, 161–169). McDowell uses the example to illustrate that experiences, conceived of as nonconceptual, may well be rationally related to perceptual beliefs, but that this does not ensure that they are cognitively accessible to the subject, or that they are the subject's own reasons. To show

> how it is that the explanandum is as it should be from the standpoint of rationality (for instance true, if the explanandum is a belief) [. . .] is not *eo ipso* to give the subject's reasons for whatever the explanation explains. The subject may not even have reasons. Consider, for instance, the bodily adjustments that a skilled cyclist makes in rounding curves. A satisfying explanation might show how it is that the movements are as they should be from the standpoint of rationality: suited to the end of staying balanced while making progress on the desired trajectory. But this is not to give the cyclist's reasons for making those movements. [. . .] [A] skilled cyclist makes such movements without needing reasons for doing so. Why would it not be similar with experience and judgement, if experiences had the non-conceptual content that Peacocke says they have? (McDowell 1994a, 163)

In this quote, McDowell suggests that a *nonconceptual* perceptual experience can make a belief 'rational'—but only in the way that a skilled cyclist's goal of staying

[67] Sometimes we may have reasons for our beliefs that we cannot become aware of, as when we have some repressed desires that prompt us to embrace certain beliefs. But it would be odd if this were the standard situation; even worse, it would cast doubt on the idea that we are epistemic subjects.

balanced in a curve at maximum speed can make his bodily movements in adjusting his position on the bike rational. From an external point of view, the reason why the cyclist adjusts his position on the bike is that this helps him keep his balance in the curve; it is rational for him to adjust his position in this way with respect to his goal of rounding the curve at high speed. But this is not to say that this reason is accessed by the cyclist as he performs his actions. As a matter of fact, the cyclist shifts his weight without having a reason (as in "the cyclist's reason") for this movement.

Similarly, the fact that a subject is undergoing a certain perceptual experience with a nonconceptual content might be able to make her holding a certain belief rational. From the standpoint of rationality, it is appropriate for her to believe that an object is round if she perceives it to be round. But, McDowell claims, this is not to say that it is the subject's own reason that leads to her belief. As I explained above in motivating the access requirement (see (i)), what McDowell thinks is necessary for a plausible account of justification is not reasons that an outsider can detect by taking the standpoint of rationality; it is reasons for which, as a matter of fact, the subject forms her beliefs. And this is not the case in perceptual justification if we conceive of perceptual experience as nonconceptual. For instance, the subject does not consciously think about the fact that her perceptual experience represents something round when she comes to believe that there is something round in front of her. Nonconceptual reasons, even if they are access*ible* to the subject, are not actually accessed during a reasoning process. Nonconceptualism cannot meet the demanding version of the access requirement.

(b) Brewer allows that perceptual experiences, if they were to have nonconceptual content, would be accessible to (or recognizable by) the subject. But, and this is the next problem for nonconceptualism, they are not accessible directly, but only via a second-order process. That is to say, to access the nonconceptual content of my experience, I have to form beliefs about my mental states and their contents and about their epistemic status. This is not a convincing account of justification.[68]

The conceptualist account, by contrast, can depict the subject as reasoning directly from a perceptual experience to the corresponding belief. A perceptual content, as something that is conceptual in form, can be grasped directly, and this includes a direct grasp of its *truth conditions* and of what it *entails*. This means that the subject can recognize the reason as a reason; in undergoing the perceptual experience, she has a grasp of what it can be used as a reason for. The condition that a reason has to be cognitively accessible (or even accessed during the reasoning process) can be met in a believable way.

The only way the nonconceptualist can allow for a subject to access or recognize her reasons, on the other hand, is by granting her very complex beliefs about how exactly the perceptual experience constitutes a reason for the belief in question. The subject needs a belief not only about her experience and its content, but also about what makes this experience a good reason for her belief, e.g., "I am having an experience which is such that it is required by the normal functioning of my

[68] A similar argument can be found in McDowell (1994a, 164/165).

perceptual systems that there be something square in front of me; therefore [. . .], the thing in question is square." (Brewer 1999, 162) To assume that normal thinkers are able to have this kind of belief or that they go through this kind of thought process in everyday reasoning is very implausible. Therefore, the nonconceptualist has no convincing theory of perceptual justification: The only way she can meet the accessibility condition for justification is by an untenable account of second-order access to perceptual experience.[69]

To sum up. The conceptualist argument consists of two distinct steps. In the first step, the conceptualist attempts to show that perceptual justification necessarily involves the subject's cognitive access to her reasons (that is, to the contents of her perceptual experiences). In the second step, he argues that nonconceptual content is not cognitively accessible (in the right way, to normal subjects) or, respectively, that it is not actually accessed during the rational transition from perceptual experience to perceptual belief. So, once the nonconceptualist concedes (as I have above) that every element of the content of all our perceptual experiences can constitute a reason for a belief, perceptual content is conceptual. Nonconceptualism is false. For nonconceptualism, as a view about the content of our *actual* experiences, is threatened by the argument as presented. To get from here to an argument for conceptualism, we would have to make sure that the premises in the argument state necessary claims.[70]

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[69] As to (c), Byrne (2005, 245) suggests an even stronger version of this objection, which I will only briefly mention here. He claims that, if we take nonconceptualism seriously, perceptual content turns out to be *ineffable*. (A similar worry is discernible in some of McDowell's writings, e.g. McDowell (1998); the point is related to his claim that reasons must be articulable.) The idea is that, while we can directly incorporate conceptual content into our beliefs, we can only *refer to* nonconceptual content. Byrne suggests that if we can do no more than that, one of the central arguments for nonconceptualism becomes unavailable. For we are unable to move from thinking about (as in referring to) our perceptual contents to the belief that perceptual content is fine-grained. His thought seems to be that, on the assumption of nonconceptualism, we can only think about perceptual content indirectly, e.g. by thinking 'The content of my current experience is as of something square'. But we would have to incorporate the details of experience *directly* into our belief contents to infer that perceptual content is fine-grained. (See Sect. 4.1 for the argument from the fineness of grain.)

As far as I can see, Byrne misunderstands what a content's being nonconceptual entails for the ways in which we can think about it. For one, we can do more than think about the content as a content; in thought, we can refer to its specific elements. For another, referring to its elements is good enough to draw the conclusions that the nonconceptualist needs. Compare thinking about the content of my experience with thinking about the content of a photograph. The photograph, as a pictorial representation, has a content that is uncontroversially nonconceptual. When I think about the photograph's content, I can think about its elements, say, a cat, the couch it is lying on, and the shapes and colors of both. I can then conclude that the content of the photograph is fine-grained, seeing as it represents more different shades of color than I possess concepts for. By analogy, the same is possible when I think about the nonconceptual content of my experience.

[70] Note that the argument directly addresses content versions of conceptualism and nonconceptualism. The only way in which it might rely on state conceptualism and on a transition from state conceptualism to content conceptualism comes in via premise (2). For the claim involved in it that, if a perceptual content is accessible, then it is conceptual, might be motivated as follows. If a

For a better overview of the weak version of the argument:

1 Any perceptual content involved in justifying a subject's beliefs is cognitively accessible to her.
2 Any perceptual content is accessible to the subject only if it is conceptual.
3 Therefore, any perceptual content involved in justifying a subject's beliefs is conceptual. (From (1) and (2).)
4 Any content of any perceptual experience is fit to be involved in justifying a subject's beliefs.
5 Therefore, any content of any perceptual experience is conceptual, and nonconceptualism is false. (From (3′) and (4′).)

Strong version:

1′ Any perceptual content involved in justifying a subject's beliefs is occurrently accessed by her in the act of justification.[71]
2′ Any perceptual content is occurrently accessed by the subject in the act of justification only if it is conceptual.
3′ Therefore, any perceptual content involved in justifying a subject's beliefs is conceptual. (From (1′) and (2′).)
4′ Any content of any perceptual experience is fit to be involved in justifying a subject's beliefs.
5′ Therefore, any content of any perceptual experience is conceptual, and nonconceptualism is false. (From (3′) and (4′).)

### *7.4.2 The First Nonconceptualist Reply: Accessible Nonconceptual Contents*

There are two kinds of reply to the overall argument that are open to the nonconceptualist. She can either deny that the subject needs access to her reasons for them to be reasons or she can argue that nonconceptual contents are cognitively accessible (or accessed) after all. The standard nonconceptualist answer consists in pointing out (against premise (2)) that we can indeed access all our nonconceptual perceptual contents; we can do so without forming complicated second-order beliefs about the justificatory status of our perceptual experiences.[72] In what follows, I will first present this reaction to the conceptualist argument. The Modest Nonconceptualist

content is to be accessible to the subject, she has to possess the conceptual concepts to access it. Hence, its content has to be conceptual. Recall that I phrased conceptualism and nonconceptualism as well as (S2C) to involve the claim that concepts have to be *exercised* not just possessed, in Sects. 3.2 and 3.3.

[71] Note that (1) and (1′) are statements of a weaker and a stronger version of access internalism.

[72] Peacocke (2001a) pursues this strategy.

reply, however, will both call into question the strong access internalist requirement that the conceptualist defends in his premise (1′) and suggest that even the weaker access internalist requirement in premise (1) is too demanding.

Peacocke calls our attention to the fact that we can think about all the details of the content of any of our perceptual experiences. We can form perceptual-demonstrative thoughts to pick out any aspect of what is represented in our experiences. Remember that he conceded, in his reaction to the demonstrative strategy, that we can possess perceptual-demonstrative concepts that are finely grained enough to refer to any aspect of a perceptual experience and that do not last beyond the presence of the respective experience itself. (Cf. my Sect. 4.1 on the argument from the fineness of grain; Peacocke 2001a, 249.) Therefore, normal subjects who have these conceptual powers are able cognitively to access any detail of the nonconceptual contents of their perceptual experiences. It follows that the conceptualist premise (1) that epistemic reasons are cognitively accessible to the subject, even if it is true, does not block nonconceptual contents from being epistemic reasons (Peacocke 2001a, 253–260).

That nonconceptual content is accessible in the way explicated by Peacocke means that it can be rationally scrutinized as well as articulated, as required by McDowell (see (ii) and (iii) above). I can think about any part of my experience content and, in doing so, investigate whether my perceptual experience really does make the perceptual belief it is supposed to justify rational. If I find out that it does not bear the appropriate rational relation to my belief, I can revise the belief. Just think about my experience of the Müller-Lyer drawing. After I find out that the appearance that line A is longer than line B is just an illusion, I am in a position to realize that my visual experience of the drawing is not a good reason to accept the belief that one of the lines must be longer than the other. I can revise my belief and now hold that line A is just as long as line B.

I can also articulate my perceptual reasons. If someone asks me why I believe that the computer screen in front of me is square, I can answer, ‘because it *is* square, just look at it’ or ‘because it looks *that* way’, by using a demonstrative to pick out exactly the property the screen has according my visual experience.

Still, the conceptualist can object that the only way the nonconceptualist can allow for our cognitive access to our reasons is by providing an implausible second-order account (see (b)). The subject has to refer to the contents of her perceptual experience and therefore has to have second-order beliefs about her own mental state; moreover, she has to acquire beliefs about the justificatory relation between her perceptual experience and the beliefs based on it.

Peacocke (2001a) offers a solution for this problem. For one, he tries to show that recognition of reasons is not too complex a task for normal thinkers, on the nonconceptualist account. For another, he argues that reason recognition does not involve second-order beliefs.

The first part of his reply to the second-order charge is relatively convincing. Instead of thinking about herself as some sort of reliable instrument, e.g. by believing that her experiences as of something square are good indicators of things actually being square in the world, the subject (according to Peacocke) only has to be able to reflect on the pertinent elements of the representational content of her

experience, on the belief in question, and on the rationality of the transition from the former to the latter. To be able to reflect on the rationality of this transition, she has to have a very rudimentary grasp of the fact that her concept *square*, for instance, is defined by possession conditions involving experiences as of something square. Peacocke suggests the following way for the subject to move up

> from the ground level of satisfying a possession condition to the level of thinking about it. One, perhaps the basic, way to make this transition is to ask questions that are in the first instance not about concepts, but about the world. Such a question might be 'Would something's looking that way *W* give reason to think it is square?' One can answer such questions by drawing on one's ordinary, ground-level abilities to react rationally to one's perceptual states in coming to make judgments about the world. Someone who satisfies a possession condition can clamber her way up to reach some understanding of what that possession condition is. (Peacocke 2001a, 258)

While this certainly requires some conceptual sophistication, this understanding can be present in the subject in very simple terms. It is plausible that subjects who can undertake rational transitions from perceptual experience to perceptually based belief can have a fundamental cognitive grasp of the conceptual capacities that are involved.

Moreover, when it comes to complaints about the complexity of things that normal subjects have to understand in order to grasp that they have a certain epistemic reason for their belief, Brewer is no better off than Peacocke. Just like his opponent, he has to maintain that subjects understand what is entailed by their perceptual experiences.

But what about Peacocke's claim that his nonconceptualist account of reason recognition is not second-order? His point seems to be that the subject reflects on the contents of her perceptual experiences, but not on the perceptual states themselves, so that they are not technically second-order reflections. I think this is right, but I am not sure whether reflection on one's conceptual abilities (which is apparently involved in the subject's thinking about concept possession conditions, e.g.) does not amount to second-order mental states after all.

I will ignore this issue in what follows. For on the one hand, I do not believe that cognitive accessibility is involved in all perceptual justification (contra premise (1)); on the other hand, the conceptualist can press the nonconceptualist even harder by moving on to the stronger version of his argument. I will discuss this strategy in the following.

The crucial difference left between conceptualism and nonconceptualism at this point is that, seeing as perceptual experiences are conceptual states according to the conceptualist, he can claim that to *have* these experiences is to understand their contents, including their truth-conditions and their entailments. So, every time I have a perceptual experience and I base a belief on it, it is guaranteed that I occurrently access the experience's content.

As I understand Brewer, this difference is really what he finds troubling about the nonconceptualist account of perceptual reasons. He might be willing to grant that any subject sophisticated enough to recognize her reasons and therefore to have knowledge is also able to have a basic understanding of her reasons. That is to say, he would probably concede that any nonconceptual content is cognitively accessible

to the subject and thus concede that premise (2) can be rejected. However, he would then certainly move on to say that mere accessibility is not good enough for genuine reason-giving relations, so that we have to look at the second version of the argument to motivate conceptualism. The subject has to recognize her reasons as she acquires the beliefs supported by these reasons—every perceptual content involved in justification is occurrently accessed by the subject in the act of justification. This is the stronger requirement stated by premise (1′).

The version of the argument that is seriously threatening to the nonconceptualist, then, is not the first one, which requires *accessibility* of reasons, but the second one, which requires *actual* access during the process of perceptual justification. Premise (1′) is supported by Brewer's claim that reasons have to motivate the subject (see (i) above). Premise (2′), that conceptual content is needed to allow for occurrent cognitive access in the act of justification, is supported by the cyclist analogy (see (a)) and by the claim (which can be extracted from Brewer's second-order complaints) that the nonconceptualist must allow for cases of justification without occurrent cognitive access.

The conceptualist argues that it is not true of every *nonconceptual* content involved in justification that it is cognitively accessed by the subject in the act of justification. For nonconceptual perceptual content is like the goal of the bodily adjustments of a cyclist (staying on the bike)—it is, standardly, not accessed by the subject during justificatory processes. Normally, it is only accessed by additional beliefs, typically after the conclusion is already reached and the belief is already justified.

It may be true that *sometimes*, when my perceptual experience (conceived of as nonconceptual) justifies a belief of mine, I do actually reflect on my perceptual reason, and that I therefore arrive at the perceptual belief. But the conceptualist holds that *any* perceptual content involved in justifying a subject's empirical beliefs is occurrently accessed by her in the act of justification (premise (1′)). What the nonconceptualist wants is that experience (conceived of as nonconceptual) can justify belief even if I do not take note of my perceptual content as my reason via an additional belief, that is, in situations in which I do not reflect on my perceptual reason. What she gets is that, in such situations, there is no perceptual justification.

Moreover, the conceptualist would claim, it is my additional belief that I acquire in recognizing my 'reason' that is the real (as in *motivating*) reason in this scenario, not the experience itself. The only way to make sure that the supposed perceptual reason and real motivating reason cannot come apart is to accept that perceptual experience has conceptual content. If perceptual content is conceptual, then for every perceptual experience, the perceiver accesses all of its content merely by undergoing it, and thus in the act of perceptual justification.

I am not confident that there is any way to deny this. I myself have argued in the previous section that the CSCT transition from experience to belief is direct and does not involve any additional, conscious reasoning processes. In everyday life, epistemic subjects are simply compelled to go from having a perceptual experience to forming the corresponding perceptual belief; the resulting perceptual belief is (normally) justified, despite the fact that no conscious reasoning is involved. So, I concede with premise (2′) that, if perceptual content is nonconceptual, it is (most often) not accessed in the act of justification.

### 7.4.3 *The Second Nonconceptualist Reply: No Need for Occurrent Access*

Thus, I will defend nonconceptualism by attacking premise (1′), that any perceptual content, to justify the subject's empirical beliefs, has to be occurrently accessed by her in the act of justification. To do so, I will first cast doubt on Brewer's claim that conceptualism itself allows for the kind of cognitive access he requires. I will then try to analyze which of Brewer's motives for his view are important and present a version of internalism that can capture these intuitions while doing without necessary cognitive access.

I think that Brewer's optimism that conceptualism guarantees the subject's actual access to her perceptual reasons during every rational transition is mistaken. Some problems of his account of perceptual justification have been brought up by Markie (2005) and Martin (2001). My objection to Brewer is related to Markie's concerns: I find it unbelievable that an average subject really recognizes everything that Brewer demands.

Here are the things that a perceiver has to understand in order not only to have basic perceptual knowledge, but also in order to have genuine perceptual experience including genuine perceptual content. As I have already mentioned, every perceptual experience that justifies a subject's empirical beliefs has a content that is grasped in an occurrent mental state by the subject—that is, she grasps the content of her experience, the truth-conditions of the experience, and what other propositions follow from her experience. If there is any of this that she does not understand, she will not be able to move to her perceptually based belief in a rational way, nor will she have a perceptual experience with conceptual content.

But this is not all that Brewer demands. He claims that the subject, in undergoing a perceptual experience, also

> understands that his current apprehension that things are thus and so is in part due to the very fact that they are. His grasping the content that *that is thus* is in part due to the fact that *that is thus*. He therefore recognizes the relevant content *as* his apprehension of the facts, his *epistemic openness* to the way things mind-independently are out there. (Brewer 1999, 204)

In other words, Brewer requires that a subject, simply in the act of undergoing a genuine perceptual experience (with demonstrative conceptual content), understand that there is an objective way things actually are in the world, and that his experience content takes up how things are. He recognizes that he is open to the facts, and he also understands that things around him could have been arranged otherwise.[73]

In order for a perceptual experience to justify a perceptual belief, then, the subject must understand two things: First, that the experience represents actual matters of

[73]Note that the requirement that the subject recognize his openness to the facts will be the central topic of the next chapter. It is relevant here because, as far as I understand it, Brewer thinks that the justificatory power of perceptual experience is (partly) due to the fact that it constitutes our openness to the facts, and that we are aware of this. Also, see Sect. 2.1.3.

fact—this is supposed to guarantee an understanding of the epistemic authority of the experience—and second, that the content of experience entails certain belief contents—this is supposed to guarantee that the subject understands that it can be a reason for the perceptual belief in question.

What kind of understanding and recognition exactly are we talking about here? Taking into account Brewer's insistence on the subject's *occurrent* access to her reasons, it seems clear that the subject needs to have an *actual* and *occurrent* understanding of both aspects of her perceptual reason, its relation to the facts, and its relation to her perceptual belief.

I emphasize that the understanding must take place as an occurrent mental state for the following reason: If all that is demanded is a non-occurrent background belief about the status of perceptual experience or a disposition to form the right kind of belief when the issue of justification is raised, we will have moved back to the weak version of the argument, and the nonconceptualist can comply. She can admit that the subject has non-occurrent *background* beliefs about the general reliability of her perceptual experiences and about the rational relations between this kind of experience and perceptual beliefs. These beliefs will be taken to involve demonstrative concepts picking out the relevant aspects of the subject's nonconceptual perceptual contents. Just think back to Peacocke's account of a very low-level grasp by the subject of her experiences' epistemic role. In the same vein, the subject can be allowed to have a *disposition* to acquire the relevant, partly demonstrative, beliefs about the rational standing of her perceptual experiences.

At this point, the conceptualist could insist that his advantage with respect to the nonconceptualist is that, according to his view, the subject could not have the experience if she did not also have an understanding of its epistemic status. For as a conceptual state, the perceptual experience does presuppose possession of the demonstrative concepts that constitute its content, which Brewer takes to include an understanding of what this content entails, as well as an understanding of the content's truth conditions. (Note that this can be motivated by appeal to the possession conditions for demonstrative concepts: A subject has to be able to draw certain inferences and has to meet the Generality Constraint to possess these concepts.) So, while undergoing the experience does not involve actual recognition of the perceptual reason as a reason, it does guarantee that the subject has the cognitive capacities to do so.

This is not true on a nonconceptualist view—the whole point of the claim that (the content of) perceptual experience is nonconceptual is to insist that subjects can undergo experiences without possessing or exercising the corresponding concepts. But this also means that, in such cases, they do not recognize, even in principle, the epistemic status of their perceptual experiences, including the truth-conditions of the experiential contents and the belief contents that are entailed by them. So, it looks like the weak version of the argument causes trouble for the nonconceptualist after all: premise (2) is correct.

Here is my reply: Even on a nonconceptualist view, the subject has to have a basic understanding of the epistemic status of the perceptual experiences that her perceptual beliefs are based on. For to *believe* the proposition whose justification is at issue,

the subject has to possess and exercise the concepts characterizing this proposition. Possessing these concepts means that the subject understands what the belief content follows from. Moreover, since our most basic perceptual beliefs represent exactly the same states of affairs (or at least part of them) as the perceptual experiences they are based on, a subject with such a perceptual belief will have a grasp of the reference and therefore of the truth conditions and correctness conditions of the contents of the belief *and* of the relevant parts of the content of the experience.

So, conceptualism and nonconceptualism are on a par as far as the subject's background understanding of the epistemic status of her experience (or at least the relevant elements of its content) is concerned. The conceptualist can claim that, to undergo the perceptual experience, it is necessary to possess an understanding of *its* epistemic status. The nonconceptualist can claim that, to have the belief whose justification is at stake, the subject has to have an understanding of its epistemic status, which corresponds to her having an understanding of the epistemic status of the perceptual experience it is based on (with respect to the relevant elements of its content).

The problem with this version of the conceptualist view is that, as before, the subject's understanding of the epistemic standing of her experience is merely dispositional—we are still dealing with the weak version. If the subject does not *actually access* this background knowledge of hers, it is not clear why it is the status of her perceptual reason as a reason that leads to her acceptance of the perceptual belief.

So, to return to the strong version, Brewer cannot allow the occurrent grasp of a perceptual reason to take the shape of additional, occurrent second-order beliefs, such as the belief that the experience reflects the facts and that it has the right kind of content to support the belief in question. Brewer demands that this understanding be an intrinsic part of the perceptual experience itself, for otherwise there will be cases in which the subject undergoes the reason-giving experience without understanding these facts about her experience. Moreover, the experience will be deprived of its role as the subject's reason and, instead, the second-order beliefs will be her reasons.

How could the subject access her perceptual reason whenever a perceptual experience justifies a belief? Maybe the perceptual experience, e.g. of the computer screen located in front of me, itself represents not only the computer screen, its shape, colors, etc., but also the fact that it is a reflection of the facts and that it entails a certain set of beliefs. It is an experience not only of the things in my field of vision, but also, somehow, of my openness to the facts and of what beliefs are entailed by it. And this is not only true of experiences that I actually use as starting points for inferences to perceptual beliefs; it is true of any genuine perceptual experience. Genuine experiences have demonstrative conceptual content, and in having this conceptual content, the relevant understanding is already included.

This view is highly implausible. My perceptual experiences represent the world around me, properties and objects, colors, shapes, sounds, smells, flavors, and the like. But they do not equally have the self-reflexive content that they are reactions to actual fact and that they entail certain other propositions. Certainly, as a normal epistemic subject *I* take them to accurately represent the objective world, and I have

certain dispositions to draw the correct conclusions from them. But my experience itself does not represent these facts about me; it is only concerned with the world I perceive.

The best way for Brewer to explicate his claims would be to put together some of my claims from Sect. 3.4.2, as well as some of McDowell's claims that I will explicate in the following chapter: The demonstrative concepts exercised by the subject in undergoing a perceptual experience are themselves embedded in a web of concepts which are shaped by the subject's beliefs, desires, expectations etc. If the subject's belief system incorporates the assumption that perceptual experience constitutes her openness to objective reality, then the demonstrative concepts she exercises in any of her experiences will be shaped by this assumption. (This covers occurrent access to the epistemic authority of perceptual experience.) Moreover, the specific inferential relations that hold between different experience and thought contents which are partly constituted by the demonstrative concepts in question will be present to the subject when she undergoes this experience. So without being explicitly represented by the experience, its epistemic status can be part of the content via the conceptual abilities themselves that are exercised in undergoing it. (This covers occurrent access to what a particular experience can serve as a reason for.)

But I do not think that even this view provides a conceptualist advantage over nonconceptualism. First, as I will argue in Sect. 8.3, the objectivity of perceptual content is not due to the perceiver's objective world-view. For the objectivity of perceptual content is not diminished when the perceiver is a solipsist. If I am correct, the perceiver's confrontation with objective reality, which is needed for her to recognize her reason as a reason, is not due to her exercise of concepts in undergoing a perceptual experience. The conceptualist has no advantage over the nonconceptualist here.

Second, the nonconceptualist can account for the subject's recognition of the relevant justificatory relations between perceptual contents and belief contents just as well as the conceptualist. As I argued above, in having a belief that is based on the experience, the subject exercises conceptual abilities that constitute a grasp of the relevant rational/semantic embedding of the belief content *and* of the relevant elements of the experience content. Again, the conceptualist is no better off than the nonconceptualist.

Third, while I agree that concepts are (at least partly) defined by their inferential roles, so that having a belief involving a particular concept means exercising the corresponding conceptual ability, means understanding how the conceptual ability is embedded in one's web of beliefs, I am not convinced that this understanding is best understood as being occurrent in the subject's entertaining a particular belief. That I employ a conceptual ability that is shaped by its inferential role does not mean that, in employing it in a particular belief, I occurrently entertain every thought that could be inferred with the help of this conceptual ability. This is an unrealistic description of what is going on when normal subjects have normal occurrent beliefs. Rather, we should take the claim that a conceptual ability is defined by its inferential role to mean that my employing this conceptual ability presupposes that I understand how

it is embedded in my web of belief, where this understanding (as explicated above) is not an occurrent mental state, but a disposition.

What are the consequences for the conceptualist argument concerning cognitive access to perceptual reasons? There is no credible way to establish that the content of *any* perceptual experience that justifies the subject's beliefs is *occurrently* cognitively accessed by her in the act of justification. It may sometimes happen that she recognizes her reasons as her reasons while she is undergoing the corresponding rational transition; she may have background beliefs about her experiences as her openness to the mind-independent world and about what beliefs may be justified on their basis. But she does not acquire second-order beliefs about these issues every time she arrives at a justified perceptual belief. And her perceptual experiences represent the world around her, but they do not at the same time represent their own epistemic status to the subject.

Even an appeal to the claim that conceptual abilities are shaped by their inferential role provides no advantage for the conceptualist over his nonconceptualist competitor. I have argued that the best way to understand conceptual abilities as defined by inferential roles is to say that they presuppose a *non-occurrent background understanding* of their inferential embedding.

As to premise (2′), the subject does not cognitively access every conceptual content involved in justification in the act of justification, no matter whether perceptual content is nonconceptual or conceptual. So, if we stick with strong access internalism (premise (1′)), we have to conclude that normal human subjects have only very few justified empirical beliefs. This would be a rather unsatisfactory result. So, premise (1′) should be rejected—we have to find a more moderate condition on perceptual justification.

### *7.4.4 Mentalism as an Alternative to Access Internalism*

Where does this leave us? There are two defensible versions of nonconceptualism that incorporate elements of internalism. One option, pursued by Peacocke, is to accept the weaker internalist accessibility criterion. The nonconceptualist can allow the subject's cognitive access to all of the content aspects of any of his perceptual experiences that may be relevant to the perceptual belief in question—as long as this access is construed as a potential access or as the subject's ability to access these aspects in principle. She can even go so far as to allow for the subject's potential access to his reasons *as* reasons, a principled understanding of what it is about his perceptual experiences that supports his beliefs.[74]

The other option, endorsed by Modest Nonconceptualism, is to deny that even *potential* access to one's reasons is relevant for an account of perceptual

[74] Again, this strategy is in need of an amended response to Brewer's second-order charge. I will not pursue this here, for Modest Nonconceptualism incorporates the other option.

justification. Let me sketch my reasons why I prefer this second option.[75] Just like Brewer, I think that a factor that justifies my belief cannot be something that is not itself responsible for my acquisition of this belief. My epistemic reasons have to move *me* to acquire the belief in question. If someone were to object that my reasons partly consist in the contents of additional beliefs that I could acquire if I was prompted to do so, I would reply that these are no more than potential reasons, or a justification that I am in a position to have, but not my actual reason that actually justify my belief.

For a plausible account of perceptual justification, we need to emphasize the relevance of the fact that the world strikes the subject a certain way in her conscious perceptual experiences.[76] For this is how we best account for the special role of phenomenally conscious perceptual experiences in the justification of empirical belief. The main idea here is that it is not the reliability of the belief-forming mechanism or the like that is crucial for the perceptual justification of belief, but that the fact that I come to believe a certain proposition because *the world perceptually appears to me* a certain way is essential. Intuitively, I take myself to be justified to endorse a perceptual belief with a certain content because it corresponds to what my perceptual experience purports to be the case. This is closely related to Brewer's claim that, as a reason, my perceptual experience with its specific content has *motivating* power to get me to acquire the corresponding beliefs. For this, the experience needs to be an occurrent personal-level mental state.

While the first nonconceptualist option includes some elements of *access* internalism, the option I wish to endorse for Modest Nonconceptualism is closely related to mentalism. The view is propagated by Conee and Feldman (2004), its main claim being that the justificatory status of any of a subject's beliefs is fully determined by her mental states. Without committing to the full theory,[77] I think it is true that perceptual contents can be epistemic reasons because they are the phenomenal contents of personal-level mental states of the subject. As such, they are able to motivate the subject herself and can be *her* reasons. It can be the specific content of a particular experience that leads to and justifies the subject's acceptance of a certain belief: It is the way the world appears to the subject in this experience that justifies a belief that she bases on it. Note that I do not require that the subject be aware of the existence of support relations between her experiences and her beliefs.[78]

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[75] Note that the following is related to my discussion in Sect. 7.3.2.1.

[76] See the epistemological and phenomenological worries in Sect. 3.4.2.

[77] For one, I think that justification fundamentally involves mental contents, not mental states; for another, I want to leave open non-mentalist sources of the epistemic authority of perceptual experience. See below.

[78] This is standard internalist fare—cf. Feldman (2004, 151; 155). The point relates to my weak interpretation of the internalist claim that the correctness of a justifying experience makes the truth of a belief probable, as far as the subject can tell.

The Modest Nonconceptualist account, then, places lower demands on epistemic subjects than access internalism. Premise (1)/(1′) can be replaced by the following requirement:

1* Any perceptual content involved in justifying a subject's beliefs is part of the phenomenal content of a phenomenally conscious personal-level state of the subject.

This requirement is trivially met by the phenomenal content of perceptual experience; but note that it is able to provide a distinction between perceptual justification on the one hand and the kind of rational relations that hold between the cyclist's goals and his bodily movements, or between a subject's visual belief and the information that is processed in her retinas prior to her acquisition of this belief. Neither the information-processing in the retinas nor the cyclist's goal of staying on the bike are personal-level phenomena. Neither of them involve a phenomenal content of a conscious personal-level state of the subject. Perceptual experiences, on the other hand, have a "built-in" consciousness, as BonJour (2010a) calls it—just in undergoing them, the subject is conscious of their content, but not via an additional second-order state.[79] This is how perceptual reasons, conceived of as nonconceptual, are *the subject's* reasons.

As an aside, by including these mentalist elements, Modest Nonconceptualism provides an account of the wide-spread ability of average subjects to access their perceptual reasons without making this a necessary condition on being a reason. For any subject that is sophisticated enough to have perceptual-demonstrative thought about her phenomenally conscious perceptual experiences at all is in an ideal position to access the content of her perceptual experiences. But this is a mere side-effect. The internalist criterion that is really relevant for perceptual justification is that perceptual reasons are the contents of conscious mental states of the subject. It is just that (most) all epistemic subjects are able to access their own conscious experience contents in thought.

But doesn't the account sketched here conflict with Modest Nonconceptualism's reliance on *external* contents as the entities that ensure that the contents of belief and the perceptual contents that justify them are semantically and rationally related? The worry is that I claim, on the one hand, that the subject's perceptual reasons are phenomenally conscious contents that move her to accept certain beliefs with related contents. Yet on the other hand, I have previously claimed that the contents of experience whose correctness requires or makes probable the truth of the beliefs it justifies are external contents, i.e. worldly states of affairs that perceptual experiences represent. These are not to be identified with the spatially structured

[79]Unsurprisingly, I am opposed to higher-order theories of consciousness. Experiences are phenomenally conscious, no matter whether they are accessed by a higher-order mental state or not. To undergo an experience is to be conscious of its content, i.e., it is for the experience to be an occurrent personal-level state; there is no need to be aware of the experience as a whole in addition to this. For a defense of this view against higher-order thought theories, see BonJour (2001, 26–28).

scenario contents of experience, which are phenomenally conscious. Doesn't this entail that the perceptual reasons that justify a subject's beliefs really are *external* contents and thus not the phenomenal contents of perceptual experiences? This result violates requirement (1*).[80]

Here is the Modest Nonconceptualist's reply. First, it is correct that it is the external content of an experience, i.e. the section of the world or worldly state of affairs represented by it, that participates in a justifying content-sensitive correctness-truth transition from experience to belief. However, recall that the experience's scenario content fully determines which state of affairs is represented by the experience. For a scenario content is a spatial type; an experience that has it as its content represents instantiations of the properties that constitute this spatial type.[81] Given this, the scenario content determines which beliefs may be justified by the experience. It fixes the state of affairs that will then guarantee or make probable the truth of the beliefs that the subject may thereby justifiably base on her experience. So, the external content of a perceptual experience does not really go beyond its scenario content. As I said before, it is in a sense swallowed up by this internal content.[82]

Moreover, I ended up ascribing an external content to perceptual experience to acknowledge the fact that the experience represents the world to be a certain way, that it is directed at certain worldly states of affairs. I then added that one way for the world to be may have a bearing on how the world is otherwise, which may be represented by the subject's beliefs. I think this can be accepted by any view of epistemic justification. But further, it has to be conceded by any adherent of the content view that there is a distinction between how the world is represented and the world itself. This concession comes out in my acceptance of scenario content as the content of perceptual experience. Nonetheless, this move does not force me to accept that the subject is not confronted with reality in experience (or to accept that there is a 'veil of perception'). For the subject is confronted with the relevant section of the world in virtue of the fact that the world strikes her to be a certain way in experience, where we can do justice to the way it strikes her by ascribing scenario content, but at the same time conceive of the *world* that strikes her as part of her conscious content. So, worldly states of affairs can be seen to be part of the phenomenally conscious content of experience.

Finally, let me emphasize again that the subject need not be aware of the CSCT transition itself. All that is required is that the perceptual reason is a conscious perceptual content of a conscious experience. As I have argued, the subject's belief appears to be right to her in the light of her experience content because (at least

[80]Interestingly, Peacocke (2015) seems to endorse a kind of externalism (with a safety condition on knowledge) in response to similar considerations.

[81]See Sect. 2.1.2.4.

[82]Similar things will be true for the internal Fregean content of the relevant belief.

in standard cases) the belief involves the exercise of concepts that are anchored in experiences representing what is believed on their basis.[83]

Let me summarize my discussion of the objection from cognitive access, then. The conceptualist claims that his opponent cannot allow for (the contents of) perceptual experiences to be epistemic reasons for belief. For epistemic reasons must be the subject's reasons, i.e., the subject must have cognitive access to her reasons. But if the content of perceptual experiences is nonconceptual, she cannot cognitively access her reasons in the right way. Given that any element of a perceptual content can be a reason for a belief, perceptual experiences do not even have minimally nonconceptual content. The conceptualist supports his claim that reasons are cognitively accessible (or accessed) by emphasizing that reasons must be rationally evaluable and articulable and that they must motivate the subject. He argues that nonconceptual contents are not fit for this task, for they are typically not accessible and certainly not accessed during the relevant rational transitions, and if they are accessed at all, this takes place in a too demanding second-order fashion.

My defense against the conceptualist contentions consisted in pointing out that perceptual reasons are fully accessible to epistemic subjects in principle via perceptual-demonstrative concepts. Further, I argued that not even a conceptualist can guarantee the subject's access to her perceptual reasons if this involves *occurrent* mental states. I concluded that the conceptualist is no better off than the nonconceptualist when it comes to explaining perceptual justification.

In a final step, I suggested that Modest Nonconceptualism should abandon access internalism and instead incorporate some elements of mentalism. Perceptual reasons are the phenomenal contents of phenomenally conscious mental states of the subject. I suggested that this, rather than the strong or weak access internalist requirements, is the requirement that perceptual justification has to meet. I argued that it can be met by the Modest Nonconceptualist account of perceptual justification.

## 7.5 Results on the Epistemological Objection

This concludes my discussion of the epistemological objection against nonconceptualism. The fundamental claim of the conceptualist argument is that perceptual experiences, to the extent that they have nonconceptual content, are not fit to justify perceptual beliefs. Since perceptual experiences are crucial to the justification of empirical beliefs, and any element of the content of any experience can be involved in the justification of belief, perceptual content is conceptual.

To introduce the objection, I set it against the background of epistemological foundationalism, and more specifically, against the dilemma arising from Sellars's myth of the given. The way I presented the debate, the conceptualist argues that the nonconceptualist cannot escape one horn of this dilemma, viz., that perceptual

[83]This was argued in Sects. 7.3.3.2 and 7.3.3.4.

experience, if its content is not conceptual, cannot even in principle bear justificatory relations to empirical beliefs.

I then presented three versions of the epistemological objection. The first relied on a distinction between the logical space of reasons and the logical space of empirical law. It claimed that only conceptual content can be placed in the space of reasons and thus bear rational relations to the conceptual contents of belief. I replied by pointing out that the Modest Nonconceptualist notion of scenario content, as something that can be correct or incorrect, is already normative and can therefore be rationally related to the conceptual contents of belief.

The second argument against (Modest) Nonconceptualism turned on the idea that nonconceptual, non-propositional content does not have the right kind of format to be inferentially related to conceptual content, so that nonconceptual and non-propositional experience cannot support belief, whose content consists in Fregean propositions. Against this, I argued that there can be content-sensitive correctness-truth transitions from perceptual experience to belief. These transitions are based on the semantic relations that exist between perceptual content and belief content, conceived externally.

The third argument presupposed that epistemic reasons require the subject's access to these reasons, and that nonconceptualism cannot plausibly meet this requirement. I argued that *no one* can plausibly meet the strong access requirement (which requires occurrent access), and that both conceptualism and nonconceptualism can allow for weak cognitive accessibility to perceptual reasons. Moreover, I proposed a weaker requirement for perceptual justification: Any perceptual content involved in justifying a belief is a phenomenal content of a conscious perceptual experience. I argued that the external contents involved in perceptual justification meet this requirement.

So it looks as though perceptual experiences are fit to bear justificatory relations to beliefs even if their content is nonconceptual and non-propositional. The notion of nonconceptual perceptual content is a normative notion, which allows for justificatory transitions to perception-based beliefs with Fregean contents. Furthermore, Modest Nonconceptualism, while most naturally combined with mentalist elements, is compatible with weak access internalism.

Turning again to the Sellars/BonJour dilemma, I have shown that the problem arising for the foundationalist on its nonconceptualist horn (perceptual experience, conceived of as nonconceptual, cannot justify anything) can be tackled by the Modest Nonconceptualist. I have elucidated how nonconceptual experience can indeed justify belief. This defense leaves the further issue of whether it is really true that perceptual experience, on the Modest Nonconceptualist picture, is not itself in need of justification—recall that this is assumed in the dilemma. Let me close off this chapter with a few thoughts on this issue.

Here is how the suspicion might arise that even the Modest Nonconceptualist's account of perceptual experience needs to be supplied with an account of how experience comes by its epistemic authority. Scenario content is genuine content that represents the world to be a certain way. Since it has this assertoric character, one may wonder why the perceiver should accept what her experience purports to be

the case. Contrast this with perceptual experience that is taken to be nonconceptual *and* non-representational, experience that is not characterized by anything beyond a certain raw feel or certain qualia. Experience conceived in this way does not assert anything to be the case, and thus it would be pointless to question whether the perceiver should believe what it purports.

So the worry is that, by solving the problem of how nonconceptual experience can justify belief, I now have to deal with the problem that is associated with the other horn of the dilemma: How does perceptual experience come by its epistemic authority?

Solving this further problem goes beyond the scope of this book. Note, too, that warding off the conceptualist's epistemological objection does not depend on dealing with this issue. Nonetheless, I wish at least to make some suggestions about the different ways the Modest Nonconceptualist might respond to it.

First off, recall my claim from Chap. 5 that the subject finds herself settled with perceptual experiences with a certain content; she cannot be held responsible for what she experiences. I emphasized there that nonconceptualism is more easily compatible with this fact about experience than conceptualism. The conceptualist has to introduce an implausible distinction between exercising and merely actualizing (or unconsciously exercising) conceptual abilities to make sense of this. In light of this, it is natural for the nonconceptualist (but not the conceptualist) to hold that I do not have to justify my experiences because it is not under my control what I experience. So, the question of how perceptual experience comes by its justificatory status cannot be posed in the same way as it can be posed for belief (or for experience as conceived by the conceptualist).

Still, it might be insisted that the Modest Nonconceptualist has to explain why the subject should trust her perceptual experiences, how perceptual experience comes by its epistemic authority. Several responses could be provided. (1) The most natural one would be to embrace something like Pryor's dogmatism (see Pryor 2000) and hold that the subject's perceptual experience, all by itself, provides her with *prima facie* justification to believe what her experience purports to be the case.[84]

(2) A different response would be to abandon internalism when it comes to perceptual experience. It might be argued that the epistemic authority of experience depends on its being a *de facto reliable* source of information. If so, my CSCTT account will have to be changed as follows: A transition from an experience to a belief, where their external contents are related in such a way that the correctness of the experience makes the truth of the belief probable, will confer justification on the belief only if the perceptual experience that is involved is a reliable source of information.

(3) Modest Nonconceptualism could be combined with epistemological disjunctivism: Similarly to McDowell's response to the conceptualist horn of the dilemma presented in Sect. 7.1, the Modest Nonconceptualist might argue that veridical perception, as a confrontation with the facts, has epistemic authority.

[84]This would fit nicely with my account of defeaters of perceptual reasons sketched in Sect. 7.3.

(And then she would have to add that this is compatible with the fact that illusory or hallucinatory experience lacks epistemic authority.) This option is open to the Modest Nonconceptualist because McDowell's reply to the dilemma does not rely on his conceptualism, but on his endorsement of disjunctivism. On this account, an experience justifies a belief only if it is actually correct and the states of affairs represented by it make it probable that the states of affairs represented by the belief obtain also.

As I have argued, then, the epistemological objection against nonconceptualism is not successful. According to Modest Nonconceptualism, the nonconceptual content of perceptual experience can be a reason for belief. With respect to the issue of epistemic authority, nonconceptualism is, if anything, better off in providing an account of how experience can come by it. With this result, let's turn to the objection from objectivity.

# Chapter 8
# The Objection from Objectivity

In the previous chapter, I repudiated the conceptualist's attempt to discredit nonconceptualism on epistemological grounds. I argued that Modest Nonconceptualism in particular can meet any plausible epistemological requirement. In this chapter, I will turn to the claim which has its source in the content worry introduced in Sect. 3.4.2 that we cannot speak of perceptual *content* unless we assume it is *objective* content. The conceptualist argues that only conceptual content can meet the requirement of being objective. If the argument works, it supports conceptualism, for then perceptual experience cannot even have minimally nonconceptual content.[1]

Here is the plan for the chapter. I will start out by presenting the objection from objectivity as it can be found in McDowell (1994a).[2] I then discuss the following replies: First, even if objective perceptual experience requires the perceiver to have an objective world-view, the experience's own content may be nonconceptual; second, perceptual objectivity can be had in virtue of mere nonconceptual personal-level abilities; third, a weaker kind of perceptual objectivity that does not even require personal-level capacities is substantial enough to provide for genuine perceptual content. The last reply is the one championed by Modest Nonconceptualism.

[1] Some of the materials from this chapter are published in Schmidt (2015).

[2] There are some passages in Brewer (1999) dealing with the same ideas; otherwise, most of the literature on the problem of objectivity consists in defenses of nonconceptualism against the objection. See Cussins (2003), Hutto (1998), Dreyfus (2007), Burge (2009, 2010), and Peacocke (1992, 1994, 2001a,b, 2003).



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## 8.1 The Argument

The conceptualist's argument consists of two steps. In the first step, the conceptualist attempts to show that we cannot speak of content of a perceptual experience unless it represents an objective, mind-independent world to the subject as objective (called 'step one' below). In the second step, he argues that there can be no representation of the world to the subject as objective by anything less than a mental state with a conceptual content ('step two'). The conclusion is that there can be no nonconceptual perceptual content—instead, it has to be conceptual. To put it even more succinctly, the argument is: no conceptual structure, no objectivity; no objectivity, no content.

Let's turn to step one: Why does the conceptualist require that genuine perceptual content be objective? McDowell in particular is motivated by the Kantian image of *blindness*, a blindness that might threaten perceptual experience: "To say that an experience is not blind is to say that it is intelligible to its subject as purporting to be awareness of a feature of objective reality: as a seeming glimpse of the world." (McDowell 1994a, 54)[3] We "conceive experience as awareness, or at least seeming awareness, of a reality independent of experience." (McDowell 1994a, 31)

McDowell here relies on the phenomenological observation that perceptual experiences seem to confront us with a mind-independent world.[4] They purport to represent a reality that goes beyond experience itself, a reality that we can grasp in thought. As subjects of perceptual experience, it strikes us not that we have certain raw feels, say, but that we are confronted with a world external to and independent of us.

One part of the point is that talk of representation and empirical content is unintelligible unless we presuppose that there is something beyond the experience (viz., an objective world) that is represented. The other part is that genuine representation of the world to the subject means that she gets it (it is "intelligible" for her) that she is confronted with a mind-independent world.

To repeat Peacocke's less metaphorical way of expressing such considerations:

> the representational content is the way the experience presents the world as being, and it can hardly present the world as being that way if the subject is incapable of appreciating what that way is. (Peacocke 1983, 7)[5]

[3] He further develops his account in a debate with Dreyfus. See McDowell (2007) and Dreyfus (2005, 2007).

[4] McDowell (1994b) relies explicitly on phenomenological considerations. Also see Sects. 2.1.3 and 3.4.2 above.

[5] He is concerned with what specific features can be represented in an experience, not with the more general issue of how perceptual content can be objective. However, his claim covers perception of objects as having particular properties, for instance. In experience, the perceiver is confronted with specific *mind-independent* objects and properties. So we need an account of how she can perceive a world of objects and properties that are independent of any perceptual experience. Together with Peacocke's quote, this leads us back to her *appreciation* of their mind-independence.

Again, experience presents the world *to the subject*—it has to register with the subject that she is confronted with a certain way the mind-independent world is.

Here are the conceptualist insights that can be gleaned from these quotes: Step one—genuine perceptual content must be objective—involves three requirements on perceptual objectivity: (1) features of the mind-independent world must be represented; (2) they must be presented to the subject; and (3) they must be represented *as objective*.

Next, step two. This is the claim that only conceptual content can be objective—only conceptual states are capable of presenting a mind-independent world to the subject *as* objective. How does McDowell argue for this claim? According to him, (A) experience can present the world as objective to the subject only if it is integrated into the subject's overall system of concepts and beliefs, into her world-view as of an objective world (see McDowell 1994a, 32).[6] (B) The required integration is possible only if experience has conceptual content.

As to (A), we can see why integration into a world-view might play a role for objective perceptual content by considering the third element of objective perceptual content. The world will be perceptually presented to the subject *as objective* only when integrated into a web of beliefs such as that the world is mind-independent, that there is a distinction between her consciousness and the world, or that the same reality can be experienced from more than one perspective. To feel the appeal of this claim, you have to take seriously the conceptualist's worry about how perceptual experience could succeed in being more for a subject than mere (non-representational) raw feels in the first place. McDowell's answer is that it can be a glimpse of mind-independent reality only against the background of the subject's understanding that it is such a glimpse.[7]

There are two motives for accepting requirement (B) of conceptual content for integration into a world-view: First, the contents of perceptual experience must bear rational relations to belief contents to make possible the integration of whole perceptual contents; rational relations require conceptual contents. Second, the integration can be achieved immediately via the elements constituting a perceptual content, but only if these elements are concepts. Only then can they be terms in a conceptual repertoire presupposing an objective reality.

Let's turn first to the integration of *whole* perceptual contents into a world-view. Recall McDowell's claim, discussed in Sect. 7.2, that only mental states with conceptual content can be rationally related to beliefs, for only conceptual contents can be elements of the logical space of reasons.

[6]From now on, I will speak only of a subject's world-view (without 'as of an objective world'). For McDowell, talk of a world-view already implies that it is a view of a world as objective—otherwise, there could not be a world and a view of it.

[7]Similar views are defended by Strawson (1959) and Quine (1960). The nonconceptualist views of Evans (1982) and of Peacocke (1992, 1994) are also heavily influenced by this stronger notion of objectivity. For a helpful summary of the tradition and an interesting criticism, see Burge (2009, 2010).

Let me provide some details concerning the purported rational relations between (the contents of) perceptual experience and empirical belief. Input from the world via perceptual experience exerts rational constraints on what it is rational to believe, and the belief system has to be constantly adjusted to the contents of the subject's perceptual experience. As per (A), in the opposite direction, the contents of our beliefs concerning the mind-independent world (our world-view) shape the contents of our experiences.

Rational relations in both directions are needed to create an integrated world-view, which includes experiences whose content itself is shaped by the world-view so as to represent the world to the subject as objective. If the relations between experience and belief were only causal, for instance, the world would not be able immediately to strike the perceiver as objective in experience. The best the subject might hope for is meta-beliefs to the effect that particular perceptual experiences which cause certain beliefs are themselves caused by features of an objective reality.[8]

Putting these claims together, perceptual objectivity relies on rational integration of perceptual content into the subject's world-view, and rational integration can only work on conceptual contents. So, perceptual objectivity presupposes that perceptual experience has conceptual content.

The other way to achieve rational integration of a perceptual content into a world-view is via the concepts constituting it (McDowell 1994a, 29–36). A perceiver's overall conceptual system incorporates the idea that she is faced with an objective world; her empirical concepts are concepts as of an objective reality—they are concepts as of mind-independent objects, relations, and properties. So her experience, if its content is constituted by concepts that are shaped by their relations to a conceptual system that presupposes the mind-independence of the world, will represent the world as objective. This is so because "the rational connections of the concept enter into shaping the content 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." (McDowell 1994a, 32)

If perceptual content is nonconceptual, on the other hand, it is impossible for this kind of intimate relation between a subject's conceptual repertoire and her perceptual contents to obtain: Since nonconceptual perceptual contents are not constituted by concepts, they cannot be rationally integrated into the her world-view via such concepts. They cannot be objective in this way.

Let me conclude my discussion with a concise statement of the argument:

Step 1 A perceptual experience can have genuine content only if it represents the world to the subject *as objective*.

Step 2 (A) A perceptual experience can represent the world to the subject *as objective* only if it is rationally integrated into a world-view.

[8]McDowell would not even grant this much, for without rational integration, our beliefs cannot have empirical content.

Step 2 (B) A perceptual experience can be rationally integrated into a world-view only if its content is conceptual.

Conclusion A perceptual experience can have genuine content only if this content is conceptual.

In the following, I will discuss three nonconceptualist replies to the argument. The first reply questions the assumption that experience's integration into a world-view requires its content to be conceptual. The second reply purports to show that the subject can appreciate and thus perceive the world as objective (as required by the conceptualist) without a belief- and concept-based world-view. The third reply relies on a weaker notion of objectivity that can provide for perceptual content without invoking any further personal-level capacities.

## 8.2 The First Reply: No Need for Conceptual Content

The first route of attack for the nonconceptualist is to allow that the subject needs a world-view for genuine perceptual content, but to insist that the fact that she needs to have certain beliefs and concepts as part of this world-view does not imply that she is required to exercise conceptual abilities in order to undergo her experience, or that its content is conceptual.[9] Recall that I have argued in Sect. 7.2—contra step 2 (B)—that nonconceptual contents can be rationally related with conceptual contents. Consequently, accepting this part of the conceptualist's demands (the requirement for rational integration of whole perceptual contents into the subject's world-view, step 2 (A)) does not pose a serious problem for the nonconceptualist.

Peacocke (1998, 386) is an example of this strategy.[10] He holds that we must elucidate a subject's perceptual experiences and her empirical beliefs at the same time. A subject can only be said to have a genuine perceptual experience with genuine spatial content when she possesses some concepts concerning mind-independent space and a concept of self. Peacocke takes perceptual contents and basic concepts of space and self to form local holisms: In one direction, we need an account of an experience's *nonconceptual* content for basic empirical beliefs involving these concepts; vice versa, we need an account of the subject's grasp of self and mind-independent space in order to explain how perceptual experience can be content-bearing. In particular, the subject's possession of these concepts is necessary for her to construct a cognitive map of her environment and to have a grasp of the fact that she is moving through it, which is necessary for genuinely spatial perceptual content.

So, Peacocke combines the idea that the subject has to have a world-view in order to have genuine perception of an objective world with the claim that

[9] See Sect. 3.3. Additionally, the move to conceptual *content* here would rely on endorsing (S2C). See Sect. 3.2.

[10] See also Peacocke (1992, 1994).

perceptual content is nonconceptual. The mere fact that the subject has to possess certain concepts and beliefs (as part of her world-view) in order to undergo perceptual experiences does not make their contents conceptual. We should ascribe a conceptual content to a subject's mental state only if she has to *exercise* conceptual abilities in order to undergo this mental state.

The problem with this objection is that it does not address McDowell's concern that the experience itself can present the world to the subject as objective only if its content is *constituted* by concepts that are embedded in a web of concepts as of an objective world. How can the nonconceptualist meet the conceptualist's argument that nonconceptual content cannot be integrated into a world-view via its constituents, since they are not conceptual?

## 8.3 The Second Reply: No Need for a Belief-Based World-View

Plausibly, a subject's *beliefs* are objective partly because they are rationally integrated into a world-view and because the concepts constituting their contents are elements of a web of concepts which is shaped by the presupposition that the world is objective. *Prima facie*, it is appealing to transfer this picture to perceptual experience.

To test the plausibility of this transfer, let's consider an entrenched solipsist's perceptual experience. The solipsist falsely believes that there is no external world and that there are no objective facts about the world to know. She thinks that all there is is her mind, her experiences and her beliefs; she believes that there are only subjective facts, facts about herself. According to her, perceptual experience does not present a mind-independent environment to her—she has no world-view. She conceives of her perceptual experience as constituted by qualia or raw feels that are not *about* anything outside of her mind.

Does her perceptual experience have a content? Does the objective, mind-independent world strike her in any way in perception, or is she just confronted with subjective facts about herself? I think the most plausible story we can tell about this confused individual is that her situation is somewhat parallel to that of the informed perceiver when looking at the Müller-Lyer drawing: He *knows* that both lines are equally long, but he cannot help but perceive them as being of different lengths. This is so because his perceptual experience purports to have empirical import, prior to and at least partly independently of what he believes about the world.

The solipsist *thinks* she knows that there is no objective reality; but she cannot shake the impression, in undergoing her experience, that there is an objective world that she perceives. Again, the reason for this is that experience, all by itself, purports to be about an objective world. The solipsist can go no further than to have a belief system and a web of concepts as of a world consisting only of subjective facts about herself. Moreover, she can try to take a certain attitude towards her perceptual

experience and try to take it as nothing but raw feels. (For instance, imagine that she has what we would describe as a visual experience as of a rock flying right at her face. She can try to convince herself that she is merely experiencing some interesting visual qualia.) But this will not change the fact that her perceptual experiences, prior to and independently of her solipsist assumptions, will purport to present her with things in the objective world. (Correspondingly, she will feel the strong urge to duck because there seems to be a rock coming at her.[11])

The conceptualist can try to accommodate my claims by saying that no one can ever be a solipsist all the way to the ground level. For what constitutes the content of any perceiver's experience is demonstrative concepts that take hold of her environment directly (Brewer 1999; McDowell 1994a).[12] He can concede that the subject cannot help the actualization of these demonstrative conceptual capacities in perception, and so she cannot help being a realist about the world at the most primitive level. With this move, however, my opponent loses the apparent advantage of his view that perceptual experience is objective because the concepts constituting its content are part of a web of concepts presupposing an objective world, and thus rationally integrated into a world-view. For the demonstrative concepts involved in experience (and the experience itself), as they are conceived of now, are of an objective reality independently of the subject's world-view.

Alternatively, the conceptualist could deny that the die-hard solipsist's perceptual experience is as of an objective reality. It only presents the subject with subjective facts about her own experience. But, as I have argued, this claim does not sit well with the fact that we cannot even make ourselves see the two lines in the Müller-Lyer drawing to be of equal length, even though we know that they are. Analogously, a solipsist's beliefs about the world do not have the right kind of influence over her perceptual experience to make its apparent empirical import disappear.[13]

The result is that we have to look elsewhere to explain the objectivity of perceptual experience. The fact that experience represents the world as objective to the solipsist despite her lack of a world-view shows that integration into a world-view is not necessary for the objective import of perceptual experience.

The solipsist case goes beyond the original objection, then: It shows not that rational integration into a world-view per se implies nothing about the nature of

[11]One might object that her urge to duck will be due to her anticipation of painful qualia, and nothing more. But I do not think that this is plausible. Just like it is beyond the subject's control that she will raise her foot reflexively when stepping into a nail, so it is not under her control that she will duck in expectation of being hit by a rock because her visual experience represents a rock to be flying at her face.

[12]See Sect. 4.1.

[13]This is the argument I alluded to in the previous chapter (Sect. 7.4.3), where I attacked the conceptualist claim that understanding perceptual experience as openness to the facts can be explained in terms of the conceptual embedding of the conceptual abilities exercised in experience. We can now see that perception purports to represent objective facts without drawing on conceptual abilities; moreover, the epistemic authority of perceptual experience is independent of the subject's belief in an objective world.

perceptual content, but that no integration into a world-view is needed for objective perceptual content. Correspondingly, we have moved from an attack on step two (B) to a rejection of step two (A). This rejection can be complemented by introducing a less demanding kind of 'world-view' into which experience needs to be integrated to be objective. I will discuss this option next.

The link between step one and step two of the argument from objectivity is provided by the notion that perceptual experience presents the world to the subject *as objective*. This is to say that the perceiver is not blind to the world—she has to take the world to be objective, or appreciate the mind-independence of the world in experience.

Let me next present a view that concedes that genuine perceptual content requires the subject's appreciation of the world as objective (in addition to her perceptual experience), but holds that this can be achieved without a belief- or concept-based world-view. Rather, what is needed is the (nonconceptual) ability to build up a cognitive map of one's environment on the basis of perceptual experience.

As stated above, on McDowell's view, experience can present the world as objective to the subject only when integrated into a world-view. In order to appreciate the fact that perceptual experience represents the objective world to her, the subject has to understand that the world is independent of her mind and of her perceptual perspective on the world.

The nonconceptualist alternative is exemplified by Peacocke (2003), who holds that the subject has to be able to keep track of her changing position in her environment to have genuinely spatial perceptual contents. He provides an account of how this is possible without a conception of objectivity.[14] In Peacocke (2003, 319), he points out that the resources for explaining how a subject can keep track of her position in space are provided by the experience's scenario content itself. For what characterizes a scenario content is its origin, in relation to which the properties and relations perceived are represented. Building up from this, a subject can come to a nonconceptual notion *hier*. The subject possesses *hier* if she represents the origin of scenario contents as *hier*—if she represents things that bear relation *R* to the origin of the scenario content as standing in *R* to *hier*. Moreover, she has to update the relations things bear to *hier* as she moves around in space. When the subject

[14]Note that, in this paper, Peacocke claims that the views presented here are compatible with his account of exhaustive vs. merely canonical methods for establishing contents about the objective world in Peacocke (2001a,b). As far as I can see, however, the views defended in Peacocke (2003) are not compatible with those described in Peacocke (2001a,b). In particular, in the 2003 paper, Peacocke insists that creatures with no reflective-critical abilities can have objective perceptual contents, while in both his 2001 papers, he holds that the ability to accept and reject contents is essential for having objective contents at all. The crucial difference he draws is between creatures who accept and reject contents based on an exhaustive set of methods and those who have, in principle, unlimited resources to find out more about their environment.

In what follows, I will ignore the 2001 account and focus on Peacocke (2003) because I think this latter view is more immune to the worry that he tacitly presupposes concept possession for objective content. I will discuss the relation between objective content and spatial content in the following section.

moves and therefore the relation of a perceived object to the origin of the scenario content changes from *R* to *R'*, she has to update her representation of this object's relation to *hier* from *R* to *R'*.

In this account, the subject possesses a cognitive map of her environment, in relation to which she is able to update her own position. What is central to this account of objectivity is a conscious personal-level representation of the perceiver's position as related to her immediate surroundings, a representation that stays the same across changing perceptual experiences.[15]

Let me be clear that Peacocke's notion *hier* is not a concept. First, as he points out, it could be realized by a clearly pre-conceptual computational mechanism (he gives rats as an example). Second, *hier* does not meet the Generality Constraint. To repeat the example from Sect. 3.4.1.2, a subject who cannot perceive colors at low levels of illumination will not be able to combine her notion *hier* to embrace the content *that object in relation R to hier is green* when the (actually green) object she perceives is not well-lit. But she should be able to embrace this content if the Generality Constraint applied to her notion *hier*.

Third, the notion *hier* can be had by a subject who can do no more than uncritically accept any perceptual content she is presented with, as long as she is able to update *hier* in relation to her perceived environment. The subject need not have any reflective-critical abilities that would be needed for her to evaluate her mental contents and to consider whether she should take them at face value or not. So, this notion does not meet McDowell's own criterion on what it takes to possess a concept, viz. the self-critical ability to use the concept in thought to revise one's empirical beliefs in response to perceptual experience.

Peacocke's view is an example of how the additional appreciation of the world as objective can be made possible without appealing to a concept- and belief-based world-view. It is an attempt to capture the requirement on objective perceptual content in step 2 (A) (of rational integration into a world-view) in nonconceptual terms: A perceiver's experiences are integrated into her cognitive map of her environment. This cognitive map constitutes her grasp of the mind-independence of her surroundings. It can be seen as a less demanding kind of world-view, for it involves the integration of the perceiver's experiences into one cognitive map of her mind-independent environment.[16]

[15]For all this, there is no need even to introduce a first-person notion. Peacocke also explains how a further nonconceptual self-notion *ich* can be introduced starting from these resources. I will ignore this addition, seeing as it is irrelevant for the current discussion. Also, see his distinction between *de se* contents and *here*-contents in Peacocke (2014, 30). Here, he also suggests that representation of stable objects over time requires the subject to have so-called "object files." (p. 15) Maintaining an object file seems to be something done by subpersonal-level processes. By contrast, Peacocke's cognitive map, as I understand it, is a conscious, personal-level representation.

[16]In a similar vein, Bermúdez (1998) describes the ability of the subject to have an integrated representation of her environment over time as one nonconceptual way for her to grasp the distinction between self and world. But he argues that there are even more primitive ways to make this distinction, which do not presuppose that the subject remembers her changing position in her

Taken together with the fall-out from the solipsist case, the result is that representation of the world to the subject as objective can be had without a belief- and concept-based world-view. What is required instead is integration of experience into a cognitive map. So far, step one remains untouched, but step 2 (A) is rejected, at least to the extent that the required integration into a world-view is an integration into a belief and concept-based world view. For perceptual experience can represent the world to the subject as objective when integrated into a cognitive map of her environment.

In contrast with the described strategy, I will argue now that the Modest Nonconceptualist need not grant her opponent even this much. In the next section, I will argue that the subject's appreciation of the mind-independence of the world *in addition* to her *perceiving* the mind-independent world is not necessary for the phenomenally conscious perceptual experience of adult humans. To prepare the ground for this, I will first present an alternative notion of objectivity which does away with the perceiver's additional appreciation of the world as objective.

## 8.4 The Third Reply: No Need for Presentation *as* Objective

I believe that everyone has to allow that perceptual objectivity *in some sense* is indeed needed for genuine content. However, objectivity should not be conceived of in the demanding way suggested by the conceptualist. Recall his three elements of perceptual objectivity: (1) Features of the mind-independent world must be represented; (2) they must be presented *to the subject*; and (3) they must be represented *as objective*. Call the conceptualist's notion of objectivity

Objectivity$_1$ A perceptual experience is objective$_1$ if it presents the subject with objective features of her environment *as objective*.

Note that step one in the argument relies on just this understanding of objectivity. The weaker notion of perceptual objectivity I propose on the Modest Nonconceptualist's behalf is

Objectivity$_2$ A perceptual experience is objective$_2$ if it presents the subject with objective features of her environment.

In the next few paragraphs, I will elucidate the notion of objectivity$_2$ and compare it with the previously proposed notion of objectivity$_1$.

The first element of perceptual objectivity that the Modest Nonconceptualist ought to accept is that it should represent objective features of the world, for we cannot *understand* how experience can have empirical content unless we assume

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environment and which appear to occur at the subpersonal level. For example, he claims that in proprioception the subject has a primitive form of self-consciousness and, at the same time, a very basic grasp of the distinction between self and world—in proprioception, the subject registers which of those things that she perceives, e.g. in vision, do or do not belong to herself.

that it takes hold of the objective world (McDowell 1994a, 33/34). If we were to deny that experience represents the objective world, we would thereby also deny that it has empirical content. It does not make sense to say that experience has representational content while denying that it represents something and that what it represents is (at least in standard perceptual experience) what is or could be the case in the world.

This can be further motivated by an appeal to the distinction between sensory states that are sensitive to *distal* stimuli and ones that are sensitive merely to *proximal* stimuli (Proust 2000). For instance, the retina of the human eye is sensitive to changes in the intensity and frequency of the light waves that strike the retina. We can say that it 'represents' the intensity and frequency of the light waves that stimulate it. But it does not represent anything beyond these proximal stimuli, such as objects or properties at a certain distance from the perceiver; the only information the retina encodes is information about proximal states. Proust argues that there are organisms, such as the California sea slug, that only 'represent' proximal stimuli and cannot go beyond this to represent distal stimuli.

Human subjects, by contrast, can perceptually represent distal stimuli such as (features of) three-dimensional objects at a distance from their perceptual organs, and they can represent them as constant even as they themselves move around their environment.[17] With this ability, we get a distinction between states of the perceiver and states of the environment, between the perceptual states themselves and what they represent, i.e., a distinction between mind and mind-independent world.

Moreover, representation of distal objects leads to the possibility of misrepresentation, as Proust argues. As long as the information contained in the state of certain sensory receptors concerns only the stimulation of these receptors themselves, there is no room for the information to go wrong. But as soon as they represent something outside of the perceptual state itself, we get the possibility of misrepresentation. For it might be that the distal objects represented are not there or that they have different properties.[18]

So, genuinely representational states are ones that have distal content, whereas merely sensory states that contain only proximal information do not have genuine content. When a sensory state is sensitive to the presence of distal features of

[17] See my discussion of perceptual constancy in Sect. 4.2.

[18] For an argument that the possibility of misrepresentation is necessary for genuine representation, see Dretske (1988). There is a lot more to be said on the topic of what distinguishes mere sensation from genuine representation of distal features. Burge (2009, 2010) provides a convincing account of how transformations in the perceptual systems can produce contents that are characterized by veridicality conditions, perceptual constancies, and, adding perceptual memory and perceptual anticipation, representation of bodies as bodies. See, for example, Burge (2010, 397–403 and 437–450).

Corresponding to the distinction between proximal and distal stimuli, the relevant contrast in this context is between 'pre-objective' and 'objective', not between 'subjective' and 'objective' content.

an environment, it is appropriate to introduce the notion of representation and of content to describe the organism's perceptual situation. This corresponds to the first element of the conceptualist's perceptual objectivity.[19]

Let me clarify that representation of constant *three-dimensional* objects at a distance is sufficient, but not necessary for genuine perceptual content. In auditory experience, e.g., sounds are represented. Plausibly, sounds are not three-dimensional objects. What is crucial for perceptual objectivity is that certain *constant* features are represented such that they appear to be a certain way independently of the position and states of the perceiver. In vision, this is typically tied to representation of distal three-dimensional objects. But it is at least conceivable that all that is represented to be out there are constant two-dimensional shapes, independently of the situation of the perceiver.

The second requirement on genuine content that Modest Nonconceptualism accepts is due to the fact that our topic is the content of phenomenally conscious perceptual experience such as that of adult humans. I am here concerned with the phenomenal content of perceptual experience. Consequently, an account of how the content of a state that is not a phenomenally conscious experience can be objective is irrelevant.

Perceptual experience takes place at the level of the person, not at the level of one of its parts—e.g. at the level of some perceptual module or system. It is the subject who is phenomenally conscious, not one of her subsystems. Moreover, as Burge (2010, 376) argues, perception is constitutively tied in with the individual's agency and with her specific perceptual perspective on the world.[20]

Another way to make this claim plausible is to take into consideration organisms that lack a central cognitive organization. According to Dennett (1998), rabbits as well as snakes lack a central organizational level at which all perceptual input is processed—rabbits cannot transfer information they have acquired only with their left eye to their right eye (and vice versa), and snakes can only ever use one perceptual module for the different stages of a mouse hunt. With creatures such as these, it is at least problematic to ascribe to them phenomenally conscious perceptual experience and, in particular, perceptual experience of the same kind as

[19]Correspondingly, I will completely ignore views that defend the possibility of *pre-objective* nonconceptual content, such as those of Dreyfus (2007), Cussins (2003), and Hutto (1998).

[20]My claims here are closely related to Burge's arguments in his recent book *The Origins of Objectivity*. Just like him, I emphasize the relevance of genuine perceptual experience taking place at the personal level (though I came up with this idea independently of his book). For example, he states that "[p]erception is a type of *objective sensory representation by the individual*." (Burge 2010, 368)

One significant difference between our accounts is that, unlike Burge, I focus on the connection between phenomenally conscious experience and genuine perceptual content. Burge is more restrictive than I am with respect to the question of what is required for genuine representation. In addition to the claim that genuine content requires veridicality conditions, he asks for objectification and perceptual constancies, thereby implying that our senses of smell and taste do not produce genuine representations. See Burge (2010, 397–403). Despite these differences, I find his arguments very enlightening and engaging.

that of adult humans. To allow for perceptual experience which presents the world *to the subject*, then, we need an individual with some kind of central organization. Otherwise, we would not be able legitimately to speak of the *subject's* having a perceptual experience.

We cannot fully capture the objective content of a subject's phenomenally conscious perceptual experience unless we include that, in perception, her environment is presented *to her*. To supply this with a more concrete account, think back to Tye's idea that the phenomenal character of experience is due to its content that is (the content of a representation which is) poised to impact the subject's central cognitive system.[21] My suggestion for the Modest Nonconceptualist account, which is based on Tye's view, is that perceptual experience is objective$_2$—it presents the subject with features of an objective world—*if there is a corresponding subpersonal representational output (which already represents distal features of the subject's environment) of a perceptual module that is available to her central behavior-guiding system.* This is what is needed for the experience to have genuine phenomenal content.[22]

Now, as I have pointed out before, on Tye's account, the central cognitive system is a belief/desire system.[23] Representations from the perceptual modules stand ready to have their contents taken up by corresponding beliefs. If a subject has no beliefs, then her perceptual states do not confront her with her environment. The autonomy thesis has to be rejected. Given my demanding view of concept possession and thus of what it takes to have genuine beliefs, non-human animals and human infants will not turn out to have conscious, content-bearing perceptual experiences.[24] As argued before, this is an implausible result, particularly in the face of empirical evidence about the similarities between human and animal physiology and about the discerning behavior of animals and infants.

To avoid this result, Modest Nonconceptualism claims not that a perceptual representation has to be poised to be taken up by the subject's belief/desire system, but that it has to be *available to guide the subject's behavior* or that it has to *constitute her perceptual perspective on the world*. The content carried by a perceptual representation has to be available to the subject in order to present *her* with her environment, so it has to be poised to impact her central behavior-guiding system, even where this is not a conceptual or belief system.

Let me connect this point to my presentation of dual-process theories, also in Sect. 6.2. According to these theories, there are two kinds of cognitive process or,

[21] See Sect. 6.1.

[22] Let me make explicit here that I am not committing myself to the claim that it is *sufficient* for phenomenal content and thus phenomenally conscious experience that a perceptual representation with distal content is available to the central behavior-guiding system. Rather, the claim I am driving at is that all the previous *necessary* conditions for conscious, world-involving perceptual content were too demanding. They should be replaced by my weaker necessary condition.

[23] See, for instance, Tye (2003a).

[24] See Sect. 6.2.

respectively, cognitive system, one explicit and the other implicit. I have argued that the cognitive abilities of animals and infants can be explained by appeal to implicit processes and that explicit cognitive processes should be ascribed only to concept possessors in order to explain their conceptual abilities.[25]

Putting these things together, for subjects who possess no concepts, perceptual representations will not be available to a central cognitive system in the sense of an explicit higher-order control system. Rather, I assume that they are available to an *implicit* centralized behavior-guiding system. Since implicit cognitive processing takes place in animals and infants, I can therefore allow that they have conscious and content-bearing perceptual experiences. To make clear that I am not restricting the Modest Nonconceptualist account of perceptual experience by tying conscious experience of a mind-independent world to an explicit central cognitive system, I will in the following speak of the 'central behavior-guiding system'. I thereby intend to cover centralized systems of both the explicit and the implicit variety, depending on whether the subject is a concept-possessor or not.[26]

Contrary to the Modest Nonconceptualist proposal, Tye identifies the central behavior-guiding system with a belief/desire system. Based on this, the conceptualist might argue that (just like Tye) Modest Nonconceptualism reintroduces integration into a web of concepts and beliefs concerning a mind-independent world by the back door. For my view agrees with his that, for concept-possessors, the relevant perceptual representations are available to be picked up by the subject's beliefs.

To reply, this is not even the case if we conceive of the central behavior-guiding system as a belief/desire system. First, that a content is *poised* to influence the belief system does not entail that it *actually* has an impact on the subject's beliefs—no actual integration with belief is needed for perceptual experience to have genuine content. Second, the personal-level perceptual content is due to the output of an *informationally encapsulated* perceptual module, so that it cannot be shaped by its relations to the subject's belief contents. So, Tye's stronger view does not rely on the embedding of the perceptual experience in a world-view, and neither does my weaker view.

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[25]This is in line with the views defended by Piccinini (2011, 187/188) and Evans and Stanovich (2013, 235), who emphasize that *hypothetical and counterfactual thinking* is tied to explicit cognitive processes. These kinds of thinking, in turn, rely on the thinker's meeting the Generality Constraint: How could you think about hypothetical and counterfactual situations if you lacked the ability to combine your concepts to form thoughts independent of you current situation?

[26]I am not sure whether there is a tension between this account and the way that Evans and Stanovich (2013, 236) set up the distinction between implicit and explicit cognition. They argue that implicit (or Type 1) processes are characterized by the fact that there is no central high-level control involved in them, but that they are autonomous. On the other hand, they do allow that animals do have some "rudimentary forms of higher order control", which they seem to attribute to the presence of an implicit cognitive system. Since centralized behavior control and coordination is much more wide-spread than hypothetical and counterfactual thought and moreover does not depend on this kind of thought, I think it makes sense to line up the implicit/explicit process distinction so that centralized higher-order control may coincide with implicit processes and detached general thought with explicit processes.

To sum up the Modest Nonconceptualist proposal, the transformation from mere proximal stimulation to representation of distal features takes place inside the perceptual systems. The subject has objective$_2$ perceptual experiences presenting her with features of her environment insofar as the corresponding output of the perceptual modules, which is poised to have an impact on her central behavior-guiding system, represents these features.

What distinguishes objectivity$_1$ from this is the idea that the subject has to *take* the world to be constituted by spatially arranged objects, on top of this (hence the 'presents ... her environment *as objective*'). In principle, the subject's additional appreciation of the mind-independence of the world can be either in terms of a world-view or in terms of a cognitive map.

I have already discussed and rejected the necessity of integration into a belief- and concept-based world-view for genuinely objective content. But it remains an open question whether the Modest Nonconceptualist's objectivity$_2$ is a genuine alternative to objectivity$_1$, where the subject's appreciation of the world *as objective* is spelled out in terms of the experience's integration with her other experiences via a *cognitive map* (see my discussion in the previous section).

Here is why objectivity$_1$, supplied by the cognitive-map account, is not necessary for genuine perceptual content. Imagine a subject with a severe case of anterograde amnesia. She has completely lost her short-term memory and is unable to remember anything she perceives. At some point, she will have lost her ability to build up a cognitive map of her surroundings and to locate herself on this map just because her short-term memory is too bad to support a permanent representation of her environment through which she moves. At this point, her perceptual experiences are not objective$_1$ anymore.

Still, I find it highly counterintuitive to claim that any one of her perceptual experiences fails to represent her environment. A more plausible description of her situation is that she genuinely perceives her surroundings at any given moment; she simply lacks the short-term memory to combine her perceptions into one persisting cognitive map. Her impairment concerns her personal-level memory, not her ability to perceive the mind-independent world.

The problem for Peacocke might be solved by pointing out that the amnesia patient will still have concepts of and beliefs about an objective world and that her perceptual experiences will therefore still be embedded in a world-view. More generally, one might claim that, for genuine perception, some sort of grasp of objectivity by the subject is necessary; it is irrelevant whether this is conceptual or whether it is constituted by an ability to locate herself on a cognitive map of her environment.

This is not convincing. Rather, the amnesiac case brings out a deeper question about the requirement of representation to the subject *as objective* for genuine content: Why should we require anything more sophisticated of a perceiver with genuine perceptual experiences than just the ability to have an experience of her environment at a particular time? Why is representation of an objective world to the subject (without adding 'as objective'), as spelled out above, not good enough?

Note that objectivity$_2$ grants genuine perceptual content to the amnesiac. Her loss of personal-level short-term memory has nothing to do with the work of her perceptual modules. They can still output representations of distal objects and properties, which can be poised to have an impact on the central behavior-guiding system. The amnesiac's problem is that she cannot form new memories on the basis of what she experiences. This deficit has no connection with the functioning of her perceptual systems—she is unable to remember what she just saw. So, she is unable to create a cognitive map on the basis of her perceptual experience. Many other of her abilities that rely on her short-term memory of perceptual experiences will be impaired as well (e.g., reaching for a hidden object). But the fact that the actual impact of her perceptual experiences on her beliefs and actions will be limited does not change the fact that the output from the perceptual system will be poised to have an impact on her central behavior-guiding system.[27]

The Modest Nonconceptualist proposal cannot be attacked by the claim that what underlies the amnesiac's memory loss is a failure of information retention mechanisms *within* the perceptual systems. I have no problem with this interpretation of the amnesiac case, for I am happy to concede that, for a perceptual representation to be poised, there have to be information-storage mechanisms in the perceptual module. It makes sense to require this for perceptual representations of distal, constant features in a perceiver's environment, features that are continuous over space and time independently of her own states.[28] Plausibly, fleeting representational analogues to snap-shots would be unable to achieve this. It is also doubtful whether such fleeting representations would be permanent enough to be poised to impact the behavior-guiding system. If the amnesiac case is described in this way, I concede that she has no genuine perceptual experience, but contend that this corresponds to a lack of *poised* perceptual representations, and thus of objectivity$_2$.

More trouble for Modest Nonconceptualism might be caused by Burge (2009, 2010). He suggests that we need perceptual memory (and perceptual anticipation) outside the perceptual systems for objective representation. What characterizes adult human perception is that we perceive constant three-dimensional objects (rather than, e.g., surfaces) that are located in three-dimensional space, related to other such objects, that are continuous over space and time and that have certain constant perceptible properties.[29]

Why should information retention mechanisms at the level of the perceptual systems not be good enough to account for perceptual experience of constant three-

[27]Tye (1995, 7–10) explicates unilateral visual neglect in the same spirit: He suggests that a unilateral visual neglect patient has phenomenally conscious visual experiences in the 'neglected' part of her visual field and that her real deficit is of a higher cognitive order—it is her inability to attend to and notice what she experiences.

[28]Peacocke (2014, 15) plausibly accounts for this by appeal to object-files.

[29]In the following paragraphs, I will focus on the question of how a subject can perceive objects as such, but similar issues could be raised and, I think, solved in similar ways, for perception of spatial relations or of perceptible constant properties of objects. I will leave this out for simplicity's sake.

dimensional objects? Spelke defends the claim that perception of three-dimensional bodies is necessarily intermodal, i.e., has to take place at a level that includes different perceptual modalities.[30] Even Burge, who seems to argue that objectification, perceptual constancies, and veridicality are all results of transformations of perceptual information at the *subpersonal* level, is somewhat ambiguous with respect to the question of whether the subject (at the *personal* level) is required to have capacities for memory and anticipation in order to perceive bodies as such, or whether it is sufficient for there to be information retention mechanisms at the level of the perceptual system.[31]

Burge's point is related to the idea that the perceiver's experience needs to be integrated into a cognitive map of her environment for it to have genuine content—such a cognitive map relies on the subject's memory of her perceptual experience to create an integrated representation of her surroundings over time. This is all it takes for the subject to appreciate her environment as objective, and thus for objectivity$_1$. The question is whether it is really necessary for the genuine perceptual content mentioned in step one of the argument from objectivity.

How to decide whether we need personal-level memory or whether subpersonal information retention is sufficient? To lend further support to my claim that personal-level capacities, memory in particular, are not needed for perceptual experience with objective content, let me add a further twist to the amnesiac case. I will investigate what the adherent of objectivity$_1$ has to say about the amnesiac's recovery of her short-term memory and of her objective perceptual experience.

Imagine that, at $t_1$, the amnesia patient is facing an apple, but she has no short-term memory of her recent past. So her perceptual state (if I may call it that) that would, under better circumstances, represent the apple, is not integrated into a cognitive map at this point. If objectivity$_1$ is needed for perceptual experience with genuine content, then the amnesia patient does not have genuine experience of the apple, with genuine content, at $t_1$.

Now imagine that, exactly at $t_1$, her capability to form short-term memories is miraculously restored. As a consequence, when she is still facing the apple at $t_2$, she has a genuine perceptual experience representing the apple to her. With her short-term memory restored, she now remembers her perceptual state at $t_1$, so that her experience at $t_2$ is integrated into a cognitive map of her environment, including the apple.

What is very strange about this account is that—as described—the amnesiac now has a memory of her perceptual state and its content at $t_1$. Without it, she would not yet be able to construct a cognitive map of her environment, and thus would not have an experience of the apple at $t_2$. This suggests that, looking back from her

[30]Cf. Burge (2010, 448), where he attacks this claim. Note that this does not imply that personal-level capacities are involved in objective perceptual experience.

[31]See e.g. Burge (2009), who appears to be ambiguous between the claim that the perceptual system or, respectively, the individual, needs to have capacities such as the ability to track a body over time. I thank him for a clarifying e-mail on this topic.

situation at $t_2$, her perceptual state at $t_1$ is a phenomenally conscious experience with genuine objective content. For how else could she remember what she perceived? But how can this be the case if her perceptual state was not a genuine experience with objective content at $t_1$?

Excluding backwards causation, it either must have been a perceptual experience with genuine content originally, or the healed amnesia patient's memory, at $t_2$, of her previous perceptual state, must be mistaken. The defender of objectivity$_1$ cannot accept the first option, and I do not see how he could make the second option work. For how could she have a mistaken phenomenally conscious memory of a genuinely content-bearing perceptual state that was not phenomenally conscious, and had no content, at the time? This is especially problematic since the phenomenally conscious memory of this perceptual state, including its content, supposedly partly constitutes the cognitive map that is needed to render her experience at $t_2$ phenomenally conscious.

So, the claim that objectivity$_2$ is all that is needed for genuine perceptual content is supported not only by the intuitive appeal of the claim that the amnesia patient's perceptual experience is not impaired by her memory loss. It has the added advantage of bypassing the strange consequences of the amnesiac case for adherents of the cognitive-map account of objectivity$_1$.

Consequently, Modest Nonconceptualism endorses objectivity$_2$, not objectivity$_1$, as a necessary condition on genuine perceptual content. Step one of the argument from objectivity is untenable—genuine perceptual experience need not present the world to the subject *as objective*, and no appreciation of the mind-independence of the world with the help of additional mental capacities is needed. What is needed for experience to have genuine content is that it presents the world to the subject. Rather than appealing to her personal-level capacities to explain how genuine perceptual content is possible, I have argued that we should look to the subject's subpersonal cognitive organization. The representations underlying genuine perceptual experience must be outputs of the perceptual modules, representing distal features of the subject's environment, that are poised to make a difference to the central behavior-guiding system.

## 8.5 A Conceptualist Comeback: Objective$_2$ Content Is Not Genuine

My endorsement of objectivity$_2$, (perceptual experience is objective if it presents the subject with objective features of her environment, no additional personal-level appreciation required) makes Modest Nonconceptualism immediately susceptible to McDowell's criticism: It is committed to an empirical notion of content illegitimately imported from cognitive science to a philosophical debate about individuals. He believes that there is a gap between 'content' as it is legitimately used in cognitive science and a demanding notion of content that is needed in the current philosophical context. (See McDowell 1994a,b, 2009b.)

I have previously discussed McDowell's claims in my defense against the first epistemological objection in Sect. 7.2. Nonconceptualism about personal-level perceptual experience is not necessarily combined with a *naturalistic* account of content and is therefore immune to the epistemological argument based on McDowell's claim that nonconceptual content is not genuine content. Recall that the nonconceptualist's personal-level notion of content is genuinely normative.

Let me now address some of McDowell's reason for the existence of an unbridgeable gap between *content* in cognitive science and in philosophy. He thinks that the use of 'content' in the cognitive sciences is merely metaphorical and applies only to the *subpersonal* level. I have quoted above his criticism of the claim that the content of perceptual experience is "a welling-up to the surface of some of the content that a good psychological theory would attribute to goings-on in our cognitive machinery." (McDowell 1994a, 55) But all the cognitive scientist can describe is a "syntactic engine" (McDowell 1994b, 198) and the processing of symbols that takes place in its subsystems. The parts of the cognitive system are not in touch with the world, so they cannot have genuine content; they are only in touch with the representational vehicles they process.

Moreover, there is no one there at the subpersonal level who understands or knows anything about the distal objects in the subject's environment or even about the proximal inputs into the perceptual system. This means that there cannot be any genuine content present at the subpersonal level either. (See McDowell (1994b, 198/199): "The system knows nothing even about the character of the immediate physical impacts on the input transducers." Also, "an animal's internal control mechanism . . . is not . . . a semantic engine, interpreting inputs as signs of environmental facts[.]")

McDowell himself, by contrast, means to describe perceptual content at the personal level; it is the content of the mental states of a subject who interacts with her environment and who is in direct touch with it; this subject has an understanding of the fact that she is placed in an environment which is presented to her in perception, so she can be said to have genuinely content-bearing perceptual experiences.

The latter claim—that there is no one at the subpersonal level who could understand or interpret the representations that are being processed—does not provide any support for McDowell's contention that the cognitive scientist's notion of content cannot be taken literally. For this is just a repetition of the overall conceptualist claim that the nonconceptualist calls into question: That the subject needs an understanding of the world (as objective) in order to have genuine content-bearing mental states representing the world. At the subpersonal level, this turns into the claim that without anyone being there to interpret the symbols, they cannot have genuine content. Since this claim is just what is at stake, asserting it in this context is not helpful.

How about McDowell's other claim, that cognitive science can only deal with syntactic events at the subpersonal level? McDowell (1994b, 199) provides an interesting example of how content can come into the picture, but only at the personal level: He claims that (by contrast to their subpersonal parts) animals such as frogs are "semantic engines. [. . .] The background against which this makes

sense is their competent inhabiting of their environment." A frog has perceptual states with genuine content, for it is an embodied agent that competently interacts with its environment.[32] The perceptual content of animals at the personal level is not constituted by the 'contents' that are processed at the level of their perceptual systems. It is a content that we legitimately ascribe to their perceptual states because they are individuals competently dealing with problems and opportunities in their environments.

It seems that McDowell is motivated by a kind of direct realism. Only systems in direct touch with the world can have mental states as *of* the world. In other words, only the subject, who is embedded in the environment, can have states with genuine, objective content that represent her environment. Internal processes are not in touch with the world in this way, so they cannot have genuine content.

I do not have the room to get into the debate over direct realism here. Nonetheless, note that a view according to which representations are processed in the perceptual systems does not preclude directness, if it is properly understood. For the subject, on any reasonable representationalist position, does not perceive her representations, but perceives the world directly with the help of these representations. Similarly, representations processed in the perceptual systems do not represent themselves or intermediate steps in their processing, but those features in the subject's environment that it is their purpose to represent, that they causally co-vary with, etc.

If I understand him correctly, McDowell's overarching worry is not that we might talk about subpersonal contents in a *causal, or enabling* account of the genuine contents of our perceptual experiences. Rather, he is opposed to identifying (in a *constitutive* account) the real contents of individuals with the merely 'as-if' contents that cognitive scientists ascribe at the subpersonal level (McDowell 1994b, 199). This strategy, he thinks, would render personal-level contents as non-genuine as the subpersonal-level contents that supposedly constitute them.

Against this, Burge (2005, 2010) argues that it is unproblematic to accept that the content of perceptual experience is nothing more than the output of the perceptual systems becoming available to the subject. For perceptual psychology explicitly treats the transformations in the perceptual systems as content-bearing, not as mere syntactic events, *and* investigates the perceptual goings-on *of individuals*. As he points out, the whole point of perceptual psychology is to explain the perceptual states of animals and humans. The *very successful* theory of perceptual psychology presupposes that the—itself content-bearing—output from the perceptual systems is what the subject becomes aware of at the personal level; this is what constitutes the content of the subject's perceptual experiences. This alone is a good empirical reason to deny that there is a principled gap between content at the subpersonal level and content at the personal level.

[32]Interestingly, but maybe just for the sake of argument, McDowell diverges here from his view that only concept possessors who have an understanding of their situation in their environment can have content-bearing perceptual experience.

I am not convinced by Burge's argument. It is legitimate for philosophers of psychology to reflect upon and to criticize the practice of equating contents referred to in personal- and in subpersonal-level explanations. To reply to such criticisms, it is not enough to insist that this is standard practice. I agree with him to a certain extent—it is legitimate to ascribe content to subpersonal representations that can be said to represent distal features of the subject's environment. But I agree with McDowell that we should not uncritically conflate contents at the different levels. We should be especially cautious here since the defining feature of perceptual content is that it is phenomenally conscious, whereas it is at least odd to say that subpersonal-level representations have phenomenally conscious content.

But then what about the Modest Nonconceptualist's claim that perceptual experience owes its objectivity to the fact that representations (of objective features of the subject's environment) from the perceptual modules are poised to have an impact on the central cognitive system? The Modest Nonconceptualist's personal-level claim is that perceptual experience manages to present the perceiver with her environment all by itself, without the help of further personal-level capacities. The world simply strikes the perceiver a certain way. The Modest Nonconceptualist's subpersonal-level claim is that we can understand how perceptual experience can come into the picture already charged with empirical import by looking at the mechanisms (in the perceptual modules) that transform registrations of proximal stimuli into genuine representations of distal features of the subject's environment. Moreover, we have to take into account the functional situation of these representations in the cognitive architecture (they have to be poised). As I have argued, we are not forced to understand the cognitive system as a mere syntactic machine—subpersonal-level representations can have content in a robust sense.

However, my story of the objectivity of perceptual experience and its content does not commit me to the view that perceptual experiences are identical with the representations outputted by the perceptual modules, or that their content is identical with the content of these representations. According to Modest Nonconceptualism, experience and its underlying representations indeed have the same *external* content—they represent the same worldly states of affairs. But I am happy to concede that the relevant subpersonal representations do no more than explain how it is possible for the subject herself to experience her surroundings, so that there may be two different representational entities, one at the personal and one at the subpersonal level, which may have different structural features and thus different internal contents.

Consequently, Modest Nonconceptualism can accommodate McDowell's requirement that subpersonal-level contents can only give enabling conditions for genuine perceptual experience. My account of objective$_2$ perceptual content is not threatened by his criticism.

## 8.6 Results

Let me conclude. I started out by presenting the argument from objectivity: Genuine perceptual content must represent the world to the subject as objective; it can do so only if it is rationally integrated into a world-view, and it can be integrated into a world-view only if it is conceptual. So genuine perceptual content must be conceptual, and nonconceptualism is false.

To defend nonconceptualism, I presented three attacks on different steps of the argument. The first objection, directed at step two (B), was the weakest. According to it, a perceptual content need not be conceptual to be rationally integrated into a world-view. Unfortunately, this objection does not address McDowell's contention that, to be directly constituted by components presupposing the objectivity of the world, perceptual contents have to be conceptual.

Instead of dealing with this last claim, I tried to strengthen the case for nonconceptualism by presenting the second objection, which is directed at step two (A), the claim that rational integration into a (belief- and concept-based) world-view is necessary for perceptual objectivity. The solipsist case shows that even a subject who lacks a world-view can have perceptual experience presenting the subject with an objective world as objective. I provided an alternative account of what is needed for perception of the world as objective, viz., integration of perceptual experiences into a cognitive map of her environment.

Third, I objected to step one: representation of the world *as objective*, which involves the subject's *taking* the world to be objective, is not required for genuine perceptual content. I argued that an amnesiac's memory loss does not affect her perceptual experience itself, even if it impairs her ability to interact with her environment or to form new beliefs. Moreover, I pointed out that the claim that possession of a cognitive map is needed for genuine perceptual experience leads to strange consequences if the amnesiac is healed. Apparently, a perceptual state that did not have genuine content at the time can be the source of a genuine content-bearing memory of what she did not really experience originally.

I conclude that the objection from objectivity fails. The Modest Nonconceptualist need not grant that genuine perceptual content presupposes the subject's ability in any way to appreciate the mind-independence of the world on top of her perceptual experience. Rather, all that it presupposes is that the world is perceptually presented to her. In order to elucidate this claim, we do not have to appeal to further personal-level capacities. Instead, we need a subpersonal account of how the perceptual systems generate representations (corresponding to her experiences) that are poised to influence the central behavior-guiding system.

I defended my view against McDowell's criticism that subpersonal-level 'as-if' contents cannot legitimately be identified with personal-level perceptual contents. I argued that there can be robust content-ascriptions at the subpersonal level. At any rate, Modest Nonconceptualism is not committed to identifying the contents of perceptual experience with those of the underlying subpersonal-level representations.

Let me add that Modest Nonconceptualism can respect the intuition that the subject has to 'appreciate', in some minimal sense of the word, her mind-independent surroundings for her to experience them. This appreciation can be fully captured by the fact that, in experience *itself*, she is aware of the objective states of affairs her experience represents. No additional personal-level mental states of appreciation are needed for this. The world strikes the perceiver a certain way in her experience.[33]

It is likely that this account will not satisfy my conceptualist opponent. His fear of the blindness of perceptual experience calls for the subject to *understand*, and in this sense appreciate, that she is confronted with a mind-independent world. An appeal to subpersonal processes will not be able to assuage his fear.

The conceptualist's worry is caused by his misconception of his and the nonconceptualist's dialectical situation. What motivates him is the specter of a perceptual experience that does not present the subject with the world around her, but with raw feels, from which she is supposed to draw conclusions about her surroundings. It is admittedly impossible to construct genuinely representational experiences from this starting-point. But this is not the nonconceptualist's view. She addresses the content worry by assuming that experience already comes with genuine representational content. In order to understand how this is possible, it is legitimate to turn to the subpersonal processes investigated by cognitive science.

[33]The argument presented in this chapter is the argument I alluded to previously in Sects. 6.1 and 6.2, which supports the claim that additional or conceptual appreciation is not needed to explain how the subject can be presented with her environment in perceptual experience. Note that, in the current chapter, I am concerned with the subject's appreciation of the fact that her experience represents a *mind-independent* world, whereas previously, the question was whether *any* feature that the subject is perceptually presented with has to be appreciated by her. The claim defended here is applicable to the issues I have discussed previously—for according to Modest Nonconceptualism, *no* additional conceptual appreciation whatsoever is needed for genuine perception.

# Chapter 9
# Modest Nonconceptualism Vindicated

## 9.1 Taking Stock

In this book, I have argued for a Modest Nonconceptualism. To this end, I first defended all participants in the nonconceptualism debate against the critics (Chap. 3), who claim that the notions of conceptual and nonconceptual content are often misunderstood. In particular, I objected to the claim that many arguments do not support content nonconceptualism, but only state nonconceptualism. I did this by defending the state-to-content principle (S2C) and by arguing that conceptualists and nonconceptualists share similar theoretical purposes which are best met by ascribing conceptual content to conceptual mental states, and nonconceptual content to nonconceptual mental states. I tried to bring out these purposes under the headers 'the content worry', 'the epistemological worry', and 'the phenomenological worry'. Moreover, I argued that mental states have exactly that kind of content the ascription of which best fulfills our theoretical needs.

After this stage setting, I discussed six central arguments for nonconceptualism. First, I investigated whether the argument from the fineness of grain can support nonconceptualism (Sect. 4.1). I conceded that the conceptualist's pure demonstrative strategy can eliminate the original objection—that perceptual content is much more fine-grained than what our conceptual resources can account for. His fatal problem is, however, that he cannot plausibly account for the phenomenal character of perceptual hallucinations. I argued that this problem can be solved by (General NC-ism$_{min}$), the view that *every* perceptual experience has minimally nonconceptual content.

The second argument started from the situation-dependence and inextricability of perceptual content (Sect. 4.2). For instance, I see the constant white color of the wall, but also its changing context-dependent color, such as its grayish hue in the shade. Moreover, there is a difference between seeing the purple of a wool carpet and the purple of a steel ball. The conceptualist is hard put to come up with an account of these features—the two conceptualist options I presented (an appeal to modes



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of presentation and the claim that two different demonstrative concepts, one for the constant, the other for the situation-dependent property, are in play in experience) were equally unattractive. This argument supports (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$).

In Chap. 5, I presented the argument from contradictory contents. I argued that—according to conceptualism/propositionalism—no perceptual content involves direct contradictions, thanks to the Fregean principle of concept individuation. On the other hand, examples such as the waterfall illusion and some synesthetes' visual experiences provide evidence that some conceptual perceptual contents do involve contradictions. Discussion of these examples led me to the observation that—due to structural differences—belief content, but not perceptual content, is revisable under rational pressure. I concluded that the content of each of our perceptual experiences is minimally nonconceptual. (So (General NC-ism$_{min}$) is true.)

My fourth argument was the argument from memory experience (Sect. 6.1), which at best supports (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$). The conceptualist cannot account for the following scenario: If a subject perceives a certain feature f of her environment, she can later remember that she perceived f even if her original perceptual experience occurred at a time when she was unable to conceptualize f. This argument is problematic, for to be bulletproof, the scenario has to be adapted so that the subject is guaranteed not to possess any concepts whatsoever of the feature in question; but if the scenario is changed accordingly, the subject is behaviorally indifferent towards f and so it becomes questionable whether her perceptual experience represents this particular feature at all.

In my presentation of the fifth argument (Sect. 6.2), the argument from animal and infant perception, I defended the claim that animals and infants have perceptual experiences with genuine content, rather than just perceptual sensitivity. I argued that, for every perceptual experience of an adult human, there is plausibly an animal or infant perceptual experience with (at least partially) the same content. Since the animals and infants in question are not concept possessors, their perceptual contents must be nonconceptual, and the same must be true of the matching perceptual contents of adult human beings. I emphasized the importance of the Generality Constraint as a condition on the possession of genuine explicit concepts for this argument, for this is the one condition that animals and infants clearly cannot meet; I argued that any subject who meets the inferential condition on concept possession will also fulfill the Generality Constraint. This argument supports (General NC-ism$_{min}$).

The sixth argument for nonconceptualism pointed out the conceptualist's difficulties with respect to concept acquisition (Sect. 6.3). The acquisition of a subject's first perceptual-demonstrative concepts can only be explained by appeal to her conscious experience of the relevant features or objects. For perceptual-demonstrative concepts can be exercised freely in new situations to refer to objects or properties the subject has never encountered before; they cannot be applied to things that the subject is not aware of; and, according to the conceptualist, she has no awareness of things before she possesses concepts to refer to them. The conceptualist, then, cannot explain how we can acquire and exercise perceptual-demonstrative concepts for unfamiliar situations. This argument supports the claim

that our perceptual experiences, at least before we have acquired any concepts, have nonconceptual content; it is neutral on the question of which kind of content our experiences have after we have acquired a wide range of concepts. That is to say, it supports (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$).

All in all, five of the six arguments presented are successful in support of (NC-ism$_{min}$), and therefore in a refutation of conceptualism. What is more, three of them (the arguments from the fineness of grain, from contradictory contents, and from animal and infant perception) entail (General NC-ism$_{min}$), the claim that is presupposed by Modest Nonconceptualism.

Then I moved on to discuss the two central conceptualist objections to nonconceptualism, the epistemological objection and the objection from objectivity. Concerning the three versions of the epistemological objection, I conceded that all elements of the contents of all our perceptual experiences may, in principle, be involved in epistemic justification. This is important because this way the objection causes trouble even for (Weak NC-ism$_{min}$).

The first version of the epistemological objection draws a distinction between a logical space of reasons and a logical space of natural law (Sect. 7.2). Only *conceptual* perceptual content falls into the normative space of reasons and can therefore bear rational/justificatory relations to belief contents. Therefore, the content of all our conscious perceptual experiences must be fully conceptual. I replied that the notion of scenario content (endorsed by Modest Nonconceptualism) is a normative notion and suggested that there may be another logical space encompassing both conceptual and nonconceptual content, viz., the logical space of content. Elements in this logical space are fit to enter rational/justificatory relations with each other, so that perceptual experiences with nonconceptual content may justify beliefs.

The second version of the epistemological objection (Sect. 7.3) states that nonconceptual and non-propositional content does not have the right kind of 'format' to play a role in the justification of belief. For *inferential* justification of beliefs with Fregean propositional contents presupposes that the content of perceptual experiences consists in Fregean propositions also. I responded to this objection by presenting the Modest Nonconceptualist account of perceptual justification, which I take to be based on a special kind of rational relation between the external contents of experience and belief, viz. content-sensitive correctness-truth transitions. For even if the contents of experience and belief differ internally, there can be a semantic relation between the states of affairs that they represent. A particular perceptual experience can justify a certain belief if its correctness requires the truth of the belief, for instance. I responded to several objections to my CSCTT account of perceptual justification.

The third version of the objection presupposes that a perceptual content can function as the subject's reason to hold a certain belief only if she can cognitively access this content (Sect. 7.4). It is then argued that nonconceptual content is not cognitively accessible in any acceptable way, so that the assumption of nonconceptual perceptual content makes it impossible for experience to justify belief. In my reply, I pointed out that the nonconceptualist can allow for the subject's dispositional

cognitive access to her perceptual contents, whereas the requirement of occurrent cognitive access is too strong. Further, I argued that the fact that perceptual contents are the contents of a subject's *conscious* perceptual experiences is good enough to account for their particular justificatory relevance on the Modest Nonconceptualist picture.

The objection from objectivity (Chap. 8) is supposed to show that all perceptual content must be conceptual by arguing that only conceptual content is genuine content. For nonconceptual content is not objective, and only objective content amounts to genuine content. I replied on behalf of Modest Nonconceptualism that a weaker kind of perceptual objectivity, which does not require any kind of additional personal-level appreciation of the mind-independence of what is represented, is sufficient for genuine perceptual content. That objective features of the subject's environment strike her in perceptual experience can be explained by appeal to subpersonal-level information-processing and cognitive architecture. For this, there is no need to appeal to conceptual content at all.

The outcome of my discussion of the conceptualist objections is that none of them is fatal to nonconceptualism: Nonconceptual content, as conceived by the Modest Nonconceptualist at least, is objective and can bear justificatory relations to belief content. So, let me conclude that, in the debate between conceptualism and nonconceptualism, the latter theory is victorious.

## 9.2 Modest Nonconceptualism

Let me say a few words about the features of the Modest Nonconceptualism that results from my discussion. With respect to the *pervasiveness* of the nonconceptual, my view presupposes (General NC-ism$_{min}$). All perceptual experiences are at least partly nonconceptual: They do not require the exercise of every single pertinent conceptual ability. Every one of them has at least some nonconceptual and non-propositional content. Nonetheless, perceptual contents may involve some conceptual elements, and perceptual experiences may require the exercise of some conceptual abilities. This is one respect in which the version of nonconceptualism proposed here is *modest*. As to the relation between nonconceptual states and nonconceptual content, Modest Nonconceptualism relies on the state-to-content principle (S2C). In slogan form: A mental state has conceptual content if and only if it is a conceptual mental state; it has nonconceptual content if and only if it is a nonconceptual mental state.

As to the nature of *concepts*, my view is liberal to whether it is Fregean senses, mental representations, or cognitive abilities that deserve this title. In any case, concepts are closely tied to concept possession. Concepts are possessed to the extent that the subject possesses the pertinent inferential abilities, abilities for general thought (in virtue of her inferential abilities), and in some cases, recognitional abilities (again in virtue of her inferential abilities). As to the nature of nonconceptual *content*, I hold that the nonconceptual content of perceptual

experience is scenario content and thus also non-propositional. This proposal is motivated by the phenomenological worry: Scenario content respects the subject's perspective on the world as a spatial arrangement of things and their properties centered around her. Externally conceived, the content of perceptual experience consists in the states of affairs represented. Conceptual content, by contrast, is identified with Fregean propositions.

Further, Modest Nonconceptualism accepts the truth of the *Autonomy Thesis*. Some subjects who are not concept-possessors have genuinely content-bearing perceptual experiences. Genuine world-involving perceptual content is to be accounted for by the subjects subpersonal architecture (representation of distal features by the underlying representation; availability of the representation to a centralized action-guiding system), not by appeal to additional mental states or conceptual abilities. The view is thus able to relieve the content worry, according to which we can have thought directed at the world only if we have content-bearing perceptual experience that constrains our thought.

Vis-à-vis the *epistemological* worry, Modest Nonconceptualism incorporates the claim that, as a genuinely representational mental state, perceptual experience and its content can have a bearing on the truth and justificatory status of empirical belief. There is room for normative constraints on belief from the world via perceptual experience. Further, the perceptual justification of belief does not proceed via inferential transitions, but by way of content-sensitive correctness-truth transitions. In such a transition, the correctness of a perceptual experience guarantees or renders likely the truth of the belief based on it, while relying on their external contents. This is another respect in which my view is modest: It grants that there is a kind of content that experience and belief have in common, which is essential to perceptual justification. Finally, Modest Nonconceptualism endorses some elements of epistemological internalism. Perceptual experience (and its content) may be the subject's own epistemic reason, for it is a conscious mental state (or, respectively, content) of the subject.

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