

PERCEPTION WITH AND WITHOUT CONCEPTS: SEARCHING FOR A  
NONCONCEPTUALIST ACCOUNT OF PERCEPTUAL CONTENT

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **PERCEPTION WITH AND WITHOUT CONCEPTS: SEARCHING FOR A NONCONCEPTUALIST ACCOUNT OF PERCEPTUAL CONTENT**

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It is agreed upon by many philosophers that perception represents the world to be in a certain way. However, there is disagreement among those philosophers about whether perceptual content is conceptual or not. The aim of this thesis is to provide a clear presentation of the debate and to propose an account of nonconceptual perceptual content that can tackle many philosophical problems related to the issue.

Conceptualism about perceptual content is the view that perceptual content is wholly conceptual. Proponents of this view claim that a subject cannot be in a contentful perceptual state without possessing concepts that fully characterize the content of his experience. The main motivation behind conceptualism is the justificatory role perception is supposed to play in forming perceptual beliefs. It is claimed that if perceptual content provides rational ground or reason for forming perceptual beliefs, it has to be conceptual just like the belief it is a reason for.

However, there are several philosophical problems that arise from such an understanding of perceptual content. Most of them mainly derive from the implausibility of the claim that a subject needs to possess every concept that figures in the characterization of the content of his perceptual state. So, nonconceptualism is based on the assumption that a contentful perceptual state can occur albeit the absence of all or some concepts that characterize the content. Therefore, in this thesis I aim to provide a notion of nonconceptual perceptual content that is epistemically relevant, i.e. that can ground perceptual beliefs in spite of its nonconceptual character.

Keywords: Perception, content, conceptual, nonconceptual.

## ÖZ

### KAVRAMLI VE KAVRAMSIZ ALGI: ALGI İÇERİĞİNE KAVRAM- DIŞISALCI BİR AÇIKLAMA ARAYIŞI

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Birçok düşünür algı deneyimlerinin dünyayı belli bir şekilde sunduğu konusunda hemfikirdir. Ancak bu düşünürler arasında algı içeriğinin kavramsal olup olmadığı konusunda ciddi bir uyuşmazlık vardır. Bu tezin amacı bu fikir ayrılığını açık bir şekilde sunmak ve birçok felsefe sorunu ile başa çıkabilecek kavram-dışısalcı bir algı içeriği açıklaması önermektir.

Kavramsalcılık, algı içeriğinin baştan aşağı kavramsal olduğunu savunan görüştür. Bu görüşün savunucuları bir öznenin algısının içeriğini tasvir eden kavramların tümüne sahip olmadan içerikli bir algı deneyimi yaşayamayacağını iddia ederler. Kavramsalcılığın en temel motivasyonu algının inanç oluşumunda üstlendiği gerekçelendirme rolüdür. Eğer algı içeriği algısal inançlara rasyonel temel veya neden teşkil ediyorsa, tıpkı neden olduğu inanç gibi kendisinin de kavramsal bir içeriğe sahip olması gerektiği iddia edilir.

Böyle bir algı içeriği anlayışı birçok felsefe sorununu da beraberinde getirir. Bu sorunların çoğu, temel olarak öznenin algı içeriğini betimleyen tüm kavramlara sahip olması iddiasının makul olmayışından kaynaklanmaktadır. O halde kavram-

dışsalcılık, içerikli bir algı deneyiminin içeriğini betimleyen tüm veya bazı kavramların olmaması durumunda da oluşabileceği varsayımına dayanmaktadır. Bu nedenle, bu tezde epistemik açıdan önem taşıyan, yani algısal inançlara neden teşkil edebilecek kavram-dışsalcı bir algı içeriği nosyonu sunmayı amaç edinmekteyim.

Anahtar Kelimeler: algı, içerik, kavramsal, kavram-dışsalcı.

**To my son**

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Perception is usually thought of as the most generous source of information about the external world. We would unhesitatingly say that we see a friend's car, a child's toy, hear a tone of voice, smell a flower or feel the coldness of ice. Most of us would also say that we see a friend's sadness or hear the exuberance of a piece of music too. And all we perceive, we perceive them to be in a certain way: the car as blue, the ice as cold, and the voice as cracked. Put in other words, perception has representational content. It represents things in a certain way.

We do not only perceive things in a certain way; along with perception we also think, make judgments and form beliefs about things that we perceive. Most of our beliefs about the external world are perceptual beliefs that we acquire on the basis of our perceptual experience. We usually believe that a car is blue merely because we perceive it to be so. But things are not so simple. The path from perception to our beliefs about and conceptions of the external world is a subject of controversy in recent philosophy especially in philosophy of mind and epistemology. The general aim of this dissertation is to shed some light on our understanding of how we come to perceive the world around us as we do and to search for to what extent our conceptual capacities are embedded in the way we perceive the world through examining whether perception and conception are separable or not.

The relation between our perception and perceptual beliefs is very close, so that it even led some philosophers to characterize perception as acquisition of belief. Some philosophers did not go that far, but nevertheless claimed that perceptions are like beliefs in that the contents of both involve conceptual capacities. Even

though it is commonly agreed upon that perception is a contentful mental state, there is disagreement on whether this content is conceptual or not. This issue of whether concepts are already operative in perceptual experiences or not commonly leads to two opposing positions: conceptualism and nonconceptualism about perceptual content.

We can define conceptualism roughly as the view that perceptual experiences have conceptual content thoroughly. According to conceptualism, in order to undergo an experience of perception the subject needs to possess all the relevant concepts that properly characterize the content of the experience. So, conceptual capacities are already operative in perception. Nonconceptualism, on the other hand, claims that perception can have nonconceptual content. A subject can have a contentful perceptual experience even though he does not possess some of the concepts that are needed to properly specify the content of his experience. Conceptual capacities do not need to be operative for perception to occur. The main argument for conceptualism is epistemological. It derives from the fact that perception provides reason for beliefs. Something cannot be a reason to hold a belief unless it is conceptual, it is claimed. This is why perceptual content has to be conceptual. Though it is undeniable that attributing a conceptual character to perceptual content seems to facilitate the understanding of the transition between perception and perceptual beliefs, it nevertheless triggers important philosophical problems. Therefore, it seems to be more convenient if we can find an account of perceptual content that does not lead to those problems but that can nevertheless account for the rational relation that is supposed to hold between perception and belief. This is why, throughout my dissertation, I attempt to show that we have good reasons for why perceptual content should be seen as nonconceptual and to deny that only conceptual content can constitute reason for beliefs. My motivation for nonconceptualism derives from the intuition that perception is a more primitive mental event compared to other cognitive acts such that it does not require the deployment of conceptual capacities and can also take place in nonconceptual beings. Being so, I argue, does not exclude it from rationality. Though my dissertation in general does not aim at constructing a theory of

perceptual justification, I will nevertheless present a possible elementary account of how nonconceptual perceptual content can indeed constitute good reasons for holding particular perceptual beliefs.

Perhaps, the best way to define the boundaries of anything starts from defining what it leaves out. The epistemological aspect of perception is a vast topic that goes beyond the purpose of this dissertation. Let me therefore, explain first what my thesis is not about and what it leaves out concerning the epistemic standing of perception in order to provide a clear presentation of its scope. One of the central questions concerning the epistemology of perception is whether perception can justify beliefs or not. According to some philosophers, such as Donald Davidson, perceptual experiences can bear merely causal relation to beliefs, and cannot justify them. My dissertation however is not an endeavor to answer this question. I assume without an argument that providing justification, reason or warrant for beliefs or perceptual beliefs is required if a state is to count as a genuine perceptual experience. How and why I am justified in this claim is not the subject of this dissertation. So, my point of departure is the assumption that perceptual experiences give rational grounds to subjects for holding certain perceptual beliefs. I, therefore find it crucial to ensure that the notion of perceptual content I propose satisfies the requirement of being empirically relevant.

Another widely discussed issue about perception concerns its relation to the external world. Does the external world put merely causal constraints on perception, or does it also determine its content? Or, does perceptual content bear some representational relation to the external world or not? The answer to these questions is not commonly agreed upon. Some philosophers hold that the content of perception is not representational because experiences are raw feels “that do not purport to represent the world in any way at all.” (Siegel 2011) However, in discussing whether perceptual content is conceptual or not, I will also assume that perception has representational content and is about the external world. It presents the subject the world as being a certain way. So, my dissertation does not include the debate on whether perception in general is representational or not,

simply it assumes that it is representational. However even though the dissertation does not include such a debate, for the sake of showing that the notion of nonconceptual perception I propose is a genuine case of perception, it will be shown that this notion is indeed representational.

So, I can briefly re-state the aim of my dissertation as the following: to present a coherent account of nonconceptual representational content of perception that is epistemically relevant, that is, one that can constitute rational ground for holding certain perceptual beliefs. The next chapter aims to lay out the framework of the debate through clarifying some fundamental notions. To this aim, I will present certain interpretations of the Kantian understanding of perception as the starting point of the whole debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists. I will further clarify what the notions such as “content”, “perception” and “concept possession” amount to within the framework of our current debate.

Chapter 3 will consist of a presentation of McDowellian conceptualism (as presented in his *Mind and World*) supplemented by Bill Brewer’s conceptualism. After having presented the main conceptualist thesis, I go on to elaborate how McDowell sees conceptualism as a secure position between coherentism and the Myth of the Given. For McDowell, his notion of conceptual perceptual content, by both involving conceptual capacities and being constrained by the external world, does not fall victim to the Myth of the Given and does not lead to any kind of coherentism or idealism. The last section of this chapter will engage on the relation between perceptual content and belief. According to conceptualism, perception constitutes reason for perceptual beliefs, but as will be seen, for them, perception can do so only if it has conceptual content.

In the fourth chapter, I present the nonconceptualist position according to which having contentful perceptual states does not require that the subject possess and deploy concepts that specify that very content. Arguments in favor of nonconceptualism are numerous, but for the sake of clarity I will present only four of them. The first argument, known as the “Argument from Fineness of

Grain,” roughly states that perceptual content is too finely grained to be conceptual, for concepts we have are coarser grained than perceptual content. The second one is the “Argument from Richness of Perceptual Content” according to which, perceptual content is so rich in details that it is unlikely for a subject to deploy a concept for each one of these details. A third argument challenges conceptualism on the ground that perception is both temporally and explanatorily prior to concepts. The final argument I rely on presents an example based on the famous Molyneux problem, in order to illustrate that contentful visual perception can occur even when the subject does not possess any visual concept at all. As will be seen, even though these arguments do not necessarily establish the truth of nonconceptualism, they nevertheless provide good philosophical and empirical reasons for adopting it.

In the fifth chapter, I propose a twofold account of perception that I mainly derives from Fred Dretske’s distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic perception. According to this distinction there are two levels of perception one of which does and the other does not involve the exercise of conceptual capacities. One level, called “basic perception,” is introduced as the kind of perception that does not involve the deployment of conceptual capacities. It is a kind of perceiving things without conceptualizing, identifying or recognizing them. The second kind of perception that corresponds more or less to Dretske’s “epistemic perception,” is what I call “conceptual” or “doxastic perception.” It is claimed that conceptual perception is a matter of taking things to be a certain way and involves conceptualization of what is perceived. The process of conceptualization, on the other hand, is construed as perceptual belief acquisition. In other words, conceptualizing an object as a cat becomes the same thing as acquiring the belief that it is a cat. As distinct from Dretske, however, I hold that the belief involved in conceptual perception does not have to be true. This leaves room for the misperception or misidentification of what is perceived.

In the sixth chapter I attempt to establish the transition from basic perception to conceptual perception in terms of the rational relation that holds between

perception and a perceptual belief. It is firstly argued that the articulability requirement posited by the conceptualist does not entail the conceptuality of perceptual content. As basic perceptual beliefs are claimed to be some sort of *concept application*, it is suggested in that chapter that the relation between basic perception and a perceptual belief should be based upon the role the content of basic perception plays in the process of concept application or conceptualization. It is finally claimed that basic perceptual content rationally grounds perceptual beliefs by providing appropriate conditions for applying certain concepts to objects being perceived.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The notions which the conceptualist-nonconceptualist debate is built upon are all philosophically controversial topics. It is therefore crucial to ensure that the framework of the debate is clearly set up. I reserved this chapter for clarifying these notions in order to make explicit what the entire debate is about. I begin with highlighting the roots of the debate by presenting the Kantian origin of it. I later give the scope of the problem by clarifying notions such as “content”, “perception” and “concept possession.”

#### 2.1 Kant and Conceptual Content

Providing a clear understanding of the conceptualist-nonconceptualist debate cannot be achieved without reference to Kant, who puts emphasis on the importance of both *nonconceptual* intuition and *conceptual* thinking in the formation of human experience and knowledge. For, as Robert Hanna expresses: “*Kant’s theory of intuition is the hidden historical origin of both sides of the contemporary debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists.*” (Hanna 2006: 90, 91, emphasis on its original) Therefore, his theory constitutes a useful starting point for revealing the main disagreement between conceptualists and nonconceptualists. Kant’s revolutionary combination of empiricism and rationalism can be seen as one of the most important inspirations for conceptualists, such as McDowell, for considering concepts as already included in perception. However, though Kant’s emphasis on concepts in the formation of experience leads to the belief that he is a conceptualist about perceptual content, some authors hold that in Kantian philosophy, there is nevertheless room for nonconceptual representational content of experience that is epistemically

relevant. According to them, Kant actually endorses a nonconceptualist theory of perception. In this part, I will attempt to present Kant's notion of experience within the context of the conceptualist-nonconceptualist debate. It will be seen that his theory of perception seems to permit two rival interpretations: a reading of Kant as a conceptualist, and a reading of him as a nonconceptualist. But first, we should briefly explain the notions that are fundamental for human experience in Kantian philosophy, such as "sensibility", "intuitions", and "understanding."

According to Kant, knowledge arises out of the cooperation of two distinct faculties: "sensibility" and "understanding." This means that knowledge "requires both sensory input and intellectual organization." (Guyer 2006: 53) Sensibility is our capacity through which objects are given to us as intuitions. Intuitions are characterized as the immediate representations of objects. Kant distinguishes sensations from intuitions. Intuitions are objective representations of objects, whereas he characterizes sensations belonging "merely to the subjective constitution of our manner of sensibility, for instance, of sight, hearing, touch, as in the case of colours, sounds, and heat." (Kant 1965: 73) According to Kant, when we take away from a representation of an object everything provided by the faculty of understanding (concepts such as substance, force, etc.) and every property that belongs to sensations (such as hardness, color, etc.), only two things remain: space and time (Ibid.: 66). No matter how hard we try in order to make our intuitions clearer, we cannot avoid intuiting objects as occupying space and as existing in time. Space and time, for Kant, therefore are pure forms of sensibility or pure intuitions that are found in the mind *a priori* and through which we intuit objects. Forms of intuition are *a priori* because they are not derived from experience. Rather, they are independent from the content of our sensations and knowledge. Thus, they are inherent in our faculty of sensibility and precede all experiences. All intuitions are given to us in space and time. Therefore, whenever we perceive objects we inevitably and necessarily perceive them through space and time. So, "space and time are the *forms* of all intuitions." (Guyer 2006: 55)

Understanding, on the other hand, is our ability to think about objects that are given in intuition. The act of understanding is judging. It depends on how we combine, organize and relate, that is to say, synthesize perceptions to one another. For Kant, knowing an object is not merely observing it; it also requires judging and thinking about what is observed, namely, it requires applying concepts to it (Guyer 2006: 71). The mind unifies and organizes perceptions through twelve categories or pure concepts of understanding subsumed under four headings: categories of quantity, of quality, of relation and finally categories of modality. “In every judgment there is a concept which holds of many representations...” (Kant 1965: 105)

These two faculties, sensibility and understanding, according to Kant, are not reducible to each other and they cannot exchange their functions. Therefore, they and their contribution to knowledge should be carefully separated and distinguished (1965: 93). However, neither of them is more preferable in the formation of experience to the other. They are both necessary faculties for attaining knowledge. According to Kant, “without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.” (Ibid.) This mutual interdependence between sensibility and understanding expressed in this quotation, I believe, is one of the most controversial expressions that give rise to the conceptualist and nonconceptualist interpretations of Kant. The starting point of the disagreement between conceptualist and nonconceptualist readings of him seems to be based upon what Kant meant by “intuitions’ being blind”. It can be clearly seen that intuition by its own does not amount to knowledge, but does that really rule out the possibility of nonconceptual representational content of perception that has epistemic relevance? As we will see, it is possible to give both an affirmative and a negative answer to this question.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant frequently emphasizes the cooperation of sensibility and understanding in the formation of knowledge. McDowell (1996) interprets this cooperation as implying the *inseparability* of these two faculties

and cites Kant as supporting his own conceptualism about perceptual content. As will become clear in the next chapter, for McDowell, anything that is nonconceptual cannot rationally ground thought and judgment. Therefore, McDowell states that in order for a perceptual experience to be contentful (and to bear rational relations to thought and belief), both faculties of sensibility and understanding have to be involved. For him, the Kantian intuition is relevant only as an indispensable part of that contribution. He states that it “does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the co-operation.” (McDowell 1996: 9) So, Kantian intuitions, for McDowell, should not be considered in isolation from concepts, and therefore, should be seen as already involving conceptual capacities of understanding. Conceptual capacities are already “drawn on *in* receptivity” (Ibid.) he says.<sup>1</sup> Considering intuitions in isolation from concepts renders intuitions completely irrelevant. Therefore, for McDowell, the *blindness* of nonconceptual intuition amounts to its being meaningless or *nonrepresentational*, and hence, a cognitively irrelevant bare presence that has no rational role in the formation of knowledge or belief.<sup>2</sup>

However, some other authors hold that *McDowell's Kant* does in no way reflect the actual Kantian claim about intuitions. We have seen that for McDowell Kantian intuitions without concepts do not have representational contents, but it is also claimed that there is textual evidence that supports just the contrary. That is, it is argued that Kantian intuitions, though being nonconceptual, nevertheless do represent external objects and have a rational bearing on belief and knowledge on their own right. In short, it can be thought that Kant is in fact providing arguments not for conceptualism but rather for nonconceptualism.

In his article “Kant and Nonconceptual Content,” Robert Hanna argues for Kantian nonconceptualism on the basis of the fact that the interdependency of

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<sup>1</sup> However, this should not be understood as if intuitions are already judgmental. Rather, as we will see later, conceptual capacities that belong to the faculty of understanding are supposed to be operative in them in a pre-judgmental way.

<sup>2</sup> John McDowell's conceptualist reading of Kant will become clearer in the next chapter where McDowell's arguments for conceptualism are presented.

understanding and sensibility is needed only for “*the specific purpose of constituting objectively valid judgment.*” (Hanna 2006: 99, emphasis on its original) So, even if it is true that, according to Kant, intuitions alone cannot yield knowledge, it does not follow that blind intuitions are meaningless and irrelevant in the sense of providing no cognition of objects. Intuitions, for Kant, are necessary for knowledge and independent from the faculty of understanding, and hence from concepts that belong to understanding. Accordingly, for Kant, “blind intuitions”, that is, intuitions without understanding correspond to “*objectively valid non-conceptual intuition.*” (Ibid., emphasis on its original) Some pieces of textual evidence about the independence of intuition from understanding found in *Critique of Pure Reason* are the following:

For appearances can certainly be given in intuition independently of functions of the understanding. (Kant 1965: 124)

But since intuition stands in no need whatsoever of the functions of thought, appearances would none the less present objects to our intuition. (Ibid.)

The appearances might, indeed, constitute intuition without thought... (Ibid.: 138)

Hanna (2006) cites another important example given by Kant that is a more obvious one that supports a nonconceptualist reading of Kant:

If a savage sees a house from a distance, for example, with whose use he is not acquainted, he admittedly has before him in his representation the very same object as someone else who is acquainted with it determinately as dwelling established for men. But as to form, this cognition of one and the same object is different in the two. With one it is *mere intuition*, with the other it is *intuition* and *concept* at the same time. (Kant 1992: 544, 545, emphasis on its original)<sup>3</sup>

These quotations at least seem to indicate that Kant neither denies the representational content of intuitions, nor that they are prior to conceptualization.

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<sup>3</sup> As will become clearer in the fourth chapter, this expression is a typical instance of the nonconceptualist claim that perception may occur even though the subject does not possess the relevant conceptual capacities that are necessary for the conceptualization of the content of his perceptions. The savage can nevertheless *see the house*, even if he lacks the concept ‘house’.

Moreover, the distinction he makes between mere sensations and intuitions may also help us to understand the status he attributes to intuitions. As we said above, Kant defines sensations as the modification in a subject's state, that is, as things "which relate solely to the subject" (1965: 314) and not to an object. Whereas intuitions, for him, are in immediate relations to objects. They *give* objects to cognition. Even though they do not present general features of objects, they nevertheless present them as particulars. In other words, an intuition cannot *on its own* represent an object as falling under a concept, say, "tree." But it can nevertheless present a tree. Therefore, McDowell's understanding of intuition without concepts as nonrepresentational bare given, that can have no rational role, can at best apply merely to Kantian sensations and not to intuitions. For, even though intuitions do not by themselves provide genuine objective knowledge about objects they nevertheless seem to lead to some kind of cognition of objects.<sup>4</sup>

## **2.2 Defining the Boundaries**

### **2.2.1 Representational Content and Representationalism**

As we said previously, the central debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists is about whether the content of perception is conceptual or not. Both sides need to agree upon the fact that perception is a contentful mental state that represents the world we perceive. Otherwise, the debate would be pointless. Certainly, in order to understand what is meant by both "conceptualism" and "nonconceptualism" we must first of all form a simple and neutral idea of what content is supposed to mean. By "neutral" I mean that our characterization should not already imply that content is a conceptual notion, and should leave open the possibility of nonconceptualism, otherwise the importance of the whole debate will vanish.

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<sup>4</sup> In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant categorizes intuitions as belonging to the category of *cognition*, see, p.314.

Our intentional mental states are usually considered to be about something.<sup>5</sup> Consider one of the most typical of such states: beliefs. Beliefs are about something and most of the beliefs are about the world we perceive. The belief that the world is round, for instance, is about the world and roundness. One way to characterize this *aboutness* is to say that beliefs have content, — representational content— through which they represent the world. Though it is not agreed upon by everyone, it is nevertheless widely thought that perceptual states, states that are usually considered as phenomenal states with specific phenomenal characters, also represent the world like beliefs and hence have representational content too. But there is disagreement upon whether the contents of perceptual states are of the same kind as the contents of beliefs. The most basic characterization of content is “how the experiences represent the world to be” (Crane 1992: 137), or the *way* a state presents the world as being. So, one thing common both to perception and beliefs is that they both represent. The content of the belief that the world is round is *that the world is round* since the belief presents the world as one in which that fact is obtaining. The contents of beliefs are usually considered to be propositional content and are expressed by that-clauses. On the other hand, consider a perceptual state, for instance, the perceptual experience of a puppy dog in front of the door. If you believe that perceptual content is also propositional, you may claim that the content of the experience is *that the puppy dog is in front of the door*. If you do not believe in propositional content of perception, you may claim that the content of this experience is *a puppy dog in front of the door or the puppy dog’s being in front of the door*.<sup>6</sup> In both cases your perceptual experience presents an entity, a state of affair or an event in the external world. That is to say, there is a specific *way* things about the external world are conveyed to you. So, when it is asked what

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about this see, Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Stanpoint*, translated by Antos C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell and Linda L. McAlister, (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that this characterization of the perceptual content is merely partial, for in the content of such an experience there is more things that are presented other than the puppy dog. So, the list that defines the content of an experience is much longer than this. For more detail about this subject, see chapter 3, The Richness Argument.

the content of a perceptual state is, it would be sufficient to describe what that state *tells* or *shows* you about the world. In other words, it would be sufficient to describe the way the world appears to you.

The tendency to posit representational content of perception is motivated by the existence of non-veridical perceptions such as illusions and hallucinations. If perception does not have representational content, then how are we to account for veridicality or accuracy of perceptual states? It seems at least clear that illusory experiences misrepresent the world and are in a sense inaccurate. Therefore, there seems to be a relation between what the experience conveys to the subject and the way the world actually is. When I nonveridically perceive that it is raining outside, the content of my experience would be inaccurate. For, the way the experience represents me the world and the way the world actually is does not match. Similarly, when I mistakenly believe that it is raining outside, the content of my belief again misrepresents the world and thus has an inaccurate content too. These considerations led philosophers to develop an account for representational content in terms of *accuracy conditions*, conditions under which the state represents accurately. According to this characterization, a state has content and represents the world if and only if “there is a condition or set of conditions under which it does so correctly, and the content of the state is given in terms of what it would be for it to present the world correctly.” (Bermúdez 2003: 194) So, the content of the perceptual experience of a puppy dog in front of the door is given in terms of conditions under which this experience is veridical. That is, conditions under which there is a puppy dog in front of the door.

In order to avoid confusion, it would be useful to clarify an ambiguity caused by the word “representation.” When we say that perceptual state has representational content or represents the world, we do not intend to imply the truth of *Representationalism* or any specification about the phenomenal character of an experience. Therefore, it is of fundamental importance to mention phenomenology as well and its relation to representational content. Representationalism can be roughly defined as the philosophical approach that

phenomenal or qualitative characters of experiences are determined by representational properties.<sup>7</sup> That is, it makes a claim about the phenomenal character of an experience. On the other hand, the subject matter of this thesis has no contention concerning the phenomenal or qualitative characters of experiences. The claim that experience has representational content is neutral with respect to whether the phenomenal character of experience is reducible to representational properties or whether there is an irreducible phenomenal or qualitative character in addition to representational content. It does not even assume the existence of phenomenal character at all. For, it is not committed to an immediate object of awareness that represents the world. Rather representational content denotes the experience itself representing the world and not another intermediary object of perception. Accordingly, there is no agreement between authors that I am making reference to throughout my thesis about the status of the phenomenal character of an experience. Dretske, for instance, adopts a representationalist stance towards qualia and claims that phenomenal properties can be reduced to representational content. He states that "... perceptual experiences are not only representational, but that their phenomenal character—the qualities that determine what it is like to have the experience—are *completely* given by the properties the experience represents things to have." (Dretske 2003b: 67)

When we look at Peacocke, on the other hand, we see that in addition to representational content of experience, he also posits the existence of nonrepresentational ingredients which he calls sensational properties and which cannot be reduced to representational ones: "The sensational properties of an experience are those of its subjective properties that it does not possess in virtue of features of the way the experience represents the world as being (its representational content)." (Peacocke 2008) Nevertheless both philosophers agree

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion of the position see, Lycan, William, "Representational Theories of Consciousness", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/consciousness-representational/>>.

that there is a nonconceptual representational element in the content of an experience.

Under the light of these explanations, I take the debate about the conceptuality or nonconceptuality of the content of perception to be most basically the following: Perceptual experiences and other propositional attitudes like beliefs present the world in a specific way and this way may be accurate or inaccurate depending upon the veridicality of the experience. According to conceptualism, perceptual experiences represent the world conceptually, and hence, have conceptual content. Whereas according to nonconceptualism, perceptual experiences can represent the world nonconceptually, and hence, have nonconceptual representational content.

### **2.2.2 Conceptual Capacities and Perception**

The subject matter of the debate between conceptualism and nonconceptualism, and our attitude towards the debate, depend further upon how one characterizes “perception”, “concept possession” or “conceptual capacity.” The claim “perceptual content is conceptual” may mean a variety of things depending upon what we mean by these terms. It can be considered as a trivial claim, for instance, if being conceptual is supposed to require merely perceptual discrimination. For, as Bermúdez also states, “If possessing the concept *F* just is a matter of being able to discriminate *F*’s from non-*F*’s, then the possibility of nonconceptually representing *F*’s is defined out of existence.” (Bermúdez 2007: 59) Or if “perception” is automatically understood as a cognitive state that already requires understanding, it would again trivially follow that perception is conceptual. However, conceptualism is not trivial. Therefore, in order to make sense of any arguments for nonconceptualism, we should first of all well establish what kind of characteristics conceptualists attribute to perception by claiming that it is conceptual, and a common ground or criterion about what a perceptual state is supposed to be. Therefore, instead of proposing a possible theory about perception and conception, I will rather attempt to provide the framework of the

debate. Given that my thesis in general challenges McDowell and Brewer's conceptualism, I will first of all clarify what the term "conceptual" is intended to mean by them. And later, I will provide some requirements that a perceptual state should satisfy in order to count as genuine perceptual experience.

### 2.2.2.1 Concept Possession

In his *Perception and Reason* Brewer characterizes a conceptual mental state as follows:

A mental state is *conceptual* if and only if, it has a representational content that is characterizable only in terms of concepts which the subject himself must possess...(Brewer 1999: 149)

This characterization is not very informative unless we understand what concept possession amounts to.<sup>8</sup> Even a brief survey of both McDowell's and Brewer's writings indicates that "concept possession" or "conceptual capacity" is not considered as a simple ability. Both philosophers believe that the content of an experience is a kind of content that can also be the content of a judgment. Accordingly, they hold that conceptual capacities that are actualized in experience are identical to conceptual capacities exercised in thought and judgment. That is, concepts one has to possess in order to be in a contentful perceptual experience cannot be peculiar to perception, but rather should require cognitive capacities associated with higher cognitive states such as believing, thinking and reasoning. As McDowell states for capacities that are in play in experience:

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<sup>8</sup> It can also be thought that, in order to have an accurate understanding of what "conceptual" means, we should also make clear what *concepts* are, or what their ontological status is. However, as I have mentioned previously, I am mainly concerned with the epistemological aspect of the conceptualist-nonconceptualist debate. Namely, about the claim that subject have to *possess concepts* that characterize the content of their experience. Therefore, I think that it would be sufficient if we clarify what philosophers mean by "concept possession" or "conceptual capacity." If we understand these notions, then we would also be able to understand what kind of state perception is supposed to be for conceptualists.

They would not be recognizable as conceptual capacities at all unless they could also be exercised in active thinking, that is, in ways that do provide a good fit for the idea of spontaneity. (1996: 11)

In her article “A New Argument for Nonconceptual Content,” Adina Roskies (2008) mentions a useful distinction between “high theories of concept possession” and “low theories of concept possession.” According to high theories, concept possession or a conceptual ability is a matter of highly complex cognitive abilities. Conversely, low theories of perception endorse a less demanding requirement for concept possession. For instance, identifying conceptual capacities with merely perceptual discrimination would be the claim of a low theory. As Roskies also indicates, conceptualists in general endorse a high theory of concept possession, “for they typically view conceptual abilities as sophisticated ones, tied to linguistic abilities, and to the capacity for abstract thought.” (2008: 649) So, a conceptual capacity is more than the ability of perceptual representation or discrimination. If not, then “conceptualism would be trivial—unopposed,” (Chuard ms.) whereas it is certainly not.

What is exactly meant by “complex and sophisticated cognitive abilities”? What are the requirements for concept possession according to conceptualists? As already mentioned above, the most important requirement for concept possession is the ability to exercise a concept in thought. As Tim Crane states, having a single belief or thought where the concept figures would not be sufficient for having a conceptual ability. We should at least possess a set or network of intentional states through which the concept is exercised (Crane 1992: 12). As the following quote from *Mind and World* indicates, McDowell seems to endorse such a constraint:

Quite generally, 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 judgments of experience with other judgeable contents. (1996: 11, 12)

Under the light of such expressions that can also be found in Brewer's (1999) writings, it can be inferred that McDowell and Brewer are also committed to a stronger requirement, namely, Evan's Generality Constraint. In *The Varieties of Reference* Evans defines The Generality Constraint as follows:

... if a subject can be credited with the thought that *a* is *F*, then he must have the conceptual resources for entertaining the thought that *a* is *G*, for every property of being *G* of which he has a conception. (1982: 104)

So, if someone possesses some concepts, then he can possess any thought that can be formed through combining these concepts (Tye 2005: 222). In order for one to exercise a thought with the content that *a is F*, one should also grasp what it is for something to be an *F* and to be an *a*, so that she can also exercise the thought that *b is F* or *a is G* (where *b* and *G* are concepts the subject already possesses). That is to say, possessing a concept requires the ability to combine the concepts with other concepts in order to form new thoughts or judgments. Conceptualists' understanding of conceptual ability that entails being exercised in active thinking seems to be supporting The Generality Constraint. Moreover, it can also be claimed that they are assuming the truth of this constraint (McDowell 2009: 10, 11 and Brewer 1999: 114, 194).

Another important requirement that draw attention, especially within the framework of The Demonstrative Concept Strategy<sup>9</sup>, is the "Re-identification Constraint" explicitly put forward by S. D. Kelly. According to Kelly (2001), in order to possess a concept, "*a subject must be able consistently to re-identify a given object or property as falling under the concept if it does.*" (403, emphasis on its original) That is to say, if we are supposed to possess the concept "red", we should be able to use this capacity in different occasions to classify different red objects. Both McDowell and Brewer are clearly committed to the validity of this constraint. For instance, in arguing against The Fineness of Grain Argument<sup>10</sup>, they explicitly state that in order to count as genuine conceptual capacity,

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<sup>9</sup> See, chapter 4, section 4.2.1.

<sup>10</sup> See, chapter 4, section 4.2.1.

demonstrative concepts should meet the Re-identification requirement. In *Mind and World*, McDowell states that a demonstrative concept is a genuine conceptual capacity if it “can persist into the future, if only for a short time, and that, having persisted, it can be used also in thoughts about what is by then the past, if only the recent past. What is in play here is a recognitional capacity, possibly quite short-lived, that sets in with experience.” (McDowell 1996: 57) And its being short-lived does not matter at all, for it is sufficient if it can persist beyond the duration of the experience. Similarly, Brewer notes that the demonstrative concept, say, “that <sub>A</sub>shade” has to be “employed to some extent, and however briefly, in the absence of the sample A itself, although its being available in thought at all depends upon the subject’s experience of A.” (Brewer 1999: 175)

So, it can be said that according to conceptualists, concept possession or a conceptual capacity consists of at least two closely related abilities: the ability to exercise a conceptual capacity in other thoughts, and hence the ability to use the same conceptual capacity in different occasions. These requirements are only those that seem the most fundamental. They are at least sufficient to ensure that what conceptualists have in mind when claiming that perceptual content is conceptual is not an ability peculiar to perception. Rather, conceptual capacities that govern our judgments and thoughts are identical to conceptual capacities that are supposed to shape our perceptions. This is why any mechanism peculiar to perception that renders only perceptual discrimination and individuation possible cannot be considered as a conceptual capacity at all. Considered within this framework, then, conceptualism seems to be a highly demanding theory that needs to be supported. It construes contentful perception as a complex and sophisticated cognitive task. Therefore, it would be more accurate if we consider the arguments against conceptualism by taking into account what “conceptual” is supposed to mean. What I intend to reject in conceptualism is, therefore, the highly complex cognitive feature it ascribes to perception.

### 2.2.2.2 Perception and Perceptual Content

So far, we have seen what kind of property conceptualists ascribe to perceptual content. However, in order to decide whether perceptual content does really bear the property of being conceptual or not, we should also provide a common notion of perception and perceptual content that both sides of the debate would agree on. If we leave perception as a vague notion, then arguments given for and against conceptualism will be incommensurable and irrelevant.

Perception in its most familiar and neutral sense, can be seen as a fundamental mechanism to interact with the environment by means of our sense organs. Therefore, despite the fact that more weight is given to visual experiences, perception also captures tactual, auditory, olfactory and taste experiences as well.<sup>11</sup> Perception is usually conceived as the way through which we obtain information (and sometimes misinformation) from the environment, on the basis of which we form beliefs and judgments about the external world, or produce behaviors in accordance with it. That is, it can be seen as the inception of all empirical knowledge and human's interaction with the world, since it is "our only window to the world: without it we could know nothing about what goes on around us." (Kim 1996: 128)

However, perception is a vague term. It is nowadays accepted that perception corresponds to a complex process that has different levels. And what one means by "perception" may diverge on the basis of which level of the process one refers to. Accordingly, the notion of perceptual content may refer to a wide range of content of those processes. Therefore, our answer to whether perceptual content is conceptual or not depends upon where perception is supposed to begin and end. If we define perception as the lowest level of visual processing that takes place,

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<sup>11</sup> Most of the literature about perceptual content is mainly concerned with visual perception. Arguments that are given for and against conceptual content are usually based upon the features of *visual* perceptual content. However, it is questionable whether the same arguments are also applicable to other sense modalities or not. Even though in this dissertation more weight is given to visual perception as well, the nonconceptualism about perceptual content that I endorse also captures perception through other sense modalities.

say, in the retina, few will deny that its content, the retinal image, is nonconceptual. For, the requirements for concept possession stated above already imply that a state in the retina does not seem to be conceptual. On the other hand, if we take perception to necessarily capture the conceptual processing as well, then it will automatically follow that its content is conceptual. This is why we have to clearly define the boundaries of what we call perception and should posit some requirements that a state should satisfy in order to count as perception. Therefore, if we are to claim that perceptual content is nonconceptual, we should also ensure that what we mean by “perception”, and hence, by “perceptual content” meets the required conditions.

A general look at the arguments given for and against conceptualism and nonconceptualism indicates that the state whose conceptuality is argued should at least satisfy two fundamental requirements. First of all, the state in question, in order to count as genuine perception, needs to be epistemically relevant. In other words, it needs to bear certain rational relations to other doxastic states. We have seen that the main motivation of conceptualism is the justificatory and rational role perception is supposed to have in the formation of empirical beliefs. And most nonconceptualists also try to ensure that nonconceptual content can nevertheless provide rational grounds for empirical beliefs. If perception is epistemically relevant in this sense, then it should be directed to the world. In other words, the kind of perceptual state in question should possess representational content or should be about the external world. It should represent the world as being a certain way. At the beginning of my thesis I explicitly stated that the subject matter of the debate between conceptualism and nonconceptualism is based upon a notion of *contentful perceptual state*.<sup>12</sup> And the

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the fact that I assume that perception is contentful and empirically relevant, should not lead to the belief that this is a trivial claim. Contrary to that, some philosophers argue that perception does not have content after all. Charles Travis (2004) in his “The Silence of the Senses”, for instance, provides substantial arguments to show that perception is *silent*, namely, contrary to what is commonly thought, perceptual experience does not represent anything. Similarly, Anil Gupta (2006) also holds that experience “is not informant” at all. For him, experience when taken in isolation does not make any contribution to beliefs and knowledge on its own right. More importantly, Brewer (2006), who is cited throughout this thesis as a conceptualist about perceptual content, abandons the idea that experiences have content altogether in his more recent article “Perception and Content”. He argues against the “Content View”

debate mainly turns around whether this content has to be fully conceptual or not. Therefore, any notion of perceptual states bearing no representational relation to the external world, such as “raw feels” or “qualia,” then, as far as they are not considered as having representational properties, have no effect in arguing against conceptualism. Even if it is proven that raw feels are nonconceptual, nothing or very little will be done against conceptualism.

Can every perceptual state that has representational content count as perception (as understood in the relevant sense within the framework of the conceptualist-nonconceptualist debate)? We have said that perception occurs through a complex process. We know that there exists an important physiological and mechanical process that takes place in our body, nervous system and brain and that lies behind our conscious perception of the world. Consider again the physiological process that underlies perception such as the retinal image. For instance, it can be argued that the retinal image has content because it represents or carries information about the object being perceived. How intelligible is it to argue for the conceptuality or nonconceptuality of a retinal image? Can the conceptualist-nonconceptualist debate be based upon such an understanding of perceptual content? Yes it can, but I believe that it is not. The subject matter of the debate is not about the conceptuality or nonconceptuality of internal physiological happenings and processes that we can never be aware of while undergoing them. Nor is it whether the unconscious content of unconscious states and processes in the body and the brain are conceptual or not. Most of the time, as an ordinary human being, I have no idea of what is going on inside my body while having an experience, hence no idea about contents that arise in such processes. However, I can nevertheless be aware of my perceptual experience and the way it represents the world. And it seems that what matters for our current discussion is the kind of content that one can be aware of.

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through criticizing two features of it. The first one is that content may be inaccurate or may misrepresent the world. And the second is that perceptual content as the Content View construes it involves generality about objects. According to Brewer those features do not straighten the Content View, as it is usually believed; on the contrary they weaken it because they are mistaken.

The distinction that I stress between the unconscious physiological level and the conscious mental level of perception seems to reflect an important distinction between levels of explanation introduced by Dennett to a great extent. Dennett makes a distinction between personal and sub-personal levels of explanations of mental events (1969: 90-96). The sub-personal level explanations consist of mechanical and physiological explanations, while the personal level consists of explanations in terms of “categories which are properly descriptive of personal activities, as opposed to the activities of brain centers.” (Bermúdez 2003: 201) For instance, we can explain an action of avoidance in personal level terms such as *pain* or in sub-personal level terms such as *neural impulses*.

Subpersonal states of perception are usually considered to possess nonconceptual content and therefore, are seen as an important tool for arguing against nonconceptualism. However, it can be thought that subpersonal contents cannot qualify as genuine contents since, owing to their sub-personal character; they cannot be epistemically relevant in the required sense, as they cannot bear rational relations to other doxastic states of the perceiver. For instance, McDowell states that contents that are ascribed to sub-personal processes are not genuine contents but merely “as if” contents that do not actually convey any information to the subject at the personal level (1994: 199-202). Moreover, his and Brewer’s remarks concerning the recognition of perceptual content as reason-constituting for the subject also indicate that they do not take sub-personal perceptual contents into account. Most writings on perceptual content indicate that philosophers are mostly interested in the consciousness level of perceptual content, that is to say, the level at which subjects are able to be aware of it. So, it can be said that the notion of perceptual content is usually considered to be a personal level phenomenon: a phenomenon that can be ascribed to persons, as opposed to being a sub-personal phenomenon that can be attributed to mechanical states and processes (Bermúdez 2003: 201).

So, if any state is supposed to count as perception in the required sense, besides being contentful, it needs also to meet a second criterion: its content should reach

the level of consciousness, or its content has to be “phenomenologically salient.” (Crane 1992: 138) It is not sufficient to have content in order to count as a genuine perceptual state, if this content rests merely somewhere in the brain, in the nervous system or in other parts of the body without being available to the subject (Its being available is sufficient, the perceptual state need not be actually accessed or recognized by the subject.) This is why what people have in mind within the frame-work of our current debate is usually a notion of perceptual experience whose content is at a personal level. In short, in order to make sense of the debate between conceptualism and nonconceptualism, it would be useful, I believe, to consider perceptual content as *a personal level representational perceptual content*.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.2.3 States versus Contents

Before presenting the conceptualist and nonconceptualist arguments, it would also be helpful to mention different characterizations of conceptualism and nonconceptualism for the sake of providing a clearer understanding of both views. In his article “Nonconceptual Content and the ‘Space of Reason’,” Richard Heck (2000) highlights an important ambiguity that he finds in Evan’s definition of nonconceptual content. According to this definition, a person can have a contentful perceptual experience even though she does not possess concepts to characterize that content. Heck claims that this characterization is a characterization about *states* rather than *contents* (2000: 484-486). It only indicates that there are two kinds of states one of which is concept dependent and the other is concept independent. Heck names this view “the state view.” So, according to the state view, a perceptual content’s being conceptual or not merely depends upon the subjects’ possession of concepts that correctly specify the content, it is not a matter about the nature of contents. So, the difference between a conceptual and nonconceptual state is not due to different kinds of content they

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<sup>13</sup>It is worthwhile noting that the consciousness or awareness in question does not amount to the introspective awareness of a mental state. The experience should be a conscious awareness but that should not be understood as if the subject should be aware of a mental state. An experience is aware in virtue of making the subject aware of the world. See, Dretske (1993).

possess, but merely due to different kind of states they are: concept-dependent and concept independent states.<sup>14</sup>

However, the following statements of Evans also make it clear that his nonconceptualist claim is not merely about states but also about contents of those states:

The process of conceptualization or judgment takes the subject from his being in one kind of informational state (with a content of a certain kind, namely, non-conceptual content) to his being in another kind of cognitive state (with a content of a different kind, namely, conceptual content). (1982: 227)

This is, in Heck's words, "the content view." According to the content view, then, a state's being conceptual or not depends upon what kind of content it possesses. Conceptual content and nonconceptual content are two different types of contents. A cognitive state like a belief has conceptual content in this sense because it has a kind of content where concepts are constituents of its content. That is, according to the state view, there are two kinds of state with the same kind of content, whereas according to the content view, there are two kinds of contents.<sup>15</sup> So, we can distinguish at least four different views about perceptual content:

1. State conceptualism: In order to have a contentful perceptual experience, a subject must possess every concept that figures in a complete specification of the content of that experience.

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<sup>14</sup> What I take to be crucial about concept-independence here is that concepts in question are concepts that characterize the content of perception, not any arbitrary concepts. So, even if it is claimed that concepts of some kind are necessary to have contentful experience, as long as those concepts need not occur in the specification of the content, this claim cannot threaten nonconceptualism.

<sup>15</sup> Jeff Speaks draws attention to the same distinction. According to him, a state has *absolutely* nonconceptual content if and only if it has a special kind of content other than belief content, and, a state is *relatively* nonconceptual if and only if, the subject does not possess all of the concepts that characterize the content. See, "Is there a Problem about Nonconceptual Content?", *The Philosophical Review* 114(2005), pp.359-398.

2. State nonconceptualism: In order to have a contentful perceptual experience, a subject does not need to possess every concept that figures in a complete specification of the content of that experience
3. Content conceptualism: A perceptual state has the same kind of content of belief content; they both have contents that bear the property of being conceptual.
4. Content nonconceptualism: A perceptual state has a different kind of content than belief content. It has a kind of content that does not bear the property of being conceptual (or bears the property of being nonconceptual).

As can be seen from the relevant literature, it is not always clear whether philosophers are presupposing such a distinction between state view and content view and which view they prefer to adopt (Heck 2000: 485, footnote 3). Heck also notes that authors usually adopt these views in combination. Therefore, I believe that instead of reinforcing the distinction, attributing the conjunction of both views to them would be a more reasonable strategy for understanding the subject matter of the conceptualist-nonconceptualist debate. Here are some quotations illustrating this point. Consider the following quote from McDowell's *Mind and World*: "A judgment of experience does not introduce a new kind of content, but simply endorses the conceptual content, or some of it, that is already possessed by the experience on which it is grounded." (1996: 48, 49) Those remarks clearly indicate that McDowell endorses *content conceptualism*. Even though McDowell does not make any explicit claim concerning state conceptualism, his arguments against nonconceptualism seems to support that he is also assuming that one has to possess concepts that characterize the content of his experience. Brewer's following remarks also make it clear that he does not take the supposed distinction into consideration:

As I am using it, a conceptual state – that is to say, a mental state with conceptual content – is one whose content is the content of a possible judgement by the subject. So, a mental state is conceptual, in this sense, if and only if it has a representational content which is characterizable only in terms of concepts which the subject himself possesses. (Brewer 2005: 217, 218)

In the nonconceptualist side, the situation is quite the same. We have already seen that Evans endorses the conjunction of both state and content nonconceptualism. In his “The Nonconceptual Content of Experience,” Tim Crane, besides accepting the content view, emphasizes the relevance of the state view (1992: 143, 144). Moreover, most of the arguments given against conceptualism are based upon the claim that it is possible for a subject not to possess some concepts that are used in specifying the content of her experience. It is for that reason that nonconceptualists’ arguments are usually criticized for merely supporting state conceptualism but not content conceptualism (Speaks 2005).

However, even though they seem to be compatible, it is usually claimed that one cannot both hold state nonconceptualism and content conceptualism. Therefore, if one succeeds in proving the truth of state nonconceptualism, the truth of content nonconceptualism will automatically follow. It seems implausible to most authors to hold that in order to be in a perceptual state one does not need to possess concepts that specify that content even though perception has the same kind of content as a belief has. It seems that such a position would not be a genuine position about contents of mental states, since it does not entail anything about the nature of the content of a perceptual state. The state view by itself “seems unmotivated and fails to address the issues that the theory of nonconceptual content is intended to address.” (Bermúdez 2007: 67) If a state’s being concept independent or concept independent is not due to the kind of content it possesses, what criteria can be offered in order to propose the state-content distinction? According to Bermúdez, only distinct type of contents can account for such a distinction. Therefore, content nonconceptualism is in a sense entailed by state nonconceptualism. Therefore, any argument given in favor of state nonconceptualism also favors content nonconceptualism.

Another point that should be mentioned within this context concerns “concept deployment.” Even though the state view is usually characterized in terms of concept possession, some nonconceptualist arguments that I rely on is also about whether a subject needs to *deploy* the concepts that fully characterize the content

of his experience or not. That is to say, it is possible to argue against conceptualism that even though a subject possesses all relevant concepts, the content of his experience is nonconceptual because the subject does not deploy those concepts during his experience. Therefore, it is crucial to mark the distinction between *concept possession* and *concept deployment* as well. As mentioned in the previous section, concept possession is defined in terms of a capacity to identify or re-identify objects and to form thoughts out of concepts. So, it can be said that we are concept possessors if we have does capacities even though those capacities are not actualized at all. Concept deployment on the other hand, requires that conceptual capacities are exercised or used. For instance while holding the belief that the sky is blue, even though I possess many other different concepts, in this particular mental state I only deploy the concepts “sky” and “blue.” Therefore, it can be thought that while having a perceptual experience of the sky as blue, it is not sufficient that the subject possesses the concepts “sky” and “blue”, he should also deploy the very same concepts. So, the state view can be thought of as not merely concerning concept possession but concept deployment as well. That is to say, the state view can be re-formulated as the following: the conceptuality of perceptual content depends upon whether a subject *possesses* or *deploys* all concepts that fully specify the content of his experience.

In the light of these considerations, I choose not to restrict the scope of my thesis to the state view or content view, since I believe that both characterizations are relevant. I interpret the ambiguity that Heck mentions, as implying that authors are engaged in both kinds of characterization of conceptualism and nonconceptualism. So, unless it is stated otherwise, I take opponents of the both sides to agree on the conjunction of both sorts. So, a state’s being conceptual or nonconceptual depends upon what kind of content it has, as well as upon whether the subjects need or need not possess or deploy relevant concepts that specify the content of that state. Keeping this in mind, however, arguments that I focus on are mostly argument concerning concept possession and concept deployment. That is to say, instead of providing a positive argument for what nonconceptual

content is, I prefer to focus on the epistemological aspects of conceptuality, rather than the ontological nature of it.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONCEPTUALISM

#### 3.1 The Conceptualist Thesis

The paradigm cases of mental states that have conceptual content are propositional attitudes such as beliefs. It is accepted by most philosophers that beliefs have conceptual content, namely that they have propositional contents that are determined by concepts. The content of a belief, which means what is believed or the proposition that is believed, is characterized by the believer in a way that depends upon the conceptual capacities the subject possesses. For instance, the content of the belief that the world is round, is determined and characterized by concepts “world” and “round”. This is usually interpreted as implying that in order to have a belief, one has to possess the concepts that determine its content. That is, I cannot have the belief that the world is round unless I also possess the concepts “world” and “round”. If I believe something I should also be able to understand and grasp what I believe, and this requires the possession of certain concepts. It is argued by some philosophers that mental states with conceptual content are not limited to propositional attitudes such as beliefs, hopes or desires. Perceptual experiences which are usually considered as different kinds of mental states (phenomenal rather than intentional) are argued by some philosophers to possess not only intentional content but *conceptual* intentional content as well. We can call this approach “conceptualism about perceptual content.” Major proponents of conceptualism are John McDowell (1996) and Bill Brewer (1999). In this chapter I will discuss conceptualism as presented in McDowell’s important work *Mind and World* where he provides a detailed account of why perceptual content has to be conceptual and presents the main conceptualist claims. It is worthwhile noting that the conceptualist thesis

endorsed by McDowell does not mean that perceptual experiences are beliefs or inclinations to believe. On the contrary, McDowell explicitly states that perceptual experiences are not identical to any doxastic or judgmental states, but they still possess the same kind of content.

The exact meaning of the claim that perceptual experiences are conceptual depends upon the state/content distinction mentioned previously. According to this distinction, conceptualism about perceptual experience means at least two things: that in order to be in a contentful perceptual state the subject has to possess the concepts that specify the content (state conceptualism) and that the content of the perceptual states is conceptual content and contains concepts as its constituents (content conceptualism). This implies that the experience of the world to be in a certain way has conceptual content and in order for a subject to experience the world to be in a certain way he has to possess certain conceptual capacities. Though the exact meaning of conceptual content conceptualists have in mind is not always clear, the central debate turns around content conceptualism and the conjunction of both sorts. In their writings, McDowell and Brewer clearly endorse both state and content conceptualism as they explicitly characterize the content of perceptual experience as a kind of content that can be the content of a belief or judgment. That is, their claim is also about the nature of perceptual content, not merely about the conditions one should satisfy in order to be in a perceptual state. In short, conceptualism states that if beliefs are assumed to have conceptual content, then perceptual states also possess the same kind of content, hence are conceptual.

The main argument given for the conceptualist thesis depends on the epistemic role perceptual experiences are supposed to have in forming empirical beliefs, judgments and knowledge. According to conceptualists, if we want to make sense of perceptual experiences as the basis and reason of some beliefs, we have to admit the conceptuality of perceptual content too. According to them, claiming that perceptual content is nonconceptual leads to an unbridgeable gap between experience and reason, and leaves the relation between them as a mystery, thus

ends up with skepticism. In the following parts of this chapter I will present the epistemic argument of McDowell and Brewer, and try to achieve a clearer understanding of the conceptualist thesis.

### **3.2 McDowell and the Space of Reason**

When someone is asked why she believes that the sky is blue, the most natural answer we would expect is “I believe that the sky is blue because I see that the sky is blue.” It is usually assumed that this is not merely the fact that my perception causes me to hold the belief; rather it constitutes good reason for me to hold the belief. In other words, it is hard to deny that perceptual beliefs are rationally grounded on our perceptual experiences of the external world. The main motivation behind the conceptualist thesis about perceptual content is this empiricist insight and the rational relation that is supposed to hold between perception and empirical beliefs. The external world, through the perception of it, is supposed to rationally ground or provide reason for empirical beliefs.

How is it possible that my experience of the blue sky leads me to believe that the sky is blue if this experience itself is not a kind of belief or disposition to believe? Proponents of conceptualism assume that only a conceptual item can provide justification for our beliefs. If my perception is supposed to justify my belief, then its content cannot be a bare nonconceptual presence. Beliefs can be justified by other beliefs or by perceptual experiences. In both cases the justifying evidence has to be conceptual. In his *Mind and World*, John McDowell aims to show that perception and the external world put empirical constraints on our thinking and that they cannot do so unless we admit their conceptuality.

Given that our empirical beliefs are about the external world and their contents in some sense depend upon the external world, it is hard to deny that the external world and its perception put some rational constraints on them. A belief or thought about the things being thus and so can be evaluated as correct or incorrect depending upon whether or not we see things as being thus and so. This indicates

that perceptual experiences warrant or ground empirical beliefs or judgments, make them true or false, hence bear a rational linkage to them. In short, “thinking that aims at judgment, or at the fixation of belief, is answerable to the world—to how things are— for whether or not it is correctly executed.” (McDowell 1996: xii) And if thinking is answerable to the world it should also be answerable to experience (Ibid.) In explaining the relation between the external world, perceptions and beliefs, McDowell follows a Kantian path and claims that we cannot account for this relation if we do not admit the cooperation of sensibility and understanding. Following the Kantian slogan that “thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (Kant 1965: 93), McDowell establishes his theory of perceptual content. The first part of the slogan shows that thoughts are constrained by the external world and intuitions, otherwise they would be contentless. The second part indicates that representational content of perception has to be conceptual; otherwise it would be blind and have no rational bearing on thought.

There is thus no room, according to McDowell, for either unconceptualized sensory input standing in no rational relation to conceptual thought or purely intellectual thought operating independently of all rational constraint from sense experience. (Friedman 2002: 25)

So, McDowell agrees on the Kantian point that our conceptual capacities are already in play when we experience the world to be in a certain way. This means that in order to have experiences of the world we have to possess certain conceptual capacities. As he puts it “The point of the claim that experience involves conceptual capacities is that it enables us to credit experiences with a rational bearing on empirical thinking.” (McDowell 1996: 52) McDowell claims that it is only through this strategy that we can avoid the intolerable oscillation between two hopeless positions in epistemology: on the one side the Myth of the Given that introduces an irrational element into rationality and on the other side coherentism which has no bearing on objective reality and empirical content (Ibid.: 23). According to McDowell, avoiding one side of the oscillation does not necessarily lead to becoming trapped in the other. There is in fact a midway to stop the oscillation that can both account for the roles of thinking and

experiencing. His view preserves the insights of both sides: that experience justifies beliefs, and that justification requires conceptuality, but he rejects their assumptions that experience is non-conceptual and that it has no rational effect on empirical beliefs.

### 3.2.1 McDowell and the Myth of the Given

As explained above McDowell holds the view that perceptual experiences justify our beliefs which have conceptual content. However, he denies that non-conceptual content can serve as a justifier because it lacks rationality. For him, nothing non-conceptual can justify something conceptual; such a transition from non-conceptual to conceptual is ungrounded and illegitimate because there can be no logical or rational relations between them. For McDowell, empirical justification can only be made within the “space of reason”. “The space of reason” is a Sellarsian term that means the logical space of justification and warrants where epistemic facts belong (whereas empirical facts belong to the logical space of nature).<sup>16</sup> The space of reason, for McDowell, does not extend to the conceptual sphere; rather it is contained in it. That is to say, every item we use in making justification is conceptual. Otherwise, we will have to accept that there is an extra-conceptual element that incorporates thinking. However, giving a non-conceptual item such a role in the formation of belief and knowledge leads to the commitment of the “Myth of the Given.” The Given can be roughly characterized as what is received in experience unconceptualized or “the bare presences that are supposed to constitute ultimate ground” (McDowell 1996: 24) for holding certain beliefs. We are committed to the Myth if we take the Given as entailing “the idea that the space of reasons, the space of warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere” (Ibid.: 7), that is, if the Given and its justificatory role are assumed to be outside the conceptual sphere. Therefore, the idea of non-conceptual content of perception is mythical since it is supposed to enter conceptual thinking without itself being conceptual, that is to say, it is mythical to

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<sup>16</sup> For a more detail on this subject see, Sellars, Wilfrid (1997), *Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

assume that perceptual content without involving our rational capacities can make things available for it. “A brute impact from the exterior” cannot be a reason to hold any belief. When we search the rational source of a belief we never come up with a bare presence or a nonconceptual item. Therefore, given that perceptions serve as bases to make justification and constitute reasons for holding beliefs, perceptions are just like beliefs in that they “themselves already have conceptual content.” (Ibid.: 46) If we are to believe that experience has a rational constraint on thinking and that a bare presence cannot provide such a constraint, we have no choice but to admit that perceptual content is conceptual. One way to avoid the Myth is to account for the relation between experience and belief on causal grounds and to deny that experience stands in rational relations to belief. However, as we will see below McDowell does not see that as a hopeful option either.

It is worth noting that for McDowell, claiming that perceptual content is conceptual does not amount to the claim that concepts are immediately exercised on what is given through perception. Rather, McDowell claims that they are “drawn on *in* receptivity, not exercised *on* some supposedly prior deliverances of receptivity.” (Ibid.: 10) They are not applied on what is given through experience, but they are already in there. Conceptual capacities that are contained in experience are evoked by the environment, not applied on it. In that sense, we can still consider experience as passive since it does not involve any activity of conceptualization or judging. It is not as if any time we have a perceptual experience we are simultaneously engaged in an active process of concept application; rather, conceptual capacities we possess are acted upon by the environment. “But when these capacities come into play in experience, the experiencing subject is passive, acted upon by independent reality.” (Ibid.: 66, 67) So, perception is conceptual but nevertheless not judgmental nor doxastic. Unlike judging, perception is both passive and involuntary, in the sense that “how one’s experience represents things to be is not under one’s control, but it is up to one whether one accepts the appearance or rejects it.” (Ibid.: 11) As Brewer states: “The particular conceptual content delivered by his perceptual experience

is something over which he has no control: it just comes to him. Things just strike him as thus and so..." (Brewer 1999: 185) And this is why McDowell states that they are "actualized" rather than "exercised". (1996: 12) McDowell stresses the passivity of experience because if the conceptuality of perception is seen as an active process of the mind, then we have to posit another passive unconceptualized given to be conceptualized in experience. In other words, we cannot avoid the Myth of the Given and account for a rational external constraint on our thinking. So, there is nothing given by perception unconceptualized. Concepts are already there within the content of perception. They are not intermediaries between thought and perception; rather, they are constituents of perceptual experience, hence passively actualized. As he writes:

In experience one finds oneself saddled with content. One's conceptual capacities have already been brought into play, in the content's being available to one, before one has any choice in the matter. The content is not something one has put together oneself, as when one decides what to say about something. (McDowell 1996: 10)

So, according to McDowell perceptions besides having conceptual content are not some kind of judgments, belief or dispositions to beliefs. But if perception differs significantly from judgments and beliefs, then what kind of conceptual capacities are involved when we experience the world to be as thus and so? That is to say, what makes perceptual content conceptual in the absence of an active rational process? Do concepts of perception differ from concepts employed in thinking? McDowell notes that if conceptual capacities that are manifested in perception are peculiar to experience and differ from those manifested in thinking, we cannot claim that they are conceptual at all and hence cannot avoid the Myth of the Given. If we want to avoid the gap between perception and thinking we cannot attribute to them two radically different kinds of conceptual capacities. These conceptual capacities are passively actualized in experience but in order to count as conceptual at all they should also be able to be actively exercised in thought. In order to experience the world to be in a certain way, we should also be able to think actively and understand concepts that specify the content of our experience. "... the passive operation of conceptual capacities in

sensibility is not intelligible independently of their active exercise in judgment, and the thinking that issues in judgment.” (Ibid.: 12) So, conceptual capacities that are actualized in experience and exercised in judgments are not different and the former cannot be accepted as conceptual at all unless they can also be actively exercised in thought. For instance, in judging that there is a red cube in front of one and seeing that there is a red cube in front of one contain the same conceptual capacities (McDowell 2009: 10, 11). In the former concepts “red” and “cube” are actively exercised in judgment, in the latter the very same concepts are passively actualized in experience. And one cannot be said to have an experience of a red cube unless the conceptual capacities involved in that experience are also able to figure in active rational thinking. If we do not take the conceptuality of experience in that sense, we will be placing it outside of rationality. This means that experience cannot be the object of active thinking and liable to revision. In short, experience cannot be seen as reason constituting and will be considered as a mythical given (McDowell 1996: 52).

### **3.2.2 McDowell and Coherentism**

Besides highlighting the role of concepts in experience, and rejecting a traditional empiricism that considers experience as unconceptualized given, McDowell nevertheless does not give up all empiricist insights in his thoughts. He in fact agrees the motivation behind the Given that perceptions should have a justificatory role in formation of beliefs (Byrne 1996: 262). Thus, his claim that perceptual experience has conceptual content and his denial of the Given should not lead us to believe that the picture he offers has no touch with reality and that perception is wholly dependent upon our conceptual capacities. Contrary to that, McDowell explicitly avoids such a conclusion, which is the other end in epistemology: coherentism. As can be seen from the above quotation, the content of perception is not like the content of our utterances; we do not just put concepts together to form the content of perception. Rather, in order to avoid any kind of coherentism or idealism that, according to McDowell, conceives thinking as “frictionless spinning in a void,” (McDowell 1996: 18) we should accept that

there is an external constraint on our rational activities. So, McDowell endorses a kind of minimal empiricism where thinking and beliefs are answerable to perceptual experiences of the world.

McDowell's main target in his *Mind and World* is Davidson's coherentism about justification that, according to McDowell, disconnects beliefs and external reality and cannot account for the empirical content of beliefs. In his article "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" Davidson (1986) offers us a coherentist approach to justification. According to him, justification of a belief consists of the coherence of a belief to the rest of the system of beliefs. That is, for coherentism, justification is an internal relation of coherence between beliefs and other propositional attitudes, not an external relation of confrontation of what is received from experience and what is believed. Davidson propounds this by claiming that only a belief can justify another belief. (1986: 310) Given that experiences are not beliefs or other kinds of propositional attitudes their relation to beliefs cannot be rational. Perceptual experiences have no rational constraint on empirical thinking; therefore they are outside of the conceptual realm. The relation between beliefs and experience for Davidson is causal: "sensations cause some beliefs and in *this* sense, are the basis or ground of those beliefs. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how and why a belief is justified." (Ibid.: 311) McDowell in fact agrees with Davidson's insight that if something has merely causal relation to a belief it cannot be the justification or reason for that belief. He, however, disagrees with Davidson's claim that experience falls outside the space of reason. In other words, both McDowell and Davidson share similar intuitions against the Myth of the Given by denying the justificatory role of nonconceptual or non-doxastic items, but they come up with quite different positions: respectively that perception has conceptual content and that perception does not justify belief.

According to McDowell, the coherentist picture is as hopeless as the Myth of the Given since it cuts the relation between the world and our empirical thinking. By claiming that perceptual experiences have no rational but merely causal roles in

forming empirical beliefs, Davidson is, in a sense, unable to give an account of how our beliefs or thoughts are about the external world, have empirical content or represent the external world, that is, how our thoughts are non-empty at all. "... if we are to avert the threat of emptiness, we need to see intuitions as standing in rational relations to what we should think, not just in causal relations to what we do think. Otherwise the very idea of what we think goes missing." (McDowell 1996: 68)

Against Davidsonian coherentism, McDowell frequently expresses that perceptual beliefs are not merely caused but rather justified by perceptual experiences. McDowell believes that if we are to deny the conceptuality of experience, the only alternative to account for its relation to empirical beliefs is to accept that it has a merely causal impact on belief. However, the most we can expect from a non-conceptual Given, according to him, is "exculpation where we wanted justifications." (McDowell 1996: 8) Besides having a causal basis, the relation between experience and thinking also has a rational dimension. And this rational relation does not hold unless we accept that its relata are conceptual. That is to say, even though a causal account of belief formation may provide a good explanation of why I hold certain beliefs, it cannot give me reason to hold certain beliefs. In other words, it cannot tell us anything about the epistemological status of experience. So, McDowell in a sense refuses all causal and reliabilist accounts where justification of a perceptual belief is considered as a matter of experiences' causing or reliably causing beliefs. It is also accepted by most nonconceptualists that we form our beliefs through the rational guidance of perceptual experiences, not merely through their causal impact on us. For instance, Heck states:

I do not just find myself having certain beliefs...having no idea where they came from; it is not as if perceptual experience gives rise to perceptual beliefs in the same sort of a way a bump on the head might cause me to believe that I am Napoleon. (2000: 501)

In perceiving things we are passive, which means that we are affected by the external world. The external reality puts a constraint on our thought and judgments. As McDowell puts: "we seem to need rational constraint on thinking

and judging, from a reality external to them, if we are to make sense of them as bearing on a reality outside thought at all.” (1996: 25) But according to McDowell, this does not necessarily commit us to the Myth of the Given either. The rational constraint on thinking does not have to be outside of the conceptual sphere. He rather acknowledges that perceptual experiences are impressions made by the world on our senses but that those experiences already have conceptual content (Ibid.: 46). Conceptual content of experience can account for both the existence of an external constraint on our empirical beliefs and the rational relation this constraint has with empirical beliefs.

### **3.3 Conceptual Content and Reason**

The main motivation behind McDowell’s rejection of nonconceptual content of experience is epistemological. He attempts to establish the conceptuality of perceptual content by appealing to its rational relation with empirical beliefs. Therefore, I believe that if a satisfactory account of non-conceptual content can be given, it should also account for the relation that holds between perception and belief. However, it is disputable whether McDowell’s epistemological argument is sufficiently strong or valid to establish the conceptuality of perceptual content. If it can be shown that the only argument McDowell provides is not necessarily correct, the conceptualist position can be weakened. In this part of this chapter I will present some considerations about the reason-constituting role of experience. As mentioned previously, for McDowell, experiences rationally ground certain beliefs. However, this process of justification is not a mere causal dependence; it is rather a process that involves highly sophisticated rational aspects. As he says:

If someone has a perceptually based belief, she believes something because her experience reveals to her, or at least seems to reveal to her, that things are as she believes them to be. And that “because” introduces an explanation that depends on the idea of rationality in operation. (McDowell 2009: 127)

Bill Brewer who is another major conceptualist offers us a clear reconstruction of McDowell’s argument for conceptualism as follows:

- (1) Sense experiential states provide reason for empirical beliefs.
- (2) Sense experiential states provide reason for empirical beliefs only if they have conceptual content.
- (3) Sense experiential states have conceptual content. (Brewer 2005: 218)

Brewer, just like McDowell, assumes the truth of the first premise without debate. For he also believes that unless premise (1) holds, “there can be no such beliefs at all about particular mind-independent objects that they are determinately thus and so.” (Brewer 1999: 19) He argues for the truth of the second premise on the basis of the relation between giving reasons and inference. Being a reason for a subject involves identifying “some feature of her situation which makes the relevant judgment or belief appropriate, or intelligible, from the point of view of rationality.” (Brewer 2005: 218) And this, according to Brewer, means that someone is forming an inference when giving reasons. In forming such an inference one has to refer to the premise or conclusion of the argument as well. This is why in giving reason one is identifying some propositions that express the premises and conclusion of an inference. If perceptual experiences provide reasons for subjects, then they are used in inference and are related to a belief or judgment in an inferential way. This is one reason why perceptual content, if it constitutes reason for certain beliefs, has to be conceptual (Ibid.: 218-220).

McDowell is not always so clear about what he means by perception’s being the rational grounds for certain beliefs. For him, the link between perception and belief is not like the relation between two doxastic states. He rather attempts to relate perceptual experiences and perceptual beliefs on the basis of the sameness of content. In experiencing the world, we are taking in the world as being thus and so. “That things are thus and so” constitutes the content of our experience. In believing that things are thus and so, we are in a state that has the same content as our experience. So, the content of our experience that grounds our belief and the

belief itself has the same content (McDowell 1996: 26). In a more recent article, he claims that though rational, the relation between belief and experience is not inferential. It is not that we are making an inference when we acquire a perceptual belief. As he explains:

When one acquires a belief in this way, one comes to believe that things are as one's experience reveals, or at least seems to reveal, that things are. The content that the explanation attributes to the experience is the same as the content of the belief explained, not a premise from which it would make sense to think of the subject as having reached the belief by an inferential step. (McDowell 2009: 131)

Brewer's and McDowell's only argument then is based upon the reason-constituting role of perception. Their argument roughly states that if perceptions are reasons for holding belief, then their content has to be conceptual. To achieve this conclusion McDowell and Brewer also attempt to show why a genuine reason has to be conceptual. In doing so they are offering a theory of justification as well. Under the light of the explanations above, we can detect two requirements, which are common in both McDowell's and Brewer's arguments, that a reason should satisfy if it is to count as a genuine reason at all: to be the subject's own reason (recognition requirement) and to be articulable.

In McDowell's conception reason is a genuine reason at all only if it is internal to the subject in the sense that the subject is able to appreciate it as the rational ground of her belief. Therefore, experience is not merely a reason for holding certain beliefs; it is rather the subject's reason for holding them (McDowell 1996: 165). Essentially the very same point is also stressed by Brewer. Brewer states that the reason for holding a belief must be the subject's own reason or reason "from her point of view." (Brewer 1999: 19) And this can be the case only if the subject can appreciate the reasoning that leads to an empirical belief. In claiming that perceptual experiences constitute reason for holding beliefs, what is meant is not any reason that is related to the belief in question indirectly by a third person point of view (Ibid.). This means that the subject should recognize and be aware of the reason and its being the rational ground for her belief, that is, should appreciate that she is holding a belief for that reason. In other words, in order to

be justified in believing something, one should be aware of and understand the justifier and its justificatory role. So, even a merely rational explanation of why someone holds a certain belief is provided, this will not meet McDowell and Brewer's requirements unless it is admitted that this explanation is the rational source of the belief from the subject's point of view: unless the subject can give it as a reason for why she holds the belief. To clarify it, McDowell gives the following example:

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 reason for making those movements. The connection between a movement and the goal is the sort of thing that *could* be a reason for making the movement, but a skilled cyclist makes such movements without needing reasons for doing so. (1996: 163)

According to McDowell, the explanation in the above example is analogous to any account of non-conceptual content that attempts to give a rational role to it. Even though non-conceptual content can be considered as the rational reason for an empirical belief in the above sense, this does not have to be the subject's own reason for holding the particular belief. If we aim to provide such a rational explanation to the relation between belief and nonconceptual content, the best we can do is to explain why a subject holds a certain belief from a third person point of view, not the reason for her to hold the belief. Since it is even possible that the subject is not aware of this rational explanation, such an explanation cannot be the intentional reason of the act, that is, it cannot be a subject's reason unless the subject understands and uses the explanation in deciding how to do or what to believe. That is, unless he internalizes the reason and appreciates it as his own reason to act. However, according to McDowell, ordinary subjects do not come to acquire most of their beliefs through such a theoretical reasoning. This example clearly emphasizes that McDowell is employing an internalist theory of justification where the justifier has to be available to cognition.

The second requirement, articulability, roughly means that something is a reason for holding certain beliefs if the subject is able to state, express or articulate the reason: It highlights the relevance of the relation between reason and discourse. As Brewer frequently expresses, when asked, a subject should be able to give his reason for holding her belief by identifying a valid argument. So, a subject who forms an empirical belief on perceptual grounds should be able to articulate the content of his perception as a reason for his belief. And “Reasons that the subject can give, in so far they are articulable must be within the space of concepts.” (Ibid.: 165)

McDowell and Brewer’s articulateness and recognition requirements have to be satisfied for experience to count as genuine reason. And anything that satisfies these requirements have to be conceptual. For, as Brewer notes, “having reasons in general consists in being in a conceptual mental state, and hence, in particular, that sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs only if they have conceptual content.” (Brewer 2005: 218) McDowell’s and Brewer’s epistemological argument, though reasonable, in no way entails conceptualism. The argument embodies premises and assumptions that stand in need of serious consideration. It does not seem that we can easily infer that perceptual content is conceptual from the fact that it constitutes reason for empirical beliefs. First of all, it is questionable whether the first premise, that is, that sense experiential states provide reason for empirical beliefs is true. For accepting this without questioning will be ignoring all causal theories of justification. However, for our purposes I will not mention how this premise can be challenged because it is accepted by most philosophers (among who are non-conceptualists) and already assumed through this dissertation that perceptual states do in a sense provide ground, warrant, or reason for empirical beliefs.

Secondly, even if we admit that perceptual experiences constitute reasons for holding beliefs, in order to infer that perceptual content is conceptual it has to be further proven that reasons are necessarily conceptual. To this end, it should firstly be shown that reasons have to be articulable and be subject’s reasons and

secondly, that satisfying these requirements necessarily entail the conceptuality of reason. Now, I will try to investigate whether the epistemological argument of McDowell and Brewer succeeds in fulfilling these conditions.

Now I am supposing without questioning that perceptual experiences constitute reason for empirical beliefs. So, when I have a perceptual belief that a certain object is a square, we can say that my reason for believing it is the perceptual experience of that square object. According to the first requirement, if this perception is really the reason of my belief, I should appreciate it as the real reason or source for my belief. On the other hand, the causal background of my belief cannot be the reason for me unless I acquire the belief in question through understanding the causal process that give rise to it. This seems to be a strongly internalist approach to justification, since the reason should not only be internal to the subject, but the subject should also be conscious of it and recognize it as reason constituting. That is, I cannot be said to be justified in believing something, if I am not aware of what justifies my belief and how it justifies it. However, this seems to exclude all externalist considerations according to which justifiers need not all be cognitively accessible. More importantly, as Philippe Chuard states (in his article), the conceptualist argument is even inconsistent with more moderate kinds of internalism. Since “being the subject’s own reasons” does not only mean that the subject has the capacity to appreciate it as her reason (or that the reason is recognizable as reason constituting) but rather that the subject has to appreciate it as her reason (the reason must be recognized as reason constituting) (Chuard ms.). We can easily imagine cases where we form some of our justified beliefs without exactly knowing, grasping or understanding the reason behind it. Here, I am not proposing that some of our beliefs occur without any reason (since this will be irrelevant for our current discussion). What I mean is that reasons do not have to be always recognized. To be more precise, we can consider perceptual experiences such as a quick glance at an object. Such an experience can justify my belief without myself being aware what justifies my belief and how. So, it seems that the recognition of reasons is an unmotivated and controversial requirement.

The articulateness requirement is even more difficult to motivate than the recognition requirement. For, if it can be shown that reasons are not necessarily recognized, it automatically follows that they are not always articulable either. Even though we are usually able to state our reason for our empirical beliefs, this does not mean that reasons have to be articulable. It is perfectly conceivable that we sometimes have justified beliefs of which we cannot express or communicate the reason for it. We can imagine cases where we have a perceptual belief about, say a square object, but where we cannot identify the experience that justifies or grounds it. "Our incapacity to specify the significant features of our experience of an object does not prevent us from having, in the way it appears to us, a reason to believe that it is thus and so." (Schantz 2001: 177) The recognition and articulability requirements seem to impose a huge task on a subject. In this account, if a subject has a reason for holding a belief the subject's being justified is not sufficient; the subject should also appreciate and be able to state how and why she is justified. This is a very strong claim that needs further support in order to challenge a huge literature about justification that is not committed to the recognition and articulability requirements. Similarly, from the assumption that perceptual experiences are reasons for holding beliefs, conceptualism comes out with a highly sophisticated account of perception which involves recognition of reasons and critical thinking. However, it is questionable whether these requirements have to be satisfied in order to have a contentful perceptual experience.

Even though conceptualists straighten their motivation for claiming that reasons have to be recognized and articulable, still they have to show that those requirements necessarily entail the conceptuality of reasons or perceptual experiences. Consider now McDowell's example of how an ordinary subject gives reason for holding a belief. When a subject is asked why she holds some belief about a certain object's being square, she will probably say "Because it looks that way", or "Because of the way it looks." (McDowell 1996: 165) Here the subject is giving reason for her belief, and the reason, which is her experience, is articulable. It is undeniable that the responses "because it looks that

way” and “because of the way it looks” are conceptual, since in order to give or state them as reasons we have to possess the relevant concepts that specify the content of those propositions. So, few will deny that articulating a reason requires relevant conceptual capacities. However, those replies or reasons the subject can give through her conceptual capacities do not commit us to the conceptuality of reasons themselves. They are rather articulations or propositions that express the contents, however, not the contents of perceptions themselves; therefore their conceptuality does not indicate anything about the nature of perceptual content. In other words, the fact that we are able to put something in words, subsuming it under a concept or referring to it by conceptual tools, does not necessarily make the thing in question conceptual in itself. The fact that I can articulate the word say “apple” does not entail that the apple is a conceptual item. It can be argued that the articulation or expression is conceptual but what is being expressed is still non-conceptual in character. It can even be claimed that what the subject is articulating here is not merely the content of the experience but rather the interpretation or the subjects’ belief about her own experience itself.<sup>17</sup> So, whether one can express the reason of a perceptual belief makes no change in the nature of perceptual content. The same kind of objection can be also found in Peacocke’s reply to McDowell. As he states, even though the demonstrative ‘that way’ in ‘it looks that way’ is conceptual, this does not show that ‘the way’ we are talking about is indeed conceptual. It is consistent to claim that the demonstrative has a non-conceptual referent, which is the experience. The question is not about the way we express the reason; the question is about the nature of the reason itself. And it seems completely coherent to say that the reason is non-conceptual even though its expression is conceptual (Peacocke 1998: 383).

The same line of argument can be held against the requirement that a reason must be a subject’s own reason. Again very few would deny that in order to recognize something as your own reason to believe, you need to possess the relevant concepts to grasp or understand the reason itself. I also believe that the

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<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed discussion on this issue, see chapter 6, section 6.1.

recognition of the content of a perceptual state requires the exercise of conceptual capacities. However, it is hardly shown by Brewer and McDowell that the conceptuality of such recognition necessarily entails that the content or reason which is recognized by the subject is itself conceptual. A similar point is made by Philippe Chuard. As he states:

Indeed it should be uncontroversial that recognition typically consists in some psychological states—regardless of how to specify such a mental state exactly. But, of course, a recognitional state is distinct from whatever is being recognised. (Chuard ms.)

So, from the fact that recognition of reasons is conceptual, it does not follow that reasons have to be conceptual as well. We cannot infer the conceptuality of what is being recognized from the conceptuality of the state of recognizing it as “reason-constituting.”

## CHAPTER 4

### NONCONCEPTUALISM

#### 4.1 The Nonconceptualist Thesis

Having defined the main claim of conceptualism, it is easier now to understand what a nonconceptualist has in mind when claiming that perception has nonconceptual content and why she endorses such a view. In contrast to conceptualism, which takes perceptual content to be the same kind of content that a belief has, nonconceptualism introduces a new kind of content that is different from belief and judgment content mainly in not being conceptually structured. However, this does not amount to saying that contents of perceptual experiences are raw feels or sense-data that have no representational relation with the external world. Indeed, nonconceptualists in question agree with conceptualists on the representational role and epistemological significance of perceptual experiences, but argue that they can have them nonconceptually. According to nonconceptualism, main proponents of which are Gareth Evans (1982), Fred Dretske (1969, 1995), José Luis Bermúdez (2000), Christopher Peacocke (1998, 1999 and 2001) and Michael Tye (2005), there are ways of representing the world nonconceptually; and perceptual content represents the world in this way. This means that concepts do not show up as the constituents of perceptual content or/and in order to be in a perceptual state one does not have to possess concepts that are needed to wholly specify the content of that state. For instance, “Experiences of piano playing do not require the concept of a piano... They require no understanding of what a piano is or what it sounds like.” (Dretske 1995b: 9) Nevertheless, the representational character of perceptual content is sufficient for its being the basis of perceptual beliefs. Gareth Evans is known as one of the first philosophers who explicitly formulate an account of

nonconceptual representational content. In his *The Varieties of Reference*, he describes perceptual experience as an informational state that carries information about the world, and hence, has representational content. He, however, states that

The informational states which a subject acquires through perception are *non-conceptual*, or *non-conceptualized*. Judgments *based upon* such states necessarily involve conceptualization: in moving from a perceptual experience to a judgment about the world (usually expressible in some verbal form), one will be exercising basic conceptual skills. (Evans 1982: 227)

For Evans, judgments are based upon experiences. However, while forming an empirical judgment on the ground of a perceptual experience, a subject is moving from one kind of informational state with nonconceptual content to a cognitive state with conceptual content (Ibid.). So, judgments and beliefs introduce a new kind of content. They are conceptual, but they are based upon nonconceptual content.

It is also worth noting that the nonconceptualist claim does not necessarily mean that there can be no conceptual item in perceptual content or that no conceptual apparatus can affect the content of a perceptual experience. Nonconceptualism is rather against the view that the content of perception is entirely determinable by concepts; that there is nothing nonconceptual about perceptual content. According to nonconceptualism, concepts that are used to specify the content of an experience cannot provide a complete account of the content of experience. Accordingly, we can discriminate at least two kinds of nonconceptualism. The first is “strong nonconceptualism” that claims that perceptual experience is wholly nonconceptual and has no conceptual component. This means that concepts have no role in determining the content of experience; perceptual content is entirely concept independent. The second is “weak nonconceptualism” according to which, perceptual content can both have conceptual and nonconceptual properties (Wright 2003: 41). According to this account, concepts that a subject possesses are partly (not entirely) responsible for the content of her experience.

Undoubtedly, we have many reasons to think that perceptual content should be nonconceptual. Even though those reasons are not always conclusive, they reveal a great deal of points to reconsider for conceptualists. The intuition that perception is somehow a more basic, more primitive notion compared to other cognitive acts that require the mastery of concepts, seems to me, to be one fundamental reason to resist the conceptualist thesis. Accordingly, the suggestion that we have to possess certain concepts in order to be in a contentful perceptual state and that the concepts we possess determine the content of our experiences constitute the main target of nonconceptualist arguments. It seems counter-intuitive to claim that one cannot perceive a red hexagon-shaped object if one does not possess the concepts 'red' and "hexagon."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, it is plausible to say that two people with different conceptual repertoires have perceptual experiences that represent the world in the same way when looking at an object under the same viewing conditions. Or again, the content of a perception does not have to change when a new concept about the object perceived is acquired (Crane 1992: 136). In the present chapter, among arguments given against conceptualism, I will present and evaluate some arguments that challenge mostly state conceptualism. That is to say, I will narrow my scope to arguments that are against the view that a subject needs to possess or deploy concepts that specify the content of her experience in order to be in a contentful perceptual state. For, I am mostly concerned not with the ontological nature of perceptual content, but rather with epistemological reasons for positing nonconceptual content. Even though most of the arguments against conceptualism within this scope do not necessarily establish the truth of nonconceptualism, they, nevertheless, constitute an important challenge for conceptualism. The most important arguments that attracted attention of many philosophers are based upon the richness and fineness of grain of perceptual content. Both arguments suggest that in order to be in a

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<sup>18</sup> According to the "Recognition by Components Theory", objects are perceptually presented through geons which are simple 3-D shapes. It is claimed that we perceive objects as different arrangements of geons. If geons are considered to be perceptual concepts, then conceptualism seems to follow. For, this would mean that we are not experiencing objects without possessing any shape concepts. Geons are already operative in perceptual process. However, it is questionable whether geons can count as genuine concepts or not. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, concepts should not be peculiar to perception but also be deployable in thought and judgment.

contentful perceptual state we do not have to possess concepts that specify every aspect of the content of the experience. These arguments also constitute the foundation of my nonconceptualist insight. Another crucial argument that I will present depends upon the priority of perception over concepts. It should be noted that nonconceptualist arguments are not limited to those I am referring to. There are also many other important arguments that attack conceptualism from different points.

## **4.2 Arguments against Conceptualism**

### **4.2.1 Argument from Fineness of Grain**

One of the most important and effective arguments against McDowell's and Brewer's conceptualist thesis, which attracted the attention of many philosophers, is based upon the fineness of grain of perceptual content. 'The Fineness of Grain Argument' roughly states that perceptual experiences slice more finely than concepts we have to describe them do. In other words, concepts we have are "concepts of bands on a spectrum," but we can perceptually experience "lines on the spectrum." (McDowell 1996: 56) If perceptual content is conceptual, then the subject of the experience should possess and deploy all concepts that specify the content of the experience in all its determinateness. That is, if an object is represented as being a specific shade of color, then the subject has to possess the concept of that shade. Otherwise, we cannot say that the subject is experiencing that particular color property of the object. Evans was the first to ask the question, "Do we really understand the proposal that we have as many color concepts as there are shades of color that we can sensibly discriminate?" (1982: 229) When we look at objects we see them to have a very specific and determinate shape, color and texture. Similarly when we hear a sound, we hear it in a specific and determinate pitch or tone. While perceiving a red object we do not merely perceive it as red, but rather we perceive it as a specific shade of red. However, it is claimed that we do not have sufficiently many concepts to capture every such

detail of perceptual content. We can perceptually discriminate more shades of color than concepts we have for them (Peacocke 2001: 240). This phenomenon is also supported by psychological experiments. As Thomas Metzinger clearly indicates:

In between 430 and 650 nanometers, human beings can discriminate more than 150 different wavelengths, or different subjective shades, of color. But if asked to reidentify single colors with a high degree of accuracy, they can do so for fewer than 15. The same is true for other sensory experience. (Metzinger 2009: 49)

Thus, either perceptual content is nonconceptual or ordinary subjects is not able to perceive the world so finely grained. If conceptualism is correct, then if I do not possess concepts of determinate properties, the determinacy of those properties cannot be said to enter the content of my perception. Given that almost all philosophers in question (including McDowell) acknowledge that in perception properties such as colors and sounds are presented in a determinate and specific way, or that the world is presented to us in a specific and determinate way, argue Peacocke and many others, perceptual content cannot be conceptual. The fact that perception of a shade of red and perception of a slightly different shade of red have different contents and that we do not have separate concepts for each slightly different shade, then we cannot account for perceptual content by merely appealing to concepts. Correspondingly, the idea that subjects in similar viewing conditions who have different conceptual repertoires differ in the fineness of grain of their perceptual contents seems implausible to nonconceptualists. Even though the argument was first introduced by Evans, the debate on fineness of grain of perceptual content mainly takes place between McDowell and Peacocke and has become a common subject in the relevant literature.

It is crucial to note that the subject matter of this argument is not merely the fact that we do not possess so many finely grained concepts, but also the fact that we do not *deploy* them each time we have an experience. Even if it is in fact possible to show that our conceptual repertoires are rich enough to capture the fineness of

grain of perception, it needs to be further shown that those very concepts are also deployed during the experience. For as Philippe Chuard notes, “possession of concepts alone is insufficient to determine the content actually entertained.” (2007: 20-42) Even though I both possess the concepts “round” and “red,” while entertaining the thought that *the table is round,* it is the concept “round” that I deploy and that determines the content of my belief. Similarly, while undergoing a perceptual experience, it is the concept I currently deploy that determines the content of my experience. So, the Fineness of Grain Argument should be considered within the framework of not only possession but also deployment of concepts.

In his *Mind and World*, McDowell thinks that Evans’ consideration in no way refutes his position. Contrary to Evans, McDowell believes that we in fact do have sufficient conceptual repertoires to capture the determinacy of experience. The conceptual capacities we have should not be restricted to general concepts such as “red” or “green.” McDowell states that Evans’ suggestion that our color concepts are coarser grained than shades we can visually discriminate is a claim about such general concepts. However, according to McDowell, we can acquire concepts of shades that determinately capture the shade presented in experience. For McDowell, demonstrative concepts such as “that shade” are as fine grained as the perceptual content itself. Even though we do not have such concepts ready in our repertoire in advance, if we have general concepts such as “shade” or “tone,” we can form concepts that capture the whole determinateness of perceptual content (McDowell 1996: 56, 57).

However, the fact that we have demonstrative concepts for every finely grained property represented in experience does not necessarily establish the truth of conceptualism. The availability of demonstrative concepts can at most show that we are able to conceptually represent these properties when thinking about them, that is to say, that we can refer to them in thought. A first reason to reject the “Demonstrative Strategy” (Chuard 2006: 155) is stated by Peacocke. For him, McDowell’s proposal does not show that perceptual content is conceptual firstly

because such concepts are made available by perception and hence cannot figure in perceptual content. This argument, referred to as “The Priority Argument”, will be presented in the following part of this chapter. Secondly, Peacocke (1998) claims that demonstrative concepts slice too finely to capture the content of perception. Suppose you perceive the color red. There is more than one demonstrative concept that you can use to describe the content of this perception. “That shade,” “that red” and “that scarlet” are different concepts that capture the very same perceptual content and each of them can equally be applied to the content of the perception of a certain shade of red. Therefore, demonstrative concepts are more finely grained than perceptual content is. McDowell may claim that we should choose the most specific concept to capture the perceptual content. However, Peacocke notes that people may have different conceptual repertoires. One may have the concept ‘scarlet’ while another only have the concept “red”, even though they are looking at the same color, under the same visual conditions, that is, even though they have the same perceptual content. The fact that they have different concepts or conceptual contents does not entail that they have different perceptual contents too. Thus, there is no way to decide which general concept to employ for construing a demonstrative concept (Peacocke 1998: 382). So, by McDowell’s suggestion, the problem of the difference between the level of fineness of grain of perception and concepts is not solved but rather it changed direction.

More importantly, Wayne Wright notes that in order for McDowell to justify his position, he should be able to show that the deployment of demonstrative concepts is a genuine conceptual capacity. As McDowell himself also notes, in order to accept that demonstrative thought is a conceptual capacity, it should “persist beyond the duration of the experience itself.” (1996: 57) And according to him, the concept “that shape” is a genuine concept because it persists after the experience is over, even though it persist a very short time. So, the application of demonstrative concepts is a short lived recognitional capacity for McDowell. Wright argues that demonstrative concepts do not count as genuine recognitional

capacities because they do not persist long enough to help further recognition.<sup>19</sup> That is to say, in order for a concept to be a genuine conceptual capacity it is not enough that it persists a small duration. If a subject S uses the demonstrative concept D for feature F:

S must not only be able to use D to identify things as exemplifying F at time  $t_0$  when the original sample is presented, but S must also be able to deploy D in her reasoning and use it to recognize other samples as exemplifying F at some time  $t_n$  sufficiently beyond  $t_0$ . (Wright 2003: 43)

For instance, it can be said that I genuinely possess the concept “tree”, because I can apply this concept to objects that I perceive at different times correctly. I can recognize other samples of trees presented at different times as exemplifying the concept “tree”. And I can entertain thoughts that include the concept “tree” at different times, even long after my experience of a tree is over.<sup>20</sup> As Wright notes, we can easily realize that in our everyday life our demonstrative concepts used to identify some features do not persist long enough for it to be a recognitional capacity. We cannot categorize other future samples of a color as falling under the concept “that shade” that was used to categorize a color presented in a past experience. To illustrate this point Wright gives the following example: No matter how carefully you look at a certain shade of color in order to keep the exact shade in your mind and conceptualize it as “that shade,” just after your experience of this shade is over, you will not be able to pick up the very same color sample. That is to say, you will not be able to apply the concept “that shade” (not a new demonstrative concept, but the same concept you used when you were perceiving the original shade) correctly. You will certainly apply this concept and say ‘I saw that shade before,’ but the shade you pick up may be different from the original shade even though the difference is a slight one. And even though you choose the exact shade, according to Wright, this will be no

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<sup>19</sup> This requirement about possessing genuine conceptual capacity matches the Generality Constraint introduced by Evans. As explained in section 2.2.2.1., according to Evans, in order for one to possess a concept, one should also be able to use this concept in different thoughts.

<sup>20</sup> A similar point is characterized by Sean Kelly as “The Re-identification Constraint”. See Sean Kelly, “Demonstrative Concepts and Experience,” *Philosophical Review* 110(2001), pp.397-420.

more than a lucky coincidence (2003: 44-45). Similarly, it is also possible that we experience exactly the same shade we experienced before, but fail to recognize that they are the same and fail to apply the same demonstrative to them. In such a case, we would have the same perceptual content at different times but would apply different demonstrative concepts to them. So, demonstrative concepts are not recognitional capacities that help us to recognize and categorize objects as exemplifying them. This is why, according to Wright, representational content of perceptual experience cannot have the conceptual content “that shade” or “that shape” as proposed by McDowell. The argument from Fineness of Grain of perceptual content still remains to pose a serious difficulty for the conceptualist, because McDowell has not proposed a genuine conceptual capacity that would capture all details and determinateness of perception.

It should also be noted that McDowell resists nonconceptualists’, especially Peacocke’s, objections in his later works. According to his revised proposal, the content of perceptual experience can be captured by concepts of ways of being colored, shaped, etc., such as “... is colored *thus*” or “... is shaped *thus*” (McDowell 1998: 415). But as Wright also notes, Peacocke’s objection is also applicable to this version too. It can be claimed that such concepts are also more finely sliced than perceptual content, because for instance “... is colored *thus*”, “... is colored red *thus*” or “... is shaded *thus*” can pick out the same perceptual content. Thus, two perceivers having exactly the same perceptual content can deploy different concepts, but this again shows that perceptual content cannot be identified with concepts proposed by McDowell (Wright 2003: 47, 48).

#### **4.2.2 Argument from Richness of Perceptual Content**

The Richness Argument which I believe is the most essential attack on conceptualism is based upon the fact that perceptual content is rich, that is, there are countless details, objects and properties represented simultaneously in a single perception. It is argued that it is unlikely that we possess and deploy every

concept that specifies each single aspect represented in perception simultaneously. As the following quotation from Bermúdez exemplifies, the Richness Argument and the Fineness of Grain argument are usually conflated and cited together: “Perceptual experience can have richness, texture, and fineness of grain that beliefs do not and cannot have.” (Bermúdez 2000: 51) However, these are two different arguments based upon different aspects of perception (Chuard 2007). The Richness Argument is mainly concerned with the quantity of details that a perceptual content embodies, whereas the Fineness of Grain Argument mostly focuses on the determinacy of those details. The argument from richness is based upon the fact that we do not always deploy so many concepts for every single item presented in experience even though we can actually possess those concepts. But if conceptualism is correct, it has to show that every time we have an experience, we both possess and deploy specific concepts that capture all details that are perceptually presented to us. What is conveyed to us through experience is so rich that claiming that they are conceptual seems to require the deployment of a gigantic amount of concepts at once. In other words, the argument is based upon the implausibility of the conceptualist claim that all concepts that are used to specify all objects, properties or relations presented in a single experience are operative in this experience at the same time.

Conceptualists may adopt two strategies in order to avoid the threat of the Richness Argument. One way is to deny that perceptual experiences have rich contents, that is, to claim that rich details that are supposed to be presented in experience do not in fact show up as parts of the representational content of the experience. The second way is to accept that perceptual content is as rich as the nonconceptualists suppose, but also to insist that those rich details are nevertheless conceptual. In other words, to claim that concepts are already operative in perceiving those details.

Is perceptual content rich? Do details that are supposed to be presented in experiences really count as perceptual content at all? It is hard to deny that perceptual experiences usually convey us a huge amount of information

simultaneously. Even a quick glance at an object may represent various properties of it and its surroundings in a very short moment. Almost everyone would agree that we do not experience objects as isolated from their surroundings or as fragmented and discontinuous. Objects are embedded in an environment that usually contains many other objects that possess numerous properties. Right now I have a conscious experience of my computer in front of me. Besides the fact that I perceive a computer, my visual experience also conveys me limitless information about the properties of my computer. Its color, its shape, its keys, its screen and many other details about it are presented to me. What is more is that my experience does not merely represent the computer and its countless details. My experience also represents and provides me information about the background of the computer. While I perceive the computer I also see the papers, books and the pen next to it. Similarly, I also perceive the part of the table which the computer is on. And I also perceive countless properties all of those details have. We can in principle enlarge this list to include every detail of the content of my perceptual experience if we have enough time and conceptual repertoire (Heck 2000: 489). However, the question is whether we do actually deploy so many concepts simultaneously each time we have an experience with a rich content or not. Given the conceptualist claim that perception is fully conceptual, that is, each single aspect represented in perception is conceptual, it is hard to imagine, how so many concepts can be at work simultaneously and sometimes in a very short duration of time. Given that it would take a pretty long time to form thoughts and beliefs about so many distinct objects, we have reason to suppose that the content of perception has to be different from the content of a belief or thought in not being conceptual. Similarly, it is reasonable to claim that it is possible not to deploy at least one concept that specifies one object or property represented in perception. If this is so, we have reason to reject the claim that perceptual content is wholly conceptual. The following quotation from E. J. Lowe illustrates the point of the richness argument very clearly:

Consider, for instance, the sort of visual experience that one might enjoy upon suddenly entering a cluttered work-shop or a highly variegated region of jungle for the first time. The perceived scene may be immensely complex

and rich in detail- and yet one is seemingly able to take it all in at a single glance, without having time to recognize every one of its ingredients individually as something of this or that kind. (Lowe 2000: 135)

Even though conceptualists do not equate perception with other kinds of propositional attitudes such as beliefs, they nevertheless claim that they have the same kind of content. This is why I find it perfectly reasonable to think that what we hold to be true about the conceptual content of a belief may also be held to be true about perceptual content of experience. The rich content of perceptual experience seems to be in contrast with the limited content of a belief one holds at a given time. When we believe a proposition, say “*a* is *F*,” we are not at the same time believing a multitude of details about *a*. In believing that a table is round we do not simultaneously believe that it is also red and situated in a specific environment. A belief has a limited content. Even though in principle we can form countless beliefs about countless details, it seems implausible to claim that we can gather all these details in a single belief. The very same point can be made clearer by mentioning Dretske’s distinction between *analog* versus *digital* encoding of information that he takes to exist between perceptual and cognitive states and that can be interpreted as a different formulation of the Richness Argument. Dretske states:

I will say that a signal (structure, event, state) carries the information that *s* is *F* in *digital* form if and only if the signal carries no additional information about *s*, no information that is not already nested in *s*’s being *F*. If the signal *does* carry additional information about *s*, information that is *not* nested in *s*’s being *F*, then I shall say that the signal carries this information in analog form. (2003a: 26)

Dretske wants us to consider the differences between a picture and a statement. The statement that there is a cup with coffee in it conveys the information in a digital way, since there is no more information carried with it. However, the picture or photograph of a cup with coffee in it contains also the information of the color, shape or size of the cup as well as other countless details about the cup, the coffee and their surroundings (Ibid.: 26-27). Dretske finds a similar

distinction between perceptions and cognitive processes such as beliefs. The content of perception when looking at a red apple is analog because it carries information other than the redness of the apple. On the other hand, the content of the belief that an apple is red is digital because it carries no more information other than the redness of the apple and information that is already contained in the apple's being red. The difference between these two ways of information coding, according to Dretske, indicates the difference between conceptual and nonconceptual content:

The contrast between an analog and a digital encoding of information (as just defined) is useful for distinguishing between sensory and cognitive processes. Perception is a process by means of which information is delivered within a richer matrix of information (hence in *analog* form) to the cognitive centers for their selective use. (Ibid.: 30)

This is why Dretske claims that perceptual content is nonconceptual and belief content is conceptual. If perceptual experiences and beliefs share the same kinds of content, conceptualists should be able to give an account of why belief content is limited in information while perceptual content is not.

It should be noted that what nonconceptualists aim to show is not that in each perceptual experience there are rich details that we are paying attention to or always noticing. It is hardly denied that we are not always fully aware of what we experience. For the amount of information conveyed by an experience is too much to process and register simultaneously (Chuard 2007). What the Richness Argument aims to show, rather, is that perceptual experiences usually convey more information than we actually notice, attend or register. It is unlikely that we notice or pay attention to everything represented in experience. However, this does not mean that things that we do not attend do not enter the content of experiences at all. Even though we do not notice or pay attention to every aspect presented in perception, we nevertheless perceive them to be in a certain way. While looking at my computer I also see the book behind it even though my attention is fixed on the computer and I do not notice the book during my experience. The fact that I cannot identify the book at the time of the experience

does not erase it from the content of my experience. As Martin says, "... one can fail to notice how things appear to one." (1992: 748) As this remark illustrates, even though one fails to notice them, things nevertheless appears to one, that is to say, they are nevertheless represented, and thus, are experienced to be in a certain way.

However, whether unnoticed or inattentive perception counts as experience or not is a controversial issue among philosophers. It can be claimed that such states are not epistemologically relevant enough to count as perceptual experience. So, a conceptualist can still hold that we only perceive what we actually notice or attend. For instance, in his article "Is the Visual World a Grand Illusion?" Alva Noë states that the cases of change blindness where perceivers fail to see the change indicate the fact that perception is fundamentally attention-dependent and that you perceive only what you attend (2002: 5). Change blindness can be defined as follows: "When brief blank fields are placed between alternating displays of an original and a modified scene, a striking failure of perception is induced: The changes become extremely difficult to notice, even when they are large, presented repeatedly, and the observer expects them to occur." (Rensink, O'Regan and Clark 2000: 127) This shows that there are cases where we are not consciously attending or noticing something which is just in front of our eyes. Therefore, we cannot so easily claim that we perceive all the details that are in our visual field. "If something occurs outside of the scope of attention, even if it's perfectly visible, you won't see it." (Noë 2002: 5) Given that what we actually notice or attend to is limited, it can be claimed that the Richness Argument cannot refute conceptualism, since it is possible to claim that perceptual experiences are not so rich after all. Correspondingly, O'Regan et al. claim that "we do not have a coherent and detailed representation of the coherent and detailed world that surrounds us," (2000: 127) contrary to what most of us believe. However, the fact that we do not perceive every perceptual detail, as the change blindness experiment shows, does not entail that we never perceive such details. It is still quite plausible to claim that perception is usually rich, that we perceive most of the details visually presented to us even though not all of them.

The conceptualist challenge against the Richness Argument can be resisted in several ways. First consider Dretske's comment on this subject. It is quite reasonable in some cases to make the remark "But you *must* have seen it" to a person. This is because of the fact that "despite what the person *thought* he saw, or whether he thought he saw anything at all, the physical and psychological conditions were such that the object must have looked some way to him." (Dretske 1969: 18) So, the first intuitive and simple reason for believing that experiences have rich content is the fact that we are usually (even if not always) in appropriate physical and psychological conditions to perceive objects in our visual field, such as the surroundings of an object we attentively experience. Even though this reasoning is not convincing enough, it nevertheless encourages us to consider unnoticed perception as a genuine perceptual experience.

A second and more important reason is phenomenological. It is based upon how unnoticed, inattentive or unrecognized perception of details affects and contributes to the phenomenology of an experience. There is a sense that the representational content of experience, the way it represents the world to be, is strongly related to its phenomenology, to how it is like to have that experience. A perceptual experience has both a phenomenology and a representational content. If unnoticed or inattentive perception does not count as a genuine perceptual experience at all, it can hardly be said that it has a phenomenology. However, unnoticed perceptions have a phenomenology, or contribute to the phenomenology of an experience. And if they have phenomenological properties they should count as genuine experience as well. Imagine two people who are looking at identical objects, with identical backgrounds, in the same viewing conditions such that we can assume that they have very similar phenomenal feels. Suppose also that those people are not merely looking at the objects; their attention is completely fixed on them, so that they do not notice or attend to any other object around. Now suppose that we somehow remove some objects from the visual field of one of them without making him feel the removal. Can we now say that the two people still have the same experience with the same phenomenology? I think not. The more objects we remove, the more obvious the

difference between their experiences will be. Similarly, two persons fixing their attention on identical objects, one of which is isolated and the other is embedded in a background, will have experiences with different phenomenal properties. Moreover, there are cases where we realize that we were hearing a sound only when the sound is over. The fact that we experience the change in the sound, or detect its removal suggests that we were already experiencing it. Can we say that we were not experiencing the sound at all because of the fact that we were not noticing it? So, if unnoticed perception does not count as perception at all, then its absence or disappearance should make no change in the phenomenology of perceptual experience. But it seems that it does. As Chuard notes, this is a good reason to accept that those experiences are real perceptual experiences (Chuard 2007: 13). That is, we do perceive some objects or events even though we do not realize at the moment that we do.

Another important reason for believing that inattentive or unnoticed perceptions count as genuine perceptual experience, that is cited by Chuard and other thinkers as well, is based upon sensory memory. In his *Seeing and Knowing*, Dretske states that it is possible for us to remember having seen things although we cannot remember being aware of seeing them (1969: 11). It is crucial here to note that the fact that we cannot remember being aware of them is due to our failure to notice or attend to them rather than our failure to remember our attentive experience of them. It usually happens that we suddenly remember having seen an object or a detail about an object, that is, retrieve information about an object that we did not notice during the experience of it. This, I believe, should not be confused with remembering a fully attentive experience of an object that we have forgotten. For instance, suppose that you are walking down the street. Among the things that you are inattentively perceiving there is also a bakery. At the time of the experience you do not consciously notice it. If someone asks you where the bakery is, you will say that you do not know. Still it is conceivable that sometimes after the experience you suddenly remember that there was a bakery on your way. Or consider cases when you are trying to find something which is actually just in front of your eyes and that you later remember where you saw it

(Ibid.). The fact that we can remember such details after the experience is over indicates the fact that those unnoticed or unattended details were experienced after all, and that their experiences have a representational content. For, if they were not experienced at all, then they would not be remembered either. If you did not experience the bakery, as most conceptualists would claim, you would never be able to remember that there was one on your way, that is, to remember having seen the bakery. Similarly, it usually happens that we find ourselves singing a song or thinking about a song suddenly without any reason or without knowing where you heard this song from. But it is usually the case that we actually heard the song from our friend a while ago, but were not noticing her singing it and later remembered the song without remembering our hearing of it. As Michael Martin states, “one’s memory experiences typically derive from one’s past perceptions.” (1992: 750) So, the fact that we have memory experiences indicates that we actually had such past experience.

So far we have seen that it is difficult to deny that experiences have rich content, for we have several plausible reasons for believing it. However, even though we can establish the richness of experience and hence the existence of unnoticed perceptions, a conceptualist can still resist the nonconceptualist conclusion derived from that argument in the following way: a conceptualist may agree that perceptual experiences have rich contents and that we experience more than what we actually consciously notice. He can, however, go on claiming that those perceptions are nevertheless conceptual, that is, our conceptual capacities are already operative in them. As Chuard also highlights (2007: 22), the following expression from McDowell indicates his agreement with the richness of perceptual content: “the characteristic richness of experience.” (McDowell 1996: 49, n. 6) One can argue that the tendency to believe in the implausibility that we cannot deploy so many concepts simultaneously while having an experience with a rich content derives from the mistaken assumption that concepts that are operative in experience are due to a cognitive activity of the subject, like the activity of concept application. If perception were seen as an active process of conceptualization it would trivially follow that concept deployment in perception

should be limited just like in beliefs and judgments. For being engaged in an activity of applying so many concepts simultaneously and usually in a very short time is very unlikely.

However, as explained in the previous chapter, McDowell insists on the difference between experience and beliefs, that is, on that concepts are passively actualized in experience rather than actively exercised on it. The conceptual content of experience is passively given to the subject. Hence, in order to have an experience with a rich content, one does not have to perform a huge cognitive task. Therefore, it is not so implausible to claim that we can deploy countless concepts that are used to determine the rich information conveyed by the experience. It can be claimed that the Richness Argument seems to be valid only as far as the conceptuality of perceptual content is taken to mean the *conceptualization* of what is given through experience, that is, only if the conceptuality of experiences is considered as the consequence of a cognitive activity. So, conceptualism can resist the nonconceptualist intuition without denying that perceptual contents are actually rich in information. Even though it is difficult to sustain it, one can both admit that perception conveys more information than we actually attend to or notice and that that information is already conceptual. Even though it seems that we cannot conceptualize so many items or exercise so many concepts at the same time even if we actually possess the relevant concepts, it can be claimed that there is nothing counterintuitive about the claim that so many concepts are passively actualized (Chuard 2007, n.17). So, the Richness Argument “hardly shows that the information given in perception is of a different kind than the information about the world represented in a belief: it shows, at most, that there’s more of it in the case of perception.” (Speaks 2005: 365) Therefore, in order for the Richness Argument to succeed conclusively against conceptualism, we should provide strong arguments not only for the richness of experience, but also for why unnoticed or unattended perceptions cannot be conceptual (Chuard 2007). In the following section I will try to provide a more conclusive argument that derives from the Richness Argument.

### **4.2.3 The Demonstrative Reply Reconsidered: Fineness of Grain of Perceptual Richness**

We have seen that the “Demonstrative Strategy” can be resisted by rejecting its being a genuine conceptual capacity. However, we can still find good reasons to support that demonstrative concepts are conceptual capacities by making some modifications on conditions that a capacity should satisfy in order to count as genuinely conceptual. So, it is in principle possible to hold that demonstrative concepts are genuine conceptual capacities after all. I believe that, even though it seems plausible, positing demonstrative concepts as a solution to the problems of conceptualism is of little help for conceptualists. For demonstration, which is the basis of demonstrative-concept formation, challenges more fundamental aspects of McDowell’s theory. Adina L. Roskies (2010) introduces a very powerful argument against conceptualism by highlighting the role of attention in acquiring demonstrative concepts. This argument I believe also discloses another difficulty concerning both the richness and fineness of grain of perceptual content. My argument has roughly the following form: if perceptual content is both rich and finely grained, then how would it be possible for a subject to deploy demonstrative concepts for each single details that are presented a fine grained way.

A demonstrative concept is expressed by a demonstrative expression of the form “that...” or “this...” and it refers to the way an object or property is presented by the current experience (Kelly 2001: 401). It can be roughly defined as “a concept that was acquired through an act of demonstration,” (Levine 2008: 329) and demonstration is “an act, it’s something you do.” (Ibid.: 334) In order to use a demonstrative concept correctly or appropriately, there are some conditions that need to be satisfied. Most importantly, demonstration requires the fixation of attention and involves the act of choosing objects or properties among others. In other words, in demonstrating an object you choose to pick it up among many other objects that are perceptually presented to you.

Demonstrative identification of a particular object as ‘that car’, for example, requires that you be selecting information from that car...; that is what makes it the case that you are identifying that car rather than anything else. (Campbell and Martin 1997: 57)

It is worth noting that what is required in the act of demonstration is not a passive fixation of attention (Roskies 2010: 124). In an article, Roskies defines two ways of directing attention: “exogenous attention” and “endogenous attention.” Exogenous attention is the passive direction of attention that is caused by a notable object, such as the shift of attention to an object that suddenly starts to move. In such a case, the subject involuntarily changes the focus of attention. Endogenous attention, on the other hand, is voluntary or intentional such that the subject deliberately directs her attention to a stimulus among other stimuli (Ibid.). Consider the act of pointing to an object. We can point to an object in two ways: the referent of our pointing behavior may luckily indicate an object without the intention to point to that object, and we can intentionally choose the object we will point to. However, it is apparent that only the latter kind of pointing counts as an act of demonstration. Similarly, only the intentional, active and voluntary act of directing attention or focusing counts as demonstration in the relevant sense. So, we acquire a demonstrative concept through an activity of demonstration of the subject. This is not a passive process; we are not merely acted upon by the environment, the process rather involves the act of selecting an object, property, etc. among others. This, in turn, means that whenever we have a mental state with a *demonstratively conceptual content*, we are engaged in an active process of demonstration.

Roskies’ own argument proceeds as follows: Given that demonstration is a voluntary and intentional act of selecting among other representations, we need to posit nonconceptual representational aspects of experience among which we choose to pick up one demonstratively. The fact that a subject voluntarily demonstrates an object or property indicates that there are also other objects or properties presented to the subject at the personal level. That is, prior to the

demonstration or fixation of the attention of the subject, other properties and objects have to be already nonconceptually presented. “The information upon which the attentional focus depends is part of the content of experience.” (Ibid.: 125) And this information, since it is prior to demonstration, is nonconceptual.

Departing from the same point as Roskies did, I believe we can challenge another difficulty for conceptualists concerning the existence of unattended experiences. I noted previously that, though being closely connected, the Fineness of Grain Argument and the Richness Argument are distinct arguments. I stress this point especially because I believe that through combining these two arguments we can attain a stronger argument which is, though not impossible, more difficult to resist. As mentioned previously, even though the Richness Argument can show that perception has rich content it can hardly prove on its own that this content is nonconceptual. The main intuition lying behind the Richness Argument, I believe, is the idea that deploying a concept for every feature in perceptual content requires a huge cognitive task for the subject and that it is unlikely that we are engaged in such a cognitive performance each time we have a perceptual experience. But we have seen that conceptualism does not necessarily lead to this conclusion. Deploying a concept does not have to involve a cognitive performance after all, since according to conceptualists they are passively actualized rather than actively exercised. However, with the aid of the Fineness of Grain Argument we can show why and how the rich content of perception has to be nonconceptual.

The Richness Argument posits a big amount of information conveyed to the subject and unattended perceptual experiences. Accordingly, by combining this claim with the fineness of grain claim we can obtain the following: there are unattended perceptual experiences whose contents are finer grained than concepts we have to specify those contents. In other words, perceptual content is both rich and fine grained. There is nothing implausible in the thought that details that we are not attending to or noticing also have quite determinate properties, which also need to be accounted for by the conceptualist. I noted previously that accepting

the richness of perception while preserving its conceptuality was an open option for conceptualists. If conceptualists admit the richness of perceptual content they can in no way account for it by conceptual means since those riches are determinate and cut more finely grained than general concepts we have for them. Appealing to demonstrative concepts cannot rescue conceptualism, firstly because demonstrative concepts require the subjects' attention to be fixed while it is by definition that unattentive perception cannot satisfy such a requirement. And secondly, because it is unlikely that the huge amount of information conveyed in a single experience simultaneously is demonstrated through an active cognitive process of the subject at the same time. In other words, it is unlikely that we fix our attention to each detail presented in perception simultaneously. So, the core intuition that we are not engaged in a cognitive task each time we have a contentful experience is in fact a reliable resource to reject conceptualism.

We have seen that the richness of perceptual content though challenged in many ways is hard to deny. It can be admitted that even though perception does not represent every detail in the visual field it nevertheless represents a vast amount of details. But if experience is rich and if conceptualism is correct, then a subject has to possess and deploy concepts that specify every single aspect of the content, and those concepts have to capture those details in all their determinateness. In order to challenge conceptualism what we need to show is that the rich details presented in experience are more finely grained than our *general* concepts. It can be objected that unattentive perceptions do not have finely grained contents; rather what they represent is not as determinate as what is presented in an attentive experience.<sup>21</sup> However, if we consider inattentive perceptions as perceptual experience as well, we have no reason to deny that they are finely grained too. That is, that they should also represent what they represent in a

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<sup>21</sup> It is possible to argue against the determinacy of inattentive content on the ground of the fact that only presentations of objects which are in the fovea (center of the retina) are determinately perceived. As you move away from the fovea the determinacy decreases. So, it can be claimed that inattentive contents are not determinate after all. However, we do not need inattentive perception to be as determinate as attentive perception. It is sufficient if it is at least more determinate than concepts we have. Moreover, it is possible to claim that objects presented in the fovea that is objects presented determinately may have themselves so many details that it is unlikely to demonstrate all these details at once.

determinate way. The intuition that inattentive experiences have coarse grained contents arises from the fact that we cannot always remember a past inattentive experience in all its determinateness. It seems harder to visually remember or imagine a feature determinately, if it is experienced inattentively. Similarly, inattentive perceptions can remain unremembered. This complicates how to figure out how determinately a property is presented. However, this in no way entails that the experience has a coarse grained content, for as we have seen, we usually do not remember the exact property of what we were experiencing quite attentively. If something is presented to us it should be presented in a specific and determinate way: if an object is presented as being red, it is presented as being a certain shade of red whether we fail to attend to or notice it or not. If perception in general has fine grained content, the content of inattentive perception should be fine grained as well.

As we have seen when forming a demonstrative concept we demonstrate and fix our attention to what we intend to refer to. That is to say, deploying a demonstrative concept necessarily requires a mental effort of the subject. Suppose that you are having an experience with a rich content. Your experience consists of several fine grained details: red<sub>1</sub>, red<sub>2</sub>,... green<sub>1</sub>, green<sub>2</sub>, green<sub>3</sub>, etc. This list can be enlarged to such an extent that it captures every slight difference of numerous perceived details. If perceptual content is claimed to be conceptual, then all those fine grained properties have to be captured by concepts deployed by the subject. In fact, it is perfectly plausible to claim that we can in principle find appropriate concepts to conceptualize every single item. However, it seems implausible to claim that these countless fine grained details are all simultaneously demonstratively captured while having the experience. Since demonstration requires fixation of attention and is an activity of the subject, it seems very unlikely that we are engaged in such activities for every single detail that is presented in experience. For how is it possible to voluntarily choose and fix attention to so many details simultaneously? In addition, given that we do not always attend to or notice every detail presented to us, to claim that they are demonstratively conceptual would involve a contradiction. For it is contradictory

to claim that unattended perceptual contents are the focus of attention. As soon as we are demonstrating some perceived property, we are also automatically attending to it. Therefore, it seems impossible to deploy demonstrative concepts for what we do not attend or notice. Conceptualism cannot rely on demonstrative concepts in order to avoid nonconceptualist arguments.

#### **4.2.4 The Priority of Perception Over Conception: Acquisition and Learning of Concepts**

Another important motive behind the nonconceptualist view is based upon the intuition that perception is more primitive and temporally prior to conceptual capacities. This belief derives from the empiricist intuition that perception is the source at least of our perceptual concepts. If a subject is supposed to possess concepts that specify the content of his experience, then the explanation of concept possession cannot be based upon the experience itself, since such an explanation would be circular. A fundamental argument against conceptualism that is construed as a reply to “Demonstrative Strategy” and called “The Priority Argument” asserts that deploying demonstrative concepts can only be explained by making reference to nonconceptual content. (Bermúdez and Cahen 2012) Another closely related argument is “The Learning Argument” that is clearly formalized by Roskies and asserts that conceptualism cannot account for concept learning and necessarily leads to concept nativism (2008: 633).

The Priority Argument can be seen as one of the strongest arguments given against The Demonstrative Strategy. According to nonconceptualists such as Heck, Peacocke and Wright, this strategy cannot work because demonstrative concepts cannot be antecedent to the experience since they are made available by the experience itself (Wright 2003: 52). That is to say, the concept “that shade” can be deployed only after you have an experience of this specific shade, for what explains deploying this concept is your having the experience of that shade of color (Heck 2000: 492). To argue that the subject has to possess the

demonstrative concept in order to experience that shade seems to be circular. For it suggests that your demonstrative concept is made available by an experience that already requires the subject's possessing the demonstrative concept. Therefore, any account of fineness of grain should be based upon nonconceptual content. As Peacocke notes:

The nonconceptual content of perceptual experience contributes to making available to a thinker various perceptually based concepts. Only a thinker who has a perceptual experience with a certain kind of non-conceptual representational content can employ such perceptual demonstrative concepts as *that shape, that texture, that interval of time*. (2001: 242)

The Priority Argument can be expanded in order to capture not only demonstrative concepts but also general observational concepts as well. Just like demonstrative concepts that are made available by perceptual content, perceptual concepts are also acquired on the basis of perception. This argument, called "The Learning Argument," roughly asserts that learning of concepts is possible only if we admit that perceptual content is nonconceptual. We first experience things, and then we acquire concepts of them. Therefore, given that perception is prior to concept, it cannot have perceptual content. If we want to make sense of concept learning, we cannot claim that perception is already conceptual since it does not make sense to talk about learning or acquiring a concept that we already possess. It is hard to deny that most, even if not all, of our concepts are learned as we progress through our life and perceive new things. So, nonconceptual perceptual content can provide the empirical basis for concept learning (Peacocke 2001: 242) In a more recent article Roskies also argues against conceptualism on the ground that by denying nonconceptual perceptual content conceptualism cannot account for concept learning and is led to embrace an unacceptable form of concept nativism (2008: 634). Roskies describes the process of concept learning as being based upon a subject's confrontation of an exemplar of the concept that is learned. That is to say, learning the concept "red" requires that one experiences a red object whose representation is nonconceptual. But if the experience is already conceptual, that is, if it already requires the possession of the concept "red", then it is not possible to talk about learning new perceptual concepts. The

only possible alternative for the conceptualist, according to Roskies, is nativism which asserts that “concepts are genetically endowed, either present from birth, or emerging as a result of normal maturational processes without the need for particular external input or effort on the part of the thinker.” (Ibid.: 642) For Roskies, even though such an approach can be adopted for some basic or core concepts, it nevertheless needs to be supplemented by an account of learning perceptual contents on the basis of nonconceptual content. Otherwise it will lead to an unacceptable and counter-intuitive version of concept nativism.

Conceptualists such as Brewer and McDowell do not base their arguments on a nativist intuition. On the contrary, as Roskies also indicates, they seem to agree with the empiricist view concerning concept acquisition (Ibid.: 641). The first conspicuous reply to the Priority and Learning Arguments is given by Brewer. According to Brewer, both arguments are based upon the mistaken supposition that the relation between perceptual content and concepts is causal, whereas the relation is actually a constitutive one. The belief that perception is temporally and explanatorily prior to concept acquisition results from this assumption. However, in conceptualist accounts the concepts are considered as parts of the perceptual contents. So, there is nothing circular in claiming that we acquire concepts through having experiences. Given that concepts are constituents of perceptual contents, it automatically follows that whenever someone has a perceptual experience he at the same time acquires concepts that make up the content of this experience. “Thus, it is, in perfectly natural sense, because he has the experience which he has, that the subject is able to employ that concept in thought.” (Brewer 2005: 222) However, I believe that this argument suggests the unacceptable conclusion that whenever we perceptually encounter an object for the first time of which we have no concept, we immediately acquire or learn that very concept. This seems to be inconsistent with the notion of “concept learning” that requires the cognitive effort of the subject and typically multiple exposures. Merely experiencing an object does not seem to be the same as acquiring the concept of that object. We do not come to learn concepts in such a miraculous way (Roskies 2008: 639).

Another way to reply to the Priority and Learning arguments is based upon the following: even though we do not possess the concept that we are supposed to learn before we have the experience, we can still give the perceptual content a conceptual account on the ground of other concepts we already possess. When a subject is confronted with a new property, he does not have to experience it initially in all its determinacy, but rather experience it through coarser grained concept he already possesses. As Gennaro states:

If I am walking down the street and see someone wearing a shirt that is a shade of red that I have never seen before, then the conceptualist could hold that, *at least for the initial very brief encounter*, I did *not* consciously experience the shirt *as* that shade of red. Of course, I can quickly *acquire* that concept, which would allow me to see the shirt *as* red<sup>17</sup> from that point on. (2011: 181)

The same line of argument can also be applied to general concepts. When I firstly experience an object or property that I have no concept of, I can perceive it through other concepts I already possess. When I firstly encounter, let us say, a magpie, I can perceive it as a bird that is black and white and that is very similar to a crow. This initial experience will differ, even though slightly, from the experience I have when I acquire the concept “magpie.” This is why, we can account for concept learning on the ground of other concepts we already possess. This explanation will not be circular since it does not presuppose that we already have the concept “magpie” in order to perceive the magpie. This argument also sheds light upon the phenomenon of the difference of perception between an expert and a nonexpert (Ibid.: 182).

However, the force of this argument is also a debatable issue. First of all, the difference between an expert and a nonexpert may not be due to the difference between their perception but rather due to the difference between their conception of what they perceive. Moreover, the argument is based on the assumption that the fineness of grain of a perceptual content depends upon concepts deployed by the subject: for it assumes that the subject’s perceptual content can become more

finely grained through acquiring a fine grained concept. This assumption however, already amounts the conceptualist claim that is being currently discussed. Nonconceptualist arguments aim to reject the claim that perceptual content depends upon concepts the subject deploys during the experience. So, trying to challenge this nonconceptualist claim upon the ground of what they aim to reject seems to beg the question. It attempts to keep the conceptualist claim (that the content of perceptual depends upon concepts the subject deploys) safe, again by applying to the same claim itself. That is to say, it bases its argument upon the conceptualist claim that our conceptual repertoires determine the way we perceive objects. The assumption that concepts we possess determine the way we experience the world as being a certain way is what needs to be shown, therefore cannot be appealed to as a reply to the Priority Argument.

To sum up, the Priority Argument and the Learning Argument damage conceptualism to a great extent. If we accept that perceptual concepts are learned or deployed on the basis of perceptual content, we can no longer hold that a subject has to possess those concepts in order to perceive things to be a certain way. Just like the Fineness of Grain and the Richness Arguments, these arguments also provide solid grounds to reject at least state conceptualism.

#### **4.2.5 First Perception: The First Encounter of Objects<sup>22</sup>**

We are creatures endowed with concepts, beliefs and ideas. From the beginning of our lives, we learn to interpret what we perceive, to shape it through the concepts we possess. And once we learn that, we cannot isolate ourselves from concepts we possess and look around with *naked eyes*. No matter how much we concentrate and try to clear our minds from any kind of prejudice, expectation, beliefs or desires, we cannot make ourselves perceive things at least without seeing them as “something”; without subsuming them under a concept. If it were possible to erase all concepts and beliefs we have, even for a very brief moment,

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<sup>22</sup> I borrowed the term “first perception” from Gallagher (1996).

we could then have a clear case of an experience devoid of all conceptual constraint. The fact that concepts are so fundamental in mapping out the way we interpret the world and ourselves may lead to the mistaken belief that perception is necessarily conceptual. The fact that our perceptions are usually (or almost always) accompanied by concepts or interpreted through them does not show that those concepts are constitutive of perceptual content, nor does it show that there is a logical entailment between them. In other words, the fact that when having a perceptual experience of a table we inevitably see or interpret it as a “table” (if we possess the concept “table”), does not show that the concept “table” is constitutive of our experience of a table. Just like hearing a sentence in a certain language is not logically dependent upon understanding that language, perception is not logically dependent upon concepts. If we know the language, we cannot help also understand it, but it is still logically possible to hear the sentence without grasping its meaning. Therefore, in order to refute conceptualism, we do not have to show how perception remains pure even when concepts are present (though it can remain pure). For instance, we do not have to show how a subject who possesses the concept “table” can nevertheless have a perceptual experience of a table without conceptualizing it as a table. Rather it would be sufficient to conceive a case where perception is present even in the absence of any conceptual capacities that would enable the subject to conceptualize what he perceives. Conceptualism would be refuted if perception without any concepts can be coherently established.<sup>23</sup> In this section I will attempt to provide such an illustration based upon “The Molyneux Problem” introduced by William Molyneux through a letter he sent to John Locke. Though the original problem too can be interpreted as constituting an important challenge to conceptualism, I believe that a more radical version of it will be much more effective and totally paralyze the conceptualist claim that all perception is conceptual.

In a letter sent to Locke, Molyneux states the problem as follows:

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<sup>23</sup> Here I am assuming and supporting the ‘Autonomy Thesis’ introduced by Peacocke. According to the thesis it is possible that a creature is in states with nonconceptual content, even though that creature does not possess any concepts at all. See, *A Study of Concepts* 1999 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, MIT Press), p. 90.

Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and thought by his touch to distinguish between a cube and a sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and the other, which is the cube, which the sphere. Suppose then the cube and the sphere placed on a table, and the blind man to be made to see; *quaere*, whether by his sight, before he touched them, he could now distinguish and tell which is the globe, which the cube? (Locke: 1998: 88, 89)

The problem is actually considered to be about the relation between different perceptual modalities, about whether an object of one sense modality can be recognized through the concepts acquired through the perception by another sense modality. My intention is however, to focus on the *firstness* of the experience the blind man gains, a kind of visual perception that occurs before one has acquired any visual concepts about what he perceives. I believe that the first visual experience of Molyneux's man is a good candidate to be an instance of basic perception if it can be shown that the man does not possess at least some concepts that are necessary to give a full definition of what he perceives.<sup>24</sup>

Is it still possible, as the conceptualists would claim, to hold that the Molyneux's man's first visual perception is conceptual? To answer this question, we should first of all establish that the man in question would have a genuine perceptual experience as soon as he gains his vision. As can be seen from Molyneux's letter, the problem in as sense presupposes that the man does actually have a perceptual experience. For, the problem is not about whether the man will perceive the shape properties of objects, but rather about whether he will be able to tell them apart. That is, about whether he will be able to

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<sup>24</sup>The Molyneux Problem should not be considered merely as a thought experiment, because there exist actual empirical instances of it. For example, William Cheselden, a surgeon, actually restored the sight of a young boy who was born blind. For more information see "An Account of Some Observations Made by a Young Gentleman, Who Was Born Blind, or Lost His Sight so Early, That He Had no Remembrance of Ever Having Seen, and Was Couch'd between 13 and 14 Years of Age" *Philosophical Transactions* 35 (1728) pp. 447-450.

interpret or identify what he visually perceives on the basis of his tactual concepts. Nor is it about whether the surgery that enables him to see is successful enough to provide him total vision. In the above quote the possibility that the man's sight is not good enough to count as perception is not even considered. So, it can be assumed that Molyneux's man actually sees objects and that the objects will be presented to him in a certain way, though the subject is unable to interpret his perception.

A possible reaction that can be seen as favoring conceptualism is to give an affirmative answer to the question on the basis of the sameness of visual and tactual shape concepts. Some philosophers, including Evans<sup>25</sup>, argue that a shape concept acquired through one perceptual modality is the same as the concept of the same shape acquired through another perceptual modality. Given that Molyneux's man already possesses concepts "cube" and "sphere" that he has gained through tactual experience, he can have a visual perceptual experience whose content is conceptual. In other words, he can experience those objects as a cube and as a sphere. Considered from this perspective the problem does not seem to threaten conceptualism.

Some other philosophers, on the other hand, give a negative answer to Molyneux's question. For them, the Molyneux man cannot tell which object is the cube and which one is the sphere on the basis of perception alone. For, contrary to the common idea that we have "concepts that we apply indifferently on the basis of sight and touch," (Campbell 2005: 195) different sense modalities provide different concepts of the same property. For instance, Berkeley argues that the Molyneux's man cannot identify what he visually perceives because his visual concepts and tactile concepts of shapes are not the same concepts. As he states: "The extension, figures, and motions perceived by sight are specifically distinct from the ideas of touch called the

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<sup>25</sup> Evans argues for the commonality between vision and touch in terms of 'egocentric space'. However, he does not take this to be in favour of conceptualism. For more detail see, "Molyneux's Question" in *Collected Papers* edited by John McDowell. New York: Oxford University Press (1985).

same names, nor is there any such thing as one idea or kind of idea common to both senses.” (Berkeley 2008: 72) So, according to him, all properties are proper sensibles; they are peculiar to one perceptual modality. Therefore, if Berkeley is correct, the blind-born man who gains his sight and visually perceives objects for the first time cannot be said to have an experience with conceptual content. For, he does not possess *visual perceptual concepts* that are necessary to define the content of his experience. Even though he already possesses some shape concepts, these concepts would be different from concepts acquired via visual perception, and hence cannot account for what he visually perceives.

Even though it is commonly accepted that shape properties are common sensible, i.e. properties that can be perceived through more than one sense, it can be argued against conceptualism on the basis of color perception. Colors are proper sensibles; they can only be perceived through vision. So, even if it is claimed that shape concepts acquired via different sense modalities are nevertheless identical, the same cannot be held for color concepts. For, if a person lacks the sense through which he can perceive a relevant proper sensible, he cannot acquire the perceptual concept of that quality through other senses. So, Molyneux’s man will not have any perceptual concept of colors that he perceives for the first time in his life time. Even if the Molyneux man may conceptualize his visual experience of a cube and sphere as “cube” and “sphere”, this conceptualization will not exhaust the content of his experience, for the shape of objects are not the only properties presented in experience. A visual experience also presents color properties. This means that there will be at least some concepts that are needed to specify perceptual content which a person can lack. If this is so, conceptualism cannot be correct: it cannot be the case that a person who perceives an object necessarily possesses all of the concepts of the details presented to him. The Molyneux man will have a contentful visual experience for the first time, but will lack some concepts that define the content of his experience.

It is always possible for conceptualists to come up with a way to account for perceptual content on the basis of some demonstrative concepts, or other concepts already possessed by the subject. Through I do not think that these are plausible options, it is at least in principle possible to find out convenient concepts already present in the subject's conceptual repertoire which the content of perception can be mold into. Molyneux's man is an adult human being. Contrary to the case of pre-conceptual infants and animals, we are at least certain that he has perceptual concepts, beliefs, thoughts and other kinds of conceptual capacities. Even though he is not able to conceptualize what he visually perceives like a sighted person does, he can nevertheless conceptualize it in some way. Suppose that Molyneux's man not only lacks color concepts but also *visual shape concepts* as well. Undoubtedly, the man will not be able to classify what he visually perceives as a sphere and as a cube, or as red and as green. But nevertheless, we can think of some other concepts through which he can conceptualize what he sees. For instance, when he first visually encounters a sphere-shaped object and a cube-shaped object, he can at least recognize them as *distinct objects that have different properties*. Given that he has had past experiences (even though not visual ones), we can at least admit that he possesses concepts like "object" or "thing", and "property." I do not think that such general concepts are capable of capturing every detail of perceptual content and that conceptualism can be rescued by this method. Nevertheless, it is still a possible option for conceptualism to claim that a subject perceives only to the extent that his conceptual repertoire permits.

Therefore, if we can modify the Molyneux Problem in order to show that there can be perception when the subject does not possess even a single perceptual concept, the argument will be much more effective. We can dramatize the Molyneux case to such an extent that we can imagine a man who possesses no perceptual concept and beliefs at all. Let me name such a scenario "The Radical Molyneux Case." A man who has always lacked not only his sight but also all of his sense modalities can have no conscious perceptual experience,

and hence can acquire no perceptual concepts. Imagine an unfortunate human who was born in comatose state and who has hitherto spent all his life without enjoying a single perceptual experience. Nevertheless, physicians have ensured that his bodily organs were growing and getting mature like those of a normal human being. Under the supervision of physicians the man becomes an adult human being and one day he wakes up from his coma and starts to perceive his environment. He starts to hear noises, smell odors and see things.<sup>26</sup> The first experience of this human being can be characterized as “perception in its very instance, without the contribution of previous sense experience, without being informed by established conceptual schemas, without the influence of habit, custom, language and so forth.” (Gallagher 1996) And this kind of perception I believe can be a clear instance of what I will call “basic perception.” Certainly, the *first experience* we are talking about here will not be very similar to the experience of a normal adult being. The man in question is not in a position to interpret, categorize or identify what he sees. He may not be able to form a meaningful whole from the various experiences he has at the moment of awakening. It is also possible that he is not able to perceive things with acuity, for he is sensing the world through organs that did not function for years. But it is not (logically) implausible to suppose that he has perceptual experiences nevertheless. He sees, for instance, his parents and doctors, but has no idea about who they are- even worse, about what they are. If it is guaranteed that all of his sense organs and his body in general are in healthy condition, then we have no reason to doubt that he is having contentful perceptual experiences. For, from the movement of his eyeball, and from the reaction of his body, it would be possible to tell that he perceives things. And as time goes by and he is acclimated to the world of

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<sup>26</sup>This thought experiment can be seen as a version of the thought experiment introduced by Condillac in 1746. Condillac wants us to consider a statue of a human that acquires one of its senses in isolation of other senses. Condillac used this thought experiment in order to show that all knowledge is based upon sensations. See, Lorne Falkenstein, "Étienne Bonnot de Condillac", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/condillac/>>.

sensory experience, he can eventually recount for us what it was like to awaken from the sensory coma he had had.

The kind of first perception described above is usually discussed among philosophers within the framework of infant perception. The first perception of an infant human is in a way similar, presumably, to the Radical Molyneux Case. The Radical Molyneux Case, however, has one advantage over the newly born infant case. It is known that a new born baby's vision and other sense organs are not as mature as those of an adult human. For instance, its retina may not be sufficiently developed for performing its function, for the size of a new born infant's eye is almost half the size of an adult's eye. Therefore, it seems more difficult to conceive what it would be like to perceive the world *through a new born infant's eyes*. In that sense, the Radical Molyneux Man can be seen like a *new born adult*. And its being an adult makes it more probable that he will have perceptual experiences more similar to ours. However, new born infants are real cases that can provide us with empirical data about first perception devoid of all concepts and interpretation. If we can understand what a new born infant is able to perceive, we can understand what basic perception with nonconceptual content would be like, and partially what kind of experiences the Radical Molyneux man will undergo. Therefore, I believe that studies about new born infants' perception can shed light on the Radical Molyneux Problem and to nonconceptual first perception.

In his *The Principles of Psychology*, William James states that babies' first perception is a "blooming, buzzing confusion," (James 1890: 462) and not anything like adults' perceptual experiences. Hence, conceptualism might argue against nonconceptualism by saying that infant perception, The Radical Molyneux man's perception or any other kind of nonconceptual perception posited by the nonconceptualist does not in fact count as genuine perception at all. It might be objected that an uncategorized mass of sensations cannot *represent* the world, and hence cannot have any cognitive relevance.

However, empirical studies show that new born infants are capable of seeing and hearing the world around them, despite the fact that their perceptions have less acuity than an adult human being's. For instance, it has been shown that new born babies' perception is not quite as James describes them; rather, babies are capable of discriminating between different stimuli and capable of visually representing the world as "a world composed of determinate and bounded individuals behaving in reasonably fixed and determinate manners." (Bermúdez 2000: 67) The developmental psychologist Robert L. Frantz noticed that newborn infants are capable of exhibiting preferences among stimuli. A new born infant may stare longer at one source of the stimuli than another –at patterned images rather than uniform ones presented side by side, for example. He, therefore, concluded that "visually inexperienced infants had at least a rudimentary capacity to detect and discriminate forms." (Banks and Ginsburg 1985: 208) Newborn infant visual ability is not restricted to merely visual discrimination. It is also claimed that newborn infants are capable of object individuation by spatiotemporal means. One research concludes that "if spatiotemporal discontinuity is detected, young infants establish representations of two numerically distinct objects." (Carey and Xu 2001: 185) That is to say, infants have a nonconceptual mechanism through which they can establish representations of single objects and distinct objects based upon the spatiotemporal information they receive from objects. So it can be said that young infants can "parse the visual array in a way that maps (more or less) the boundaries between objects even, though they have no conceptual grasp of what those objects are, or of what an object in general is." (Bermúdez 2003: 191) Moreover, it has also been shown that they are able to track objects (Pylyshyn 2007). It seems plausible to suppose that the Radical Molyneux Man will exhibit at least the same visual ability as a baby is able to exhibit. When his senses are first opened to the "layout of reality," he will immediately start getting information from them. Even though he will not be able to articulate what he perceives, and recognize it even as "something" or subsume it under any kind of concepts, he will nevertheless have a contentful experience of the world. His

experience might be more determinate than a baby's experience, and is obviously less determinate than a normal adult human being's. From the empirical findings about the fact that newborns can have contentful perceptual experience, we can also derive the conclusion that a man who gains all of his senses at ones will also have contentful experiences from the very first moment.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCEPTUAL PERCEPTION AND BASIC PERCEPTION

#### 5.1 Are Concepts Nevertheless Needed for Perception?

Although we have strong reasons to reject conceptualism, we cannot easily dismiss the fact that concepts have a fundamental role in determining our perceptual knowledge. This is why I believe that McDowell's core intuition behind his conceptualism should be respected to a certain extent. As will be apparent in this chapter, the claim that seeing an object as a tree requires conceptual capacities can be held, I believe, as correct when "seeing as" is understood in a specific way. We cannot simply neglect one of the most common uses of "perceiving" as the apprehension of the external world that requires the mastery of concepts one would have in having a belief about what one is perceiving. In asserting that one is seeing an object as a tree, for instance, we usually intend to mean that one understands, interprets and is able to report what he sees, and hence, possesses and deploys the concept "tree." This kind of perception is usually referred to as "epistemic" or "cognitive perception." (Dretske 1969)

However, as will be presented in this chapter and is held by many other philosophers, I do not believe that this conceptual use of perception is exhaustive. In other words, I think that a nonconceptual form of perception devoid of conceptual content should nevertheless be posited. Moreover, I believe that this form of perception is essential for any kind of perceptual experience. Perception with nonconceptual content is more basic and prior to any state that requires the mastery of concepts, and hence, does not require the subject's understanding or apprehension of what he perceives. Then, in its most basic form, perceiving a tree

does not require possession of the concept “tree.” This kind of perception can be referred to as “simple perception,” or “non-epistemic perception.”(Ibid.)

No one would deny that a person who possesses a specific concept about what is perceived and who does not possess it in similar viewing conditions will have experiences that represent the tree in similar ways, though one can account for this similarity in different ways. In his more recent article “Avoiding the Myth of the Given,” McDowell himself also appreciates the very same point. As he states:

Consider an experience had, in matching circumstances, by someone who cannot immediately identify what she sees as a cardinal. Perhaps she does not even have the concept of a cardinal. Her experience might be just like mine in how it makes the bird visually present to her. (2009: 259)

The content of the states of two people (one of whom possess the concept of a cardinal, the other does not) will share something in common independently of what they believe and of what they take the object to be. It seems undeniable that an expert and an inexperienced will perceive the same object in a similar way despite the huge difference in their conceptual repertoire, regardless of how they classify and identify the perceived objects. In order to account for the common feature of the perceptual experience whose subjects possess different concepts, it seems necessary to introduce a nonconceptual item, that is, nonconceptual content. However, it is equally arguable that what is common in both states is not nonconceptual content but rather the conceptual content that is determined by concepts that both people share in common (Crane 1992: 137, 138). For example, if both people have the concepts, say, “bird,” and “red” and some other basic concepts of shape and color, the contents of their experiences of a cardinal can be determined by those concepts. So, even though one of them lacks the concept ‘cardinal,’ they will have the common perceptual content determined by concepts they both possess. In the same article, McDowell revises his conceptualist position to a more moderate form where he restricts concepts that determine perceptual content to basic concepts of proper and common sensibles. For him, not all concepts about what is perceived have to be included in perceptual content. Conceptual capacities that are actualized in experience are merely

conceptual capacities that are associated with sensible properties such as shape, size, color, etc.(McDowell 2009: 260) So, conceptual content of a perceptual experience is not determined by concepts like “tree”, “bird”, “table” or “cardinal” but rather by concepts like “round”, “blue” or “cube,” etc.

A more moderate understanding of conceptual capacities involved in perception, however, though making it more plausible, does not make conceptualism immune to arguments given against it nor does it succeed in showing that at least some concepts are needed for contentful perception. It seems equally problematic to claim that perception requires one to possess the concept “round” or “red” instead of concepts like “tomato” even though “tomato” requires a more advanced conceptual repertoire. For, there is nothing counter-intuitive in claiming that one can perceive a red tomato without possessing the concept “red.” No matter how general and basic the concept needed for perception is supposed to be, it is still plausible to hold that perception would still be possible when this concept is absent. Consider the following analogy of looking at a text in front of us as endowed with different levels of conceptual capacities. We can see the words on the text in such a way that we can read it and understand what it says. In such a case we will undoubtedly say that we see the words on the text. If we do not know the language in which the text is written (but know the writing system), we can still see the text and also read words on it without knowing or understanding what the text is about. This is also a clear case of seeing. Similarly, we can just look at the text and see it without even understanding that the signs on it are words. This is the case, when a preschool child looks at the text. And finally, we can see it without even having any idea about the shapes of the signs. Accordingly, it seems perfectly conceivable that we can see the text without having any idea or conception at all about it. We have reason to suppose that in each case one perceives the text. Understanding the text is no more perception than reading it without understanding, and the latter is no more perception than simply looking at the text without having any idea of what it is. What differs in them is not their being perception, but rather their conceptuality or cognitive aspect.

One of the possible reactions against such reasoning is that there should be a stopping point to it: a point where the subject possesses a minimal conceptual capacity that is essential for his ability to perceive. It can be argued that we need to possess at least a concept like the concept of “object” or “thing” in order to be able to perceive the text. If the subject does not have the conceptual resource that enables him to recognize or identify what he perceives as “something”, then we cannot talk about a perceptual experience taking place. Perception at least requires the awareness and understanding that what we see is a thing, hence, the possession of the concept “thing”:

Even to see a particular as a *unique uncategorizable* something is to see it as something, even to see a man as ‘that man whom I can’t recognize’ is to bring him under a general concept of an unknown stranger currently in front of me, a negative demonstrative covering concept.( Chakrabarti 2004: 365)

This sounds as a reasonable reaction; however, it is debatable whether it succeeds in supporting conceptualism. The fact that we need to possess such a basic concept in order to perceive does not entail the truth of conceptualism that aims to give a conceptual account of every detail we perceive. Conceptualism does not only claim that one has to possess some concepts in order to have a contentful perceptual experience. It also states that one has to possess concepts, which according to conceptualism, *exhaustively* determine the content of one’s perceptual experience. If possessing and deploying the concept “thing” is sufficient to establish the truth of conceptualism, then it should also be sufficient to determine the contents of experiences with all their details. So, to claim that perceptual content is conceptual on the basis of the fact that we should at least possess the concept “object” or “thing” in order to experience an object amounts to the claim that these concepts determine the content of our experiences. However, such a condition of concept possession cannot account for the diversity of perceptual contents we have when we see different objects, for the concepts “thing” or “object” equally applies to almost every object we perceive. If possessing such a concept is sufficient to perceive objects, then the content of all experiences of different objects would have identical conceptual contents. We would then perceive everything as merely as a “thing.” Therefore, if we are to

account for the conceptuality, we should also be able to account for different contents dependent upon the perception of different objects. This cannot be done on the ground of a minimal conceptual repertoire, such as the possession of the concept “thing”. As Dretske also states, “if the concept one must have to be aware of something is a concept that applies to *everything* one can be aware of, what is the point of insisting that one must have it to be aware?” (1993: 269)

The fact that we do not need to possess the concept “cardinal” in order to perceive a cardinal seems apparent. However, given the above considerations and previous arguments against conceptualism, I believe that the same is true for more basic concepts such as “thing”. Perception can occur even in the absence of such concepts. So, concepts are not needed at all for perception, that is, conceptuality is not an essential aspect of perceptual experience. This, however, should not be understood as if concepts have no relation to our perceptual experiences. Perception and conceptualizations figure usually (but not necessarily) as inseparable elements of cognition. However, instead of interfusing conceptualization into perception, I propose to consider them as occurring at different levels of the cognitive process.

## **5.2 A Multi-Level Account of Perception**

The claim that perception has levels or stages (and correspondingly the term “perception” has different senses) is not a novel claim, not novel in philosophy and not novel in science. It has already been widely accepted that perception is not a simple state, but rather a complex process that involves different levels. Similarly, it is usually agreed upon that “perception” is an ambiguous term meaning different things in different contexts. For instance, visual perceptual process begins when light emitted from objects reaches the retina and ends at a level where the subject cognitively or conceptually apprehends the object. It is also claimed that perception also involves a more abstract level where the subject is said to perceive more abstract properties such as “sadness in a tone of voice.” (Chalmers, French and Hofstadter 1992: 195) The sense of “perception” one

intends to mean may vary according to the level he takes to be essential for perception. For instance, conceptualists claim that perception necessarily captures the conceptual extension as well, while nonconceptualists hold that the conceptual level is not essential for perception.<sup>27</sup>

For instance, the Cognitive Scientist Zenon Pylyshyn characterizes visual perception as a process that involves two main stages and posits an early stage of vision where there is representation without concepts. For him, even though perception as a whole is cognitively penetrable, early vision is not. The visual process also embodies a stage named “late vision” which is conceptual (Pylyshyn 1998).

Long ago Kant, from whom McDowell admittedly derived his conceptualism, has developed the idea that perception can be divided into sensibility and understanding. Sensibility was seen by Kant as the capacity to receive effects from objects, that is, as the faculty through which objects are passively perceived. Understanding, on the other hand, was seen as the faculty through which we synthesis what we get through sensibility by using concepts of understanding. However, as we have seen in the second chapter, whether the Kantian theory of perception is conceptualist or not is a debatable subject. For, it is not certain whether Kant takes intuitions to be representational and cognitively relevant, shortly, as genuine perception. Moreover, G.J. Warnock (1965), and Fred Dretske (1969) have developed philosophical theories of perception where perception is divided into two main levels or senses one of which consists of a more basic kind of perception that does not require any conceptual endowment, and the other a cognitive engagement with the world that requires conceptual capacities. In this section, I also attempt to provide a similar account of perception, in order to show how perception with representational content can be nonconceptual. My account will mainly rely on Dretske’s characterization of perception, though it will differ

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<sup>27</sup> Although the term “perception” refers to all kinds perception through other senses as well, the focus of this chapter is visual perception. However, the arguments presented can also apply to other kinds of sense perception.

from it in some relevant respects. Though I agree with Dretske about his notion of simple perception to a great extent, I believe that his distinction between nonepistemic and epistemic perception on the basis of object vs. fact perception (or “perceiving” vs. “perceiving that”) leaves a big chasm between basic perception and conceptual perception. Instead of Dretske’s distinction, I propose a different distinction that includes a kind of conceptual perception that is cognitively less demanding than Dretske’s notion of epistemic perception. I argue against conceptualism by showing that basic perception which is an essential prerequisite for any kind of conceptual perception is nonconceptual but nevertheless representational and epistemologically relevant. I will try to establish the cognitive relevancy of basic perception on the basis of its relation to conceptual perception of objects and perceptual beliefs. Therefore, contrary to Dretske and some other philosophers, I avoid referring to basic perception as “non-epistemic” and I prefer to refer to perception with conceptual content perception as “conceptual perception” or “doxastic perception” rather than “cognitive perception” or “epistemic perception” in order not to disregard the cognitive and epistemic contribution of basic perception.

### **5.2.1 Basic Perception: A Sense of Perceiving Devoid of Conceptualization**

We can define basic perception, as the perceptual level that does not require the mastery of concepts and that is prior to any perceptual and cognitive level that is conceptual. Therefore, experiencing a case of basic perception does not depend on the subjects’ conceptual repertoire, and does not require the conceptualization of what is perceived, even though as a matter of fact we possess those concepts and usually conceptualize what we see. So, it is a kind of perception that does not “involve the acquired abilities to identify, recognize, name, describe and so on.” (Warnock 1965: 65) It is merely a perceptual state of seeing objects *tout court*. Basic visual perception, as I see it, corresponds approximately to the notion of “early vision” posited by cognitive scientists. Therefore, in order to achieve a complete understanding of basic perception, I think appealing to some illustrations provided by cognitive sciences would be appropriate.

One of the clearest characterizations of basic perception is provided by Dretske in his *Seeing and Knowing* as “a way of seeing which is logically independent of whatever beliefs we may possess.” (1969: 17) For him, “seeing a bug in this fundamental way is like stepping on a bug; neither performance involves, in any essential respect, a particular belief or set of beliefs on the part of the agent.” (Ibid.: 6) Similarly, Warnock also distinguishes a sense of perceiving that is radically distinct from apprehending and judging. Here is his useful illustration of what basic visual perception may come to mean:

Suppose that I was an infant in arms. Even so, so long as there is reason to hold that I did, as we might say, “set eyes on” the man who was in fact Lloyd George, then there is reason to say that I saw him, even though I then neither made, nor could have made any judgment at all, either right or wrong, about who or what it was that I saw. (Warnock 1965: 52)

As we have already said, merely positing a level of perception that is devoid of conceptual content will not serve our purpose unless it is shown that it is a genuine case of perception. What can basic perception do, what kind of information does it provide? What is its contribution to cognition? If basic perception is not a confused mass of sensation what does it represent? These are some preliminary questions that should be elucidated if we want to make sense of basic perception as epistemically relevant.

Basic perception is not a “blooming, buzzing confusion” as James calls the infant’s perception of the world. It rather provides a well ordered presentation of the environment populated with objects with boundaries. When someone basically perceives, say, a plane tree, the tree is presented to one as being a certain way independently of any concepts such as “tree,” “plane,” “green” etc. Therefore, basic perception should be clearly distinguished from what we may call “perceiving as” and “perceiving that.” Basic perception of a plane tree is not equivalent to perceiving the tree *as* a plane tree, nor is it to perceiving it *as* a big plant, for this kind of perception (perceiving as) is conceptual. It involves conceptualization. Similarly, when I basically perceive a plane tree, I do not perceive *that* what I perceive is a plane tree either. For, again, perceiving *that*

something is the case also requires the exercise of conceptual capacities.<sup>28</sup> But nevertheless the tree is presented to me through the sensible properties it has. It is presented as having a specific shape, location and color. Basic perception is, therefore, the perception of *objects* via the *way they seem to us*. While enjoying a basic perceptual experience, I simply perceive the plane tree, the tree or the green plant whatever you may call it, and I do nothing more.<sup>29</sup>

Characterizing basic perception as nonconceptual but nevertheless representational can be seen as problematic and objected through the following reasoning: If basic perception has representational content, then a subject who experiences a case of basic perception, sees the environment as being in a certain way. This, in turn, implies that the subject is actually having a kind of perception that can be characterized as “perceiving *a*” and which ultimately depends upon the conceptual repertoire of the subject. Vesey, for instance, was one of the thinkers who claimed that “all seeing is seeing as.” (1965: 72) Therefore, one cannot treat “perceiving” separately from “perceiving as”. This is a very important point that should be clarified. As Dretske also points out, the problem can be resolved if we can establish what one means by “seeing-as.” As will be seen in the next section, I do endorse the view that there is a kind of perception in the form “perceiving *as*” that involves the exercise of conceptual capacities. But I reject that perceiving (basic perception) objects as being in a certain way can always be equated with perceiving *as* (involving conceptualization, identification or recognition of the object). For, being presented with objects does not entail the recognition or identification of the object nor the way the object is represented. When describing or articulating the nonconceptual content of perception we naturally use the word “as”, just like we use many other words and concepts. For instance, we may say “We perceive the plane tree as having a certain shape and color.” However, the fact that we refer to the representational content in this way

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<sup>28</sup> Perceiving *that* corresponds to Dretske’s notion of “fact perception” or “epistemic seeing.”

<sup>29</sup> The fact that we can use which ever term or concept to refer to the content of basic perception illustrates why the content of basic perception is nonconceptual. Dretske names this, “the principle of substitutivity”. According to this principle, if *S* nonepistemically sees, say, a teapot, then *S* sees a rare antique if the teapot is a rare antique. For more see, Dretske (1969), pp. 54-61.

does not make the referent (the nonconceptual content) conceptual. On the other hand, as will be clear in the next section, “perceiving as” already involves characterization or interpretation on the part of the perceiver. If we perceive a plane tree *as* green in this second sense, we are already conceptualizing what we perceive, that is our conceptual capacities are already operative in this perceptual state. So, for the sake of clarity we may distinguish two uses of the word “as.” In the former, we use the word to describe the content of a nonconceptual basic perception. In such a case, “seeing as” merely means that an object is represented in a certain way to the subject. The content need not be identified, classified or conceptualized by the subject of the experience at the moment of the experience, though it may be identified by a third person or by that subject at a different time. For instance, when I say “The young infant experiences objects as enduring in time”, it is not the young infant that makes this articulation. Therefore, the infant need not conceptualize what he sees as “an object that endures in time”. In the latter, the word “as” functions as the signification that the subject of an experience is already conceptualizing what he perceives at the moment of the experience. Even though a third person can also articulate the content of another person’s experience, the content of a perceptual experience cannot be conceptual unless it is already conceptualized by the subject having the experience. When, for instance, we say, “*S* is perceiving an object as a triangle” in the second use of “as,” what we mean is that *S*’s perceptual experience already involves *S*’s conceptualization of the object as triangular, hence, the concept “triangle.”

Perceiving objects basically should not be equated with cases like “looking but not seeing” either. So, merely “setting eyes on” something may not always be a case of basic perception. For, basic perception is not such an empty or insignificant notion. An object’s presence in our visual field is not a sufficient condition for its being perceived. Though it can be inattentive, basic perception should nevertheless permit a flow of information (or sometimes misinformation) from the object perceived to the perceiving subject. In other words, it should render a subject conscious of an object, an event or a property. This is where

*basically* perceiving a bug differs from unknowingly stepping on a bug. In both cases there is a causal link between the bug and the subject but only in the former case a presentation of the bug reaches the consciousness of the subject. That is, seeing a bug is intentional, it has content whereas stepping on a bug does not. Stepping on a bug, as far as you are not aware that you are stepping on it, has no effect on your future beliefs, whereas seeing a bug (even though it does not itself involve beliefs) may be the ultimate ground for some of your perceptual beliefs about the bug.

One of the most important requirements posited by philosophers is the “differentiating requirement”. According to it, in order to experience a case of basic perception of an object, the object should be “visually differentiated from its immediate environment” (Dretske 1969: 20) by the perceiver. In other words, the object should look “different than its immediate environment.” (Ibid.: 20):

Suppose that we attach a piece of beige paper to a beige wall and dim the lights until the paper appears (from where we are standing) as an undistinguished part of the wall. Does one, under these circumstances, still *see* the piece of paper? (Ibid.: 23)

According to Dretske, the answer is no. So even though we still visually perceive a uniformly beige surface, we cannot be said to perceive the piece of paper on the wall. We certainly do perceive something, and there is a sense that we perceive the beige paper as being presented undifferentiated from its surroundings. However, according to Dretske, this is not a genuine case of non-epistemic seeing unless the object is presented as a differentiated part.

The differentiating requirement (whether it should be satisfied or not) reveals an important function of basic perception: the process of distinguishing objects from their background and from other objects, that is to say, parsing the visual scene into objects (Pylyshyn 2007: 31). This process referred to as “object segmentation” (Raftopoulos 2009: 13) is an important process because it illustrates the epistemological relevance of basic perception by providing an understanding of how objects are presented in perception nonconceptually, and

what kind of information it provides. So, basic perception has the function of individuating objects, in a sense, nonconceptually. For instance, Zenon Pylyshyn, who isolates early vision from any conceptual processing holds, contrary to most philosophers, that individuating and re-identifying objects do not necessarily involve the exercise of conceptual capacities. There is a more primitive form of individuation of objects in our visual field that renders conceptual processing possible. He thinks “Conceptual identification ultimately requires a nonconceptual basis.” (Pylyshyn 2007: 32) Pylyshyn argues for the nonconceptual function of individuation of objects on the basis of *tracking* of individual objects. Early vision provides us a nonconceptual mechanism through which we are able to “maintain the identity of tracked objects as enduring individuals.” (Ibid.: 53) That is to say, it enables us to perceive things as objects that are spatio-temporally continuous despite the changes they undergo. As also mentioned in Chapter 4, one of the most important pieces of evidence for object individuation in early vision is the study that shows that young infants are able to infer the existence of an object that is hidden behind a screen (Carey and Xu 2001). For instance, if young infants see a toy being hidden behind a screen, they become surprised if the toy is not there when the screen is removed. However, the infant case does not entail that basic perception is peculiar to preconceptual infants. Rather, basic perception or early vision is a perceptual phase or step that is included in all visual perceptual processes. Therefore, not only infants but also adults retrieve spatio-temporal information during early vision that does not involve conceptual capacities (Raftopoulos and Müller 2008: 198). So, basic perception is not merely setting our eyes on objects, it also enables us to discriminate objects from others, to follow them and to recognize their identity through time. Even though at the level of early vision we do not identify objects as falling under certain descriptions or concepts, we nevertheless experience them as being in a certain way. The early stage of early vision, therefore, has representational content that is nonconceptual.

Basic perception understood as such does not only convey spatio-temporal information to the subject. While this kind of information is claimed to be

temporally prior in visual processing, other sensible or observable properties of objects are also nonconceptually presented to the subject. By sensible properties, I mean properties like shape, size, motion, color etc. Basically perceiving an object then, involves the awareness of its sensible properties as well. For, as Raftopoulos states:

Visual processes that process information about surface shading, orientation, color, binocular stereopsis, size, shape, spatial relations, and analysis of movement are referred to as “early vision.” The stages of early vision purportedly capture information that is extractable directly from the initial optical array without recourse to higher-level knowledge. (2009: 172)

So, when we have a basic perception of an object, say, a plane tree, the tree is presented to us as having the color of certain shades of green and brown, a specific shape and a specific texture. We experience the tree in a quite determinate way. None of these presented properties requires that we possess and employ the concepts that describe the color or the shape of the tree. We experience the tree to be in a specific way, *the way in which it appears to us*, independently from the concepts that are associated with the characterization of this way. Contrary to most thinkers, especially cognitive scientists, who take the early vision and its content to be purely sub-personal level phenomena, that is to say, merely as a kind of physiological process that one cannot be aware of, I believe that the content of basic perception occurs at the personal level. When a subject basically perceives his environment he becomes aware of the way the world is manifested to him. That is to say, the content is available to the subject's awareness. The kind of awareness in question should, certainly, not be understood as the recognition of what is perceived, for I do not deny that recognition requires conceptual capacity. However, the presentation of an object through its sensible properties is nevertheless presented to a *subject*. In other words, the experience of basic perception does not merely process information sub-personally; it conveys this information to a level in which the subject has awareness of what he perceives. So, the radical Molyneux man or the new-born infant is in a sense aware of the environment that he basically perceives. And

once he acquires conceptual abilities, he is then able to use the content of his basic perceptions to form empirical beliefs.

Our characterization of basic perception implies that we can perceive objects without having any belief, any idea about it, without recognizing or identifying what it is. The Radical Molyneux case and pre-conceptual infant perception constitute a fundamental illustration of how in the absence of any conceptual capacities that render identification or recognition of what is perceived possible, perception can nevertheless occur. Now I want to mention medical conditions called “visual agnosias” that will help us further to understand how perception is layered and make it clear how nonconceptual perception may be experienced even by a subject who is endowed with concepts that are needed in characterizing the content of the experience. The first type of that condition known as “apperceptive agnosia” is a visual deficit concerning object perception and that takes place at the early perceptual processing. Patients of apperceptive agnosia are unable to recognize objects due to a deficit that prevents them to form a complete representation of the stimuli, rather than a recognitional deficit. (Baugh, Desanghere and Marotta 2010). The second one is “associative agnosia” which is known as a visual disorder in which patients are unable to recognize what they perceive. In associative agnosia the deficit is a cognitive one, for the earlier level of perceptual processing remains intact. The patients of apperceptive agnosia can form complete visual representation of objects but are unable to identify what they perceive (Ibid.). In other words, compared to apperceptive agnosia, associative agnosia is a “higher-level deficit reflecting the failure to assign meaning to an object despite the derivation of an intact percept.” (Behrmann 2003: 301) As Bermudez also states, this kinds of disorders indicate that perception is a layered process. They show that there are at least two levels of perception: cognitive and noncognitive. Here is how Bermudez interprets the difference between apperceptive agnosia and associative agnosia:

The existing classifications can usefully be supplemented by thinking about the functional differences revealed by the visual agnosias in terms of the distinction between nonconceptual and conceptual content. The grouping operations impaired in the apperceptive agnosias and preserved in the

associative agnosias produce representations of the world at the level of nonconceptual content. The grouping operations parse the visual array into spatially extended and bounded individuals that stand in spatial relations to each other, and that, of course, is how the world seems to be represented in the instances of infant perception that were taken as paradigm examples of nonconceptual content. The visual world of the infant and the visual world of the associative agnostic can be understood in terms of each other. (Bermúdez 2000: 81)

Associative agnosia seems to be crucial for our discussion against conceptualism because through providing a case of “perception stripped of meaning” (Behrmann 2003: 301) it gives us a chance to concretely conceive what it would be like for a subject to have a perceptual experience devoid of conceptual content, despite the fact that he possesses all relevant conceptual capacities that would, in normal circumstances, lead him to conceptualize what he perceives. If it is empirically possible to perceive an object without being able to recognize or conceptualize it through concepts that are already possessed, then, I believe, we have strong reason to posit a genuine case of perception that does not involve conceptual content.

### **5.2.2 Conceptual Perception or Doxastic Perception: A Sense of Perceiving Endowed with Concepts**

So far we have seen that there is a level of perception that does not require mastery and exercise of concepts but which represents objects nevertheless. Dretske characterizes it as non-epistemic perception or perception of objects because it does not yield knowledge and it is a state through which we become aware of objects. I, on the other hand, choose to refer to it as “basic perception” in order to emphasize that it is essential to any kind of perception and not to ignore the epistemic relevancy it has. However, as stated previously, even though basic perception, as its name signifies, is the most basic form of perceptual experience, it would be a mistake to suppose that it can account for every type or level of perception. The fact that our conceptual capacities are usually, if not always, operative each time we have a perceptual experience, though does not entail that perception is already conceptual through and through, calls for a kind

of perceptual state that, besides a purely perceptual component, involves conceptualization and belief as well. Actually, it is undeniable that we usually use the term “perceiving” as a process that involves conceptualization. When we are thinking about others’ experiences we are subtly assuming that they understand or conceptually grasp what they see. Dretske characterizes this kind of perception as “epistemic” or “meaningful perception” through which we become aware of facts and which requires the mastery of concepts that describe that fact. Although my notion of basic perception corresponds to Dretske’s “non-epistemic perception,” my understanding of “conceptual” or “doxastic perception” differs from his “meaningful perception” substantially. As can be seen from the terms I choose to refer to perceptual experiences that involve conceptualization, I believe the essential criterion necessary for conceptual perception is merely its *conceptuality*, which brings along a belief. Whereas Dretske’s notion of epistemic perception requires not only conceptuality but also the *knowledge* of what is perceived. Conceptual perception in that respect is less demanding than epistemic perception and more demanding than basic perception. It involves an implicit belief about what is perceived but does not have to yield knowledge hence leaves room for non-veridicality and misidentification. But before presenting my account of conceptual perception it would be useful to briefly present Dretske’s notion of epistemic perception.

According to Dretske, epistemic or meaningful perception is “perception that embodies a judgment or belief, some degree of recognition or identification of what one is perceiving.” (1995a: 331) Therefore, contrary to non-epistemic perception, meaningful perception requires possession and exercise of conceptual abilities. Dretske notes that through epistemic perception we are perceiving *facts*, where he defines a fact as “what we express in making true statements about things.” (1993: 264) So, epistemic perception, according to Dretske, is a kind of “perceiving that.” Just like one can simply see a black cat on the sofa, it is also possible to see *that* the object on the sofa is a black cat. Given that epistemic perception of a black cat on the sofa requires a fact, then the statement “the object on the sofa is a black cat” needs to be true. In other words, *S* sees that *b* is *P in an*

*epistemic way* only if *b* is *P*. Dretske wants us to consider a small child who is looking at the sofa where there is a black cat but misidentifies what she sees as a black sweater. According to Dretske, this child undoubtedly sees an object (a black cat). However, it would be wrong to claim that she sees *that* there is a black cat on the sofa, for she does not realize that what she perceives is a cat. Moreover, we cannot say that she sees *that* there is a sweater on the sofa either, for this does not correspond to a fact. Therefore, the child does not experience a case of epistemic perception. Under the light of these explanations, it is clear that epistemic perception, for Dretske, does not only involve belief but also includes knowledge about the object perceived. It is “a-coming-to-know by visual means.” (Dretske 1995a: 332) Therefore, epistemic perception cannot occur if the belief involved in it is false.

I believe that if we are to provide a notion of perception that requires conceptual capacities, Dretske’s characterization of epistemic perception is too demanding. First of all, a mental state’s being conceptual does not entail its being knowledge-involving. Therefore, having a kind of perception that involves conceptualization does not have to be equated with fact perception. For, a skeptic who holds that knowledge is never attainable can nevertheless employ an understanding of perception that is conceptual. Consider Dretske’s own example stated above. Even though it is true that the child does not see that there is a cat on the sofa, isn’t it also true that she conceptualizes what she sees by making use of the concept “sweater” and consequently takes to object in question to be a sweater? So, it seems that knowledge is not a necessary condition for having concepts involved in perception. Dretske’s move from “perceiving” to “perceiving that” is a big jump that needs an intermediary point. This intermediary point is what I call “conceptual” or “doxastic” perception through which we see objects to be in a certain way. So, “conceptual perception” or “doxastic perception”, instead of a propositional form, takes the form “perceiving as” or “perceiving to be”. Actually, Dretske does not ignore that there is a kind of “perceiving-as” in between his notions of non-epistemic perception and meaningful perception. In

his article “Meaningful Perception” Dretske characterizes “perceiving objects as a so-and-so” as hybrid perception. As he states :

Like meaningful perception it requires a fairly specific cognitive or judgmental attitude or tendency on the part of the perceiver: the object is classified or identified in some way. Unlike meaningful perception, however, this judgment or belief need not qualify as knowledge or recognition. The judgmental outcome of the perception need not be veridical. (Ibid.: 335)

This, I believe, is a correct characterization. Therefore, it would be unfair to criticize Dretske for not considering perceiving-as at all. However, I believe that perceiving an object as a so-and-so is more basic and fundamental compared to perceiving that something is the case. Every *perceiving-that* requires *perceiving-as*. That is to say, it is not possible to see that there is a black cat on the sofa without seeing the perceived object as a black cat. Therefore, instead of defining perceiving-as as hybrid, it will be more appropriate to define it as genuinely conceptual perception and define meaningful perception (which yields knowledge) as deriving from perceiving-as.<sup>30</sup> In that sense, Dretske’s twofold distinction between non-epistemic perception of objects and epistemic perception of facts seems to be insufficient to account for all levels of perception. As we have already seen, the central debate between conceptualism and nonconceptualism about perceptual content turns around whether a subject has to possess and exercise the relevant concepts in order to be in a contentful perceptual state. So, the content of perceiving-as counts as conceptual content, since in order to perceive an object as a cat, it is necessary that the subject deploys the concept “cat”. When it is considered within the framework of the conceptualist-nonconceptualist debate it seems to me more plausible to give weight to perceiving-as, because whether a perceptual experience conveys knowledge or not is irrelevant with respect to its having conceptual content.

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<sup>30</sup> I believe that whether conceptual perception is perception of fact and yields knowledge or not is based upon further conditions that the belief involved in perception should satisfy in order to count as “knowledge.” Whereas conceptual perception does not even presuppose the truth of the belief that is involved in it. So, expecting meaningful perception to satisfy these conditions seems to be too demanding.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding concerning the word “as”, I need first of all to clarify what is meant by “perceiving-as” within this context. The word “as” that is used to qualify an experience has so many uses. Accordingly, the phrase “perceiving as” can mean a variety of things. Therefore it is vital to ensure that a clear understanding of doxastic perception is clearly provided. Recall that in the previous part, perceiving-as is construed as merely meaning that things look in a certain way or are presented in a certain way to the perceiver, since we have seen that things’ being perceptually presented does not require the exercise of concepts. So, it should first of all be well established that ‘perceiving-as’ that I equate with conceptual perception signifies a conceptual achievement of the perceiver. This conceptual achievement however, needs to be further distinguished from another common use of “as”: the kind of cognitive act of likening an object to something else. “Perceiving-as” does not necessarily require “a special skill or interpretive act.” (Prinz 2006: 436) For instance, it should not be equated with cases like perceiving a cloud *as* a dinosaur. Although this kind of perceptual act does involve conceptual perception, it is not necessary for conceptual perception to be interpretive to this extent. So, “perceiving-as” as I take it, corresponds to a perceptual state that may involve more basic conceptual activities, for instance perceiving a black cat as a black cat, or as an animal or as a black fluffy object depending on the conceptual repertoire and the cognitive background the subject has.

Another important point which is open to misunderstanding is about how odd it sounds, in usual discourse, to say *I see something as a cat* instead of simply saying “I see a cat.” Why is it that we usually find it more convenient to say *I see a cat* but not *I see something as a cat* when perceptually experiencing and identifying a cat? In both cases the object is presented and is experienced as a “cat”, therefore, both cases are instances of conceptual perception. This confusion arises from the fact that the word “as” is usually considered as implying “looking other way than it actually is.” So, in the assertion *I see something as a cat*, “as” is used to accentuate that the subject is suspecting that the object he sees is not

actually a cat but only looks like a cat. For instance, Sellars makes a similar claim about the way an object *looks* to a subject. As he states:

... when I say "X looks green to me"...the fact that I make this report rather than the simple report "X is green," indicates that certain considerations have operated to raise, so to speak in a higher court, the question 'to endorse or not to endorse.' I may have reason to think that X may not after all be green. (1997: 41)

Similarly, in his article, Vesey (1965) states that people usually say, "it looks like a torpedo" instead of saying that "it is a torpedo" when they "have reason to believe that the object may not really be what it looks like." (68, 69) The case is similar in the case of perceiving-as. It is undeniable that in usual discourse we rarely say that we see objects "as a so and so", for we do not usually consider the fact that they can be different than they seem, hence do not find it necessary to use the word "as". However, as Vesey also indicates whether we say "I see a cat" or "I see something *as* a cat", we are actually in both cases seeing the object in question *as* a cat. So, conceptual perception, as I characterize it, involves perceiving-as and perceiving-as does not necessarily imply any belief concerning the veridicality of the experience. The word "as" in conceptual perception is meant to signify merely the way a subject conceptualizes what she perceives and not our suspicion about the veridicality of our experience.

So, "*S* perceives *x* as *y*" may come to mean at least four things:

1. *x* appears to *S* as *y* (as in the case of basic perception)
2. *S* likens *x* to *y* (as in likening a cloud to a dinosaur)
3. *S* has reason to believe that *x* is not actually *y* even though it appears so.
4. *x* appears to *S* as *y*, and *S* takes *x* to be *y*.

The notion of conceptual perception that I propose is the ordinary way of perceiving the world around us which is number 4. It neither requires any belief about the veridicality of our experience, nor any imaginative talent. Conceptual or doxastic perception is merely a matter of taking things to be so-and-so through visual, tactual, auditorial etc. means. Therefore, for the sake of distinguishing this kind of perception from other kinds of “perceiving-as” and of avoiding any misunderstanding in the following parts of my dissertation, I will use the expression “perceiving-to-be” as in “perceiving a thing to be a cat” instead of “perceiving as.” My reason for employing this term rather than “perceiving-as” is merely pragmatic and terminological. It only aims to ensure that the kind of conceptual perception in question is not confused with other use of “perceiving-as.”

Conceptual perception or doxastic perception can be then roughly explained as the level of perception at which a subject perceives an object *to be* so-and-so (perceives an object as a so-and so), that is to say, sees an object to be belonging to a certain type, falling under a certain concept or satisfying a certain description. For instance, conceptually perceiving an object to be a black cat amounts to seeing it as instantiating the concepts ‘black’ and ‘cat’. This kind of perception corresponds approximately to the cognitive scientists’s notion of late vision that is defined as the stage of visual processing that is conceptually modulated. Given that one cannot see an object to be falling under a concept, without possessing that concept, then conceptual perception certainly has conceptual content. You cannot see an object to be a cat in the relevant sense, if you do not have the concept “cat”. Conceptual perception is the ordinary way of seeing objects around us. As we have already seen, the occurrence of basic perception without the company of conceptualization is indeed very rare. In everyday life, as we are already endowed with large conceptual repertoires, background beliefs and expectations, we generally see objects as falling under a certain concept, category or description, that is, we readily identify, conceptualize or categorize what we get from basic perception. Along this characterization we can conclude that conceptual perception requires at least two things: a purely

perceptual component, i.e. basic perception and a doxastic state, i.e. a basic perceptual belief.

Basic perception of a given object is a prerequisite for conceptual perception of the same object. One cannot perceive a particular object to be a cat, without basically perceiving the object itself. Dretske endorses this requirement only for *primary epistemic seeing*, which he defines as “the cases where we see that *b* is *P* by seeing *b* itself.” (1969: 79) For instance, seeing that the cat is on the sofa through seeing the cat itself is primary epistemic seeing. Dretske goes on to posit another kind of epistemic seeing: *secondary epistemic seeing*, which he defines as “the cases where we see that *b* is *P* without seeing *b*.” (Ibid.: 80) For instance, one can see in this relevant sense that his cigarette lighter is low on fluid by observing the flame or one can see that the president is ill by looking at the newspaper (Ibid.: 79, 153). My notion of conceptual perception despite the difference in its epistemic requirement is more similar to Dretske’s primary epistemic seeing. I think that seeing the president *to be* ill from the newspaper without seeing the president himself will not count as a genuine case of conceptual perception of the president, but merely a case of perception of the newspaper. I, therefore, think that secondary epistemic seeing or conceptual perception of an object without perceiving the object itself should not be considered as literally a case of perception of that object but only a figurative use of “perception.”

All cases of conceptual perception involve a basic perceptual belief about the object being perceived that is constituted by concepts that are deployed in conceptual perception. In other words, perceiving things *to be* a certain way requires the basic perceptual belief that they are in that way. I take perceptual beliefs as beliefs that “are about manifest observable properties of objects in the world.” (Pryor 2000: 539) acquired through perception. So, conceptual perception involves a perceptual belief about observables properties of objects that are basically perceived: perceiving an object to be red requires that the subject believes that the object in question is red.

Conceptual perception embodies a perceptual belief due the fact that it involves concept application. For, I believe that *concept application* is the same thing as *perceptual belief acquisition*. More specifically, applying a perceptual concept to an object being perceived, say, applying the concept “red” to an apple, is the same mental activity as acquiring or forming a basic perceptual belief about the object in question, the perceptual belief that the object is red. Concept application is the act of subsuming an object under a concept, category or description. So, conceptual perception involves at least the perceptual belief that the object perceived is an instance of or falls under a particular perceptual concept, category or description. For how is it possible to take an object to be belonging to a concept, without believing that it falls under that concept. This is in high contrast with McDowellian understanding of the passive conceptuality of perception. As mentioned in Chapter 3, McDowell construes perception as conceptual but nevertheless non-doxastic, i.e. as not involving belief. According to him, perception justifies belief but it is not itself a belief or inclination to believe. However, I believe that the idea of being conceptual without being doxastic is implausible. Perceiving something to be so-and-so requires that the subject’s has at least an opinion, an idea about or a claim on what he perceives. In short conceptual perception can be seen as “a coming-to-believe through perceptual means” or as *taking things to be* certain way through perceptual means.

The perceptual belief involved in conceptual perception need not be understood as an explicit judgment of the subject. Most of the time, we do not transform our perceptual beliefs into explicit judgments about objects. Nor it is necessary that the belief is always acquired through an active process of inference or reflection. In normal circumstances, when I conceptually perceive an object I do not form my perceptual belief on considerations about whether my experience is say, illusory or not (unless I have reason to think that it *is* illusory). I do not usually engage in reasoning such as “my sight and mental life is normal, there is no reason I hallucinate or have illusory experiences, and therefore what I perceive is a cat.” I instantly hold the belief that it’s a cat. Almost every time I perceive

things I also have beliefs about them. If we take our experiences at face value (most of the time we do), then through conceptualization we acquire the belief that the object we perceive is the way we perceive it. We can define this initial belief roughly as the belief that is acquired through the conceptualization of what we see: the belief that something is a so-and-so, or that it falls under a certain concept.

What about non-veridical experiences that constitute major counter examples against the view that perception is belief or disposition to believe (belief theories of perception)<sup>31</sup>, or cases where the subject has reasons to believe that his experience is non-veridical? Do they also constitute challenge against my construction of conceptual perception as involving belief? In most cases our perception of objects involves the belief that what we perceive is the way it appears to us, but what if we have the contradictory belief that it is not? I believe that our positing a type of perception that is devoid of perceptual belief (basic perception) already ensures without any problem that perception can remain the same even though the belief about it changes. In order to see how conceptual perception can do justice to non-veridical perceptions, let us consider the famous Müller-Lyer illusion. Imagine someone who looks at the lines and sees them as two lines of different lengths. Suppose further that the subject in question does not know that he is experiencing an illusion and that the lines are actually of the same length. The way we conceptualize what we perceive, and hence the conceptual content of our conceptual perceptions is determined by the concepts. So, having no reason to suspect that lines are in fact equal: our subject will conceptualize what he sees as “two lines with different lengths.” That is, he will have a conceptual perception of two lines with different lengths, that is to say, he will perceive and accordingly take the lines to be of different lengths. Given that undergoing a conceptual perception involves a perceptual belief about the object perceived, the subject’s conceptual perception will involve the (false) belief that the lines are of equal length.

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<sup>31</sup> See, David Armstrong, *Perception and the Physical World*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961) and Georje Pitcher, *A Theory of Perception*, (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1971).

Suppose now that the subject is informed about the illusion. Through measuring the length of the lines he realizes that the lines appear to him in a different way than they actually are. Nevertheless the subject goes on to perceive the lines in the same way: the lines look or appear to him as if they have different lengths. So, can we say that the subject goes on to conceptually perceive (perceive-as) the lines in different length, or will his conceptual perception differ after he finds out that the lines are of equal lengths? If we say that the subject goes on to conceptually perceive the lines in the same way, we will be trapped in the classical problem attributed to belief theory of perception. Recall that conceptual perception involves a belief that the object falls under the concept used in the conceptualization of the object. Therefore, a subject who goes on to conceptually perceive the lines as of different length will have two contradictory beliefs: the belief that the lines are of equal length and the belief that they are not. So, we need to conclude that if the subject believes that what he perceives is different than it appears, his conceptual perception of the object will be different from the conceptual perception he would have in the absence of such a belief. Even though the subject will go on *basically* perceiving the lines in the same way (as one line longer than the other), his conception of what he perceives will change on the basis of the belief he acquired.

If conceptual perception requires that the subject takes the object in question to be in a certain way, he cannot go on to conceptually perceive the lines to be of different lengths, since he does not take them to be so anymore. That is, his basic perception does not give rise to the belief that the lines are of different lengths. But is not still correct that the subject in a sense still perceives the lines *as* being different lengths in a conceptual way? Yes, it is. But not in the sense of “perceiving-to-be”. The ‘as’ here signifies that the subject basically perceive the lines in a certain way, but has reason to suspect that they are not as they appear (as in number 3). Being aware of the difference between appearance and reality, the subject now holds the belief that the lines *appear* as having different length not the belief that they actually have different length. So, the fact that conceptual perception is not immune to counter evidence and can be altered accordingly

(contrary to basic perception), does not allow any difficulties posed by non-veridical experiences.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The rationale for presenting two kinds of perception; basic perception and conceptual or doxastic perception, is to establish a nonconceptualist account of perceptual content that can cope with problems attributed to nonconceptualism. Let us first recall the main claims of conceptualism and nonconceptualism shortly. Conceptualism is the view that the content of all perceptual experiences are conceptual though and through, therefore in order to be in a contentful perceptual state the subject of the experience needs to possess all concepts that would provide a complete characterization of the content. According to nonconceptualism, on the other hand, the subject need not possess at least some of the concepts that would provide a complete characterization of the content. By positing basic perception, I tried to show that certain phases of perception do not essentially involve any kind of conceptual capacities but may nevertheless be contentful. An object can be basically perceived, and this perception may represent the object in a quite determinate way without the need of any cognitive or conceptual activity. However, it is undeniable that concepts play an important role in how we see, interpret or make sense of the world around us. It is further true that, in ordinary life we usually perceive objects as fitting into certain descriptions or concepts. Therefore, I find it vital not to ignore the most common use of the notion “perception”, as conceptualizing, identifying or recognizing the external world. The conceptual content of conceptual perception is determined by the concepts deployed in conceptualization, and is therefore dependent upon the conceptual background of the perceiver as well as his other cognitive states. This is why, what accounts for the diversity of the way people experience the world *to be* fundamentally depends upon the cognitive capabilities of the subject.

We have seen that conceptual perception involves an implicit perceptual belief about the object being perceived; in that sense it involves a conceptual

achievement. Therefore, I believe that it would be better if we characterize conceptual perception not as a pure case of perception, or as totally different sort of perception that is wholly conceptual. Certainly, it is not a pure case of belief either. It is rather a hybrid state that has both purely perceptual and cognitive components. It includes both basic perception and the conceptualization of what is received through basic perception. So, the suggestion that there are two levels of perceptual experience one of which requires the exercise of conceptual capacities and the other does not, should not be understood as a synthesis of conceptualism and nonconceptualism. For, conceptual perception is not, as conceptualists would claim, conceptual through and through; it embodies nonconceptual components as well. Even though we perceive things as a *so and so*, and even though this requires conceptualization, there is still a nonconceptual element in every kind of perceptual experience: the content that is delivered to the subject through basic perception.

My next task now is to establish the connection between basic perception and the perceptual belief that is involved in conceptual perception. That is to say, I need to account for the content of basic perception as grounding the conceptualization of the object perceived. If I am to make sense of basic perception as a counter argument against conceptualism, I need to further show that it can bear justificatory or rational relations to perceptual beliefs.

## CHAPTER 6

### NONCONCEPTUAL PERCEPTUAL CONTENT AND JUSTIFICATION

In previous chapters I advocated a nonconceptualist position about the content of perception. I showed that we can posit at least two levels or senses of perception one of which does not require possession of concepts that specify the content, and the other requires the possession and deployment of those concepts. These are “basic perception” and “conceptual perception,” respectively. I further claimed that conceptual perception involves a perceptual belief that is grounded on basic perception. My next task is to establish this grounding relation so as to resist conceptualist charges of being committed to the Myth of the Given. We have seen that the most important basis for the conceptualist thesis is the epistemological role which perceptual content is supposed to have in the formation of perceptual beliefs. McDowell argues that any notion of perceptual content that does not involve the conceptual capacities exercised in thought is merely a “mythical given” that can only be the causal ground for perceptual beliefs and not the reason or justification for them. In Chapter 3, I tried to establish that McDowell’s and Brewer’s conception of “reason” does not rule out the possibility of nonconceptual perceptual reasons by roughly presenting some possible objections against this conception. In this chapter, I will try to provide a deeper elaboration of the same issue in order to show how conceptual perception can be rationally grounded on basic perception which is itself nonconceptual. In other words, I will attempt to show how the perceptual belief that is involved in conceptual perception can be justified by basic perception that has nonconceptual content. My intention is not to provide a full-fledged theory of justification; this would be beyond the limits of my current purpose. I will rather try to merely present a possible way to ideate nonconceptual perceptual content as a possible ground that constitutes rational reasons for our beliefs.

## 6.1 Nonconceptual Content and the Articulability Requirement

In order to form a perceptual belief, basic perception alone is not sufficient, that much is obvious. For, in order to have a perceptual belief one has to possess the relevant conceptual capacities involved in that belief. So, if a perceptual state is to justify a perceptual belief, the subject in question needs to possess all of the concepts that figure in the content of the belief. In other words, a perceptual state can justify a belief only if the subject possesses certain relevant concepts. For how would it be possible for perception to justify the belief “The sky is blue” if the subject does not possess the concepts “sky” and “blue,” for example? This requirement however, is not due to the conceptuality of perception but rather due to the conceptuality of the belief, hence does not entail any kind of conceptualism about perceptual content. It is sufficient if the subject merely possesses the concepts involved in the belief without possessing all of the concepts that specify the perceptual content. It is also true that we are usually in a position to give or articulate the reason of our perceptual beliefs. If we are asked why we believe that the sky is blue, most of us will be able to say “Because it looks blue” or “I can see that it is blue.” From this, conceptualists conclude that the content of perception is conceptual, since for them “reasons that the subject can give, in so far as they are articulable, must be within the space of reason.” (McDowell 1996: 165) I argue, on the contrary, that nonconceptual content of perception is quite consistent with our ability to *give justifications* through deploying concepts.

In the previous chapter I have claimed that conceptualization necessarily involve belief formation; therefore, any case of perceiving something *to be* a so-and-so necessarily involves the belief that something is a so-and-so or falls under the concept “so-and-so.” Therefore, the conceptualist claim that only something conceptual can justify or constitute reason for a belief, I believe, has a parallel in the coherentist claim that “only a belief can justify another belief.” But we have seen that coherentism is considered to be an unwelcomed position for conceptualists. In order to resist a coherentist conclusion, we need to posit

something more fundamental that is not itself already a belief but that will serve as the justifier of perceptual beliefs (Vision 2009: 294).

We have seen that one of the most important motivations for conceptualism is based upon the assumption that a reason for a belief is articulable, in other words, the subject should be able to give or state his reason for that particular belief. It is argued on that ground that perceptual content, which is a reason for perceptual beliefs, cannot be non-conceptual. As we have seen in Chapter 3, this requirement can be challenged in two ways. We can firstly claim that, in order to have a justified perceptual belief, we do not need to state the reason for holding that belief. It is possible that we lack conceptual means that would enable us to make such an assertion or articulation. Consider a child whose conceptual repertoire and rational capacities are limited compared to an adult human being. The child forms a perceptual belief on the basis of his experience of the sky as blue. Given that the child does not have concepts like “reason” “justification” or “belief,” ect., it would be doubtful that the child is in a position to give reasons for his belief. But the child may nevertheless base his belief on his perception because it is plausible to claim at least for perceptual beliefs that “one can have a justified belief even if, in response to someone who doubts this, one could not show that one does.” (Audi 1993: 145) His perception is not a merely causal basis of his perceptual belief like a bump on the head can be the causal basis of the belief that he is Napoleon. This example is challenged by Adam Leite in an article where he stresses the relevance of the articulation of the reason for holding beliefs. According to Leite, the infant case does not entail that articulation is not necessary for justification but rather that infants “are not justified in believing as they do.” (2004: 243) For him, ‘being justified’ is not applicable to infants who lack requisite rational and conceptual capacities (Ibid.: 244).

Whether Leite is right about the infant case is debatable. For, it is not clear why infants who may have the requisite conceptual capacities for holding perceptual beliefs are exempted from justification. Nevertheless, my claim concerning the articulability of perceptual content is more radical. I do not only claim that we

may lack conceptual means required for giving reasons, I also claim that even though we do possess those means, perceptual content is nevertheless not articulable *in nature* as a belief content is. At a first glance, this seems to be a very bold claim. For, don't I already agree that when we are asked why we are holding a particular perceptual belief, we are able to give our reason for holding it? Is not the reply "Because it looks that way" already the articulation of our perceptual reason? It surely is the articulation of a reason, but I do not believe that it is the articulation of perceptual content.

Perceptual content is not a kind of content that can be articulated in the sense belief content can be, for it is not propositional. Brewer holds that perceptual content has propositional content that a subject can state as a premise for an argument. I believe this suggests that a perceptual state is a kind of doxastic state. For, how would it be possible for a person to articulate a premise without being committed to its truth, namely, without believing in it? A typical example of articulating a reason for a belief is to articulate another belief. The answer to the question of "Why do you believe that it will rain tomorrow?" may be "Because the weather is overcast." The proposition "The weather is overcast" is the content of your belief that the weather is overcast. It is what you believe and the concepts that figure in that proposition are the constituents of your beliefs. In my opinion, the case is quite similar when "it looks that way" is given as the reason for a particular perceptual belief. The proposition does not seem to be the content of a perceptual experience but rather the content of a belief about the content of the experience (about the way an object looks). For, it seems that one cannot give a proposition as a reason for his belief, unless one is also committed to the truth of the proposition, that is, unless one believes that proposition. So, "It looks that way" articulates the belief that an object looks a certain way, and this belief is constituted by the concepts deployed in this phrase. Therefore, whenever you give a reason for your perceptual belief in this way, what you are actually doing is articulating another belief. Whereas, we have already acknowledged that what we search is not another belief but rather a more fundamental basis for perceptual beliefs. Moreover, the fact that articulating this belief involves

conceptual capacities has no bearing on whether perceptual content is conceptual or not. As Alex Byrne also states:

When the subject says “Because it looks square”, she expresses her belief that the object looks square, and of course this belief is a mental state with conceptual content. Hence articulating her reason involves deploying the concept SQUARE. But that in no way shows that *the experience her belief is about* has conceptual content, which is what McDowell needs. (1996)

It is possible to claim that this seeming difficulty can be overcome if we change the form of the articulation. Even though it is correct that the phrase “it looks that way” is the articulation of a belief or judgment, the phrase “the way it looks” is not. Put in other words, in order to avoid coherentism, we can give a perceptual reason in the following way: “I believe that the sky is blue, because of *the way it looks*.” The reason given is not the belief that it looks certain way, but rather the way itself. According to conceptualism, then, “the way it looks” is the articulation of the perceptual content, therefore perceptual content is conceptual. In order to give a perceptual reason for a belief, referring to the way itself is more convenient than stating a belief about it. Given that I take perceptual content to be non-propositional, this suggestion seems appealing at the first glance, for it would enable us to avoid an epistemological regress. However, contrary to what is usually held, it does not follow from that that perceptual content is articulable in the required sense and hence is conceptual.

I find it crucial to make a distinction between *articulating a content* and *referring to a content*. The lexical meaning of “articulable” is “being capable of being expressed.” So, in Fregean terminology the thing that is articulated consists of the *sense* of the articulation (not the referent). Therefore, articulating belief content amounts to a direct expression of it. Anything that is articulable in this sense has to be conceptual. Referring to a content, on the other hand, is not a matter of the sense of the articulation but of the referent of it. And being referable in no way implies that the referent is conceptual. In order to clarify the difference between articulating a content and referring to a content, consider the following expressions concerning the belief that the sky is blue: “The content of my belief”

and “that the sky is blue”. The first expression is an instance of referring to the belief content. It does not directly express the content itself but rather denotes it through conceptual means. So, concepts “content”, “my” and “belief” does not show up as the constituents of the belief that the sky is blue. The second expression on the other hand, is the direct articulation of the content itself. The sense of this articulation is equal to the content of the belief that the sky is blue. So, referring to something through concepts is not the same activity as articulating something despite the fact that they both involve conceptual capacities. One can refer to an apple through the concept “apple”, let us say. However, it sounds absurd to say that one can articulate the apple. Here to word ‘apple’ is referring to an object but it is not articulating the object itself.

The difference between articulating and referring to a content is very significant in challenging conceptualists’ argument for conceptual perceptual content. Consider the phrase “the way it looks”<sup>32</sup>. This phrase can be stated as a reason of why a particular belief is held and therefore, is supposed to entail the conceptuality of perceptual content. However, in the light of the distinction I propose, it can be held that this assertion does not express the content of an experience but merely refers to it. In other words, the content of a perceptual experience does not consist of what this phrase expresses (the sense) but rather consists of its referent. So, conceptual content is indeed referable or conceptualisable through conceptual means but it is not itself articulable in the required sense, not in the sense a belief content is. If perceptual content is not articulable in the sense a belief is, then it does not follow that it is conceptual. The fact that we can mention, refer to or form beliefs about an object (perceptual content) through conceptual means does not entail that the object in question is conceptual (Peacocke 1998: 381-388). As Peacocke also highlights: “...the conceptual character of the conceptual constituent ‘that way’ must be sharply distinguished from the nonconceptual character of its reference, a nonconceptual way in which something is perceived.”(2001: 256) “The conceptual character of

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<sup>32</sup> When arguing against Peacocke, McDowell cites this expression as the articulation of perceptual content, see. McDowell 1996: 166.

the demonstrative is entirely consistent with the nonconceptual character of the way to which it refers.” (1998: 383)

## **6.2 How can Nonconceptual Perceptual Content be Reason for Beliefs?**

To liken perceptual content to an ordinary object like an apple in not being articulable (which is nevertheless referable and specifiable through concepts) and hence, being nonconceptual, may worry most people who are concerned with the epistemic role of perception. For perceptual content, contrary to an ordinary object, is supposed to have a justificatory role in the formation of belief. By emancipating perceptual content from conceptuality, I do not intend to limit its relation to perceptual beliefs merely to casual grounds. For, that would contradict the central aim of this dissertation: the aim to generate an account of nonconceptual perceptual content that can *rationally ground* our perceptual beliefs. Perceptual contents do ground beliefs, but being different from beliefs, they do not ground them like a belief which is grounding another belief. The justificatory relation between beliefs is usually considered to be inferential. Whereas the rational grounding relation between perceptual content and a perceptual belief cannot be inferential, for this would lead to the unwelcome conclusion that perceptual content, like belief content, is propositional. This, as I said in the previous section, would mean that perceptions are kinds of doxastic states.

Having argued that the epistemological argument of conceptualism does not entail that perceptual reasons are conceptual, I will now try to show that nonconceptual items can be good candidates for playing the rational role perception is supposed to play in forming beliefs. We have seen in Chapter 2 that according to conceptualists, being a genuine reason for a belief requires that the subject hold the belief in question for that reason. In other words, if a state is supposed to be a reason for a belief, it needs to be a reason from the subject's point of view; the subject himself needs to base his belief particularly on that reason. Nonconceptual perceptual content, according to conceptualism, even

though can explain *why* a subject holds a certain belief from a third person point of view; it does not explain the *subject's reason* for which the subject holds that belief. The subject needs to appreciate the content of his experience as his reason to hold a belief. It is, therefore, crucial to show that perceptual content satisfies those requirements, i.e. can be a subject's reason for holding a belief, without being conceptual. The nonconceptual content of a perceptual experience, I argue, can be a genuine reason because:

- (1) It is representational
- (2) It occurs at a personal level
- (3) It is able to be referred or specified as a reason for holding a belief.

Concerning (1), it has been already highlighted that perception has representational content. And representational content was roughly defined as the way an experience represents the world to be. One of the main reasons why nonconceptual content is considered as leading to the Myth of the Given is based upon the assumption that “a brute impact from exterior” cannot be a reason for beliefs. Nonconceptual perceptual content is considered as a brute impact because it is thought that, owing to its nonconceptuality, it cannot *tell* anything to a subject about the external world. However, we have seen that basic perception which has nonconceptual content conveys us a great deal of information about the world. In other words, it *shows* us the external world to be in a certain way. This representational character of perceptual content ensures that the relation between a perceptual experience and a perceptual belief is not merely causal, but also rational. For, in normal circumstances if an experience represents an object to be red, I am justified in believing that it is red rather than being justified in believing that it is blue (Schantz 1999: 188). And the way it represents the object to me has some bearings on whether my perceptual belief is true or false. This is surely not merely a matter of the causal relation between the content of my perception and the content of my belief. Perceptual content has an epistemic role. Therefore, it is

plausible to say that “I have, in the way the object appears to me, a reason to believe that it is red.” (Ibid.)

Being representational on its own is not sufficient to ensure that perceptual content is a genuine reason for beliefs. As McDowell also acknowledges, establishing a rational linkage between belief and perception does not help the nonconceptualist to show that perception provides us genuine reasons to hold beliefs. For being rationally linked does not mean that the reason in question is the subject’s own reason. It is possible that a state makes it rational to hold a particular belief even though the subject does not base his belief on that state. Another reason why nonconceptual perceptual content can play the justificatory role required is the fact that perceptual content occurs at a personal level (as opposed to subpersonal level). Even though it is possible to establish a rational relation between a retinal image and a perceptual belief (a given retinal image can figure in the explanation of why it is rational to hold a certain belief), the retinal image cannot be the subject’s own reason for holding a belief due to the fact that it is not a kind of content that the subject can be aware of. The fact that one can explain why a subject holds a particular perceptual belief on the basis of his retinal image, or some other subpersonal process or state, does not explain the *subject’s own reason* why he holds that particular belief. The state in question needs to be available to awareness. Even though the subject may be unaware of and ignorant about the causal process that leads to his holding a belief, he can nevertheless base his belief on his personal level perceptual state. It is, therefore, unfair to criticize nonconceptual content by equating it with states or processes that the subject is not aware of and on which he cannot base his belief. Given that perceptual content occurs at the personal level, I see no reason to exempt it from the *space of reason*.

I have argued that the argument from articulability does not succeed in establishing the conceptuality of perceptual content for perceptual content is not articulable in the same way belief content is. But (3) highlights another reason for why perceptual content is genuinely reason-constituting: Perceptual content is

referable, specifiable, or describable through conceptual means. Even though this does not entail that perceptual content is conceptual, it illustrates that perceptual content is employed by the subject as a reason for holding a belief. So, (3), that is, the fact that a subject can refer to, mention or specify his perceptual state if he has the requisite conceptual means when he is asked why he holds a particular belief, can be seen as a further indication for the rational role of nonconceptual perceptual content. Though this is not necessary for perceptual content to be a reason for holding a belief, it nevertheless clarifies that perceptual content is also a kind of content that can be accessed and thought about or evaluated through conceptual capacities that one possesses. As stated previously, this feature of perceptual content is consistent with its being nonconceptual. For, the conceptuality of an expression does not entail the conceptuality of its reference. A person may or may not be able to *refer* to his perceptual content as a reason for his belief depending upon his intellectual endowment. If he cannot, this would not be a threat to nonconceptualism. The nonconceptual content of his experience may perfectly be his reason for holding the belief even though the subject is unable to express that it is. But if he can, we will have positive evidence that the subject is basing his belief upon the content of his experience. Consider again a person who is asked why he believes that the sky is blue. In normal circumstances, the subject will say “Because it looks that way” or, if he has the relevant concepts, “Because of the content of my perceptual experience.” In both expressions, the subject is referring to the content of his experience. The fact that a subject is able to make such a remark illustrates that his perceptual content is available to and accessed by the subject as his reason to hold the belief. If one is able to refer to, point to or show something when asked for a reason for belief, then the thing in question should be seen as the subject’s own reason for holding that belief. So, I agree McDowell’s remarks that “just because she gives expression to it in discourse, there is no problem about the reason’s being a reason for which..., and not just part of the reason why....” (1996: 165) In short, I see no reason for why a representational personal level state that can be the object of thought as well, cannot count as a genuine reason for a subject to hold a perceptual belief.

### 6.3 The Transition from Basic to Conceptual Perception: A Possible Account of Perceptual Content-Perceptual Belief Relation

In the preceding chapter we have defined conceptual perception as a kind of state that requires both a purely perceptual state (basic perception) and a basic perceptual belief. Conceptually perceiving an object *to be* a table implies that the subject both basically perceives the table, and has the belief that the object in question is a table. We have further claimed that the perceptual belief involved in conceptual perception is grounded on the basic perception of the object. In the light of the arguments above, we can say that the content of basic perception provides the rational reason for the perceptual belief involved in conceptual perception. Once we acknowledge that nonconceptual content can rationally ground perceptual beliefs, there is no obstacle to comprehending how a subject passes from basic perception to conceptual perception.

The transition from basic perception to conceptual perception is possible mainly due to the reason-constituting role of basic perception in forming perceptual beliefs. This is not, however, to deny that there is no causal link between perception and belief. It is rather that, besides the causal process that gives rise to a perceptual belief or conceptual perception, there is also a rational link accessible by the first person point of view. In previous sections, I have already ruled out the possibility that the relation between basic perception and belief is inferential, for this would lead to the conclusion that perceptual content is propositional. The formation of some beliefs is undoubtedly inferential. But that does not mean that all beliefs are formed via the same process. I propose instead that the formation process of basic perceptual beliefs is based on different grounds. My argument for the reason constituting role of nonconceptual content can be roughly formulated as the following:

- (1) Forming basic perceptual beliefs is *conceptually the same thing as* concept application to objects that are basically perceived.

(2) The content of basic perception provides rational grounds for concept application to objects that are basically perceived.

(3) Therefore, the content of basic perception provides rational grounds for forming basic perceptual beliefs.

In chapter 5, it has already been argued in favor of (1), namely, that applying perceptual concepts is the same mental process of forming a perceptual belief about that object. For instance, applying the concept “red” to something necessarily ends up with the belief that the thing is red or that it falls under the concept “red”. If you conceptualize an object as “red”, you necessarily believe that the object in question is red. And similarly, if you form the belief that an object is red, you are applying to it the concept “red”. Therefore, the grounding relation between basic perception and perceptual beliefs should be sought in the way we conceptualize the object we perceive. The truth of (2) seems to be explicit either. As Bermudez states:

we can only apply concepts to objects and properties that we can perceptually discriminate, and the perceptual discrimination of objects and properties must be distinct from the process of applying concepts if some applications and judgments are to be warranted and others not. Roughly speaking, a thinker is warranted in applying the concept of, say, a particular shade of colour to a property just if her experience makes that shade available in the appropriate manner. (2009: 465)

Nonconceptual perceptual content or the content of basic perception constitutes reason for or warrants beliefs by providing appropriate *ground* for applying particular concepts to objects. Consider the case of seeing a red table. The content of your experience, namely, *the way* the table is presented to you is such that you find appropriate to apply the concept “red” to that object, hence form the belief that the object is red or falls under the concept “red”. As a result you perceive the red table *to be* red. This means that the content of basic perception provides “application conditions” (Ibid.: 466) for concepts:

... certain concepts (paradigmatically those classically known as observational concepts) have application conditions at the level of

nonconceptual content— application conditions that can be given without mentioning the concept in question. Because of this states with nonconceptual content can provide reasons for perceptual judgments without standing in logical relations to them. (Ibid.)

Because those application conditions are at the level of nonconceptual perceptual content, they should not be considered as being inaccessible to the perceiver. Therefore, they should not be conceived as a set of external conditions that the subject is unaware of. Otherwise we will fall victim to the same conceptualist criticism that they are not a subject's own reason. So, by applications condition I do not mean some conditions specified from a third person point of view, but conditions the subject is personally aware of in virtue of consciously having them. That is to say, the subject himself finds those conditions as appropriate as to apply certain concepts. Therefore, application conditions should be considered as internal to the perceiver because they consist of the awareness of objects in virtue of having a perceptual experience.

A nonconceptual perceptual content may make the application of some concepts appropriate while others inappropriate. For instance, the nonconceptual content of the perception of a tree, in most circumstances, would make the application of the concept "green" appropriate rather than the concept "red". Within this context, it is worthwhile noting that perceptual content makes the application of certain concepts appropriate when the perceptual experience is taken at face value. In other words, if a subject does not have any counter evidence, he finds the nonconceptual content of her experience as appropriate for applying certain concepts even though her experience is not in fact veridical. So, it can be said that nonconceptual perceptual content gives us *prima facie* appropriate conditions for applying concepts. And if justification or grounding of a belief is *prima facie*, it can "be defeated or undermined by additional evidence." (Pryor 2000: 532) We have already explained what happens if a subject has counter evidence to his conceptual perception in Chapter 5. It was argued there that if a subject discovers that he is undergoing an illusion, he can revise his perceptual belief. So, in the case of the Müller-Lyer illusion, the subject discovers that the application conditions provided by his basic perception do not make it appropriate to apply

the concept “two lines of different lengths.” Given the additional information the subject has gained, the subject in question gives up the belief that the lines are of different length and hence does not conceptually perceive the lines to be of different length anymore. He does not conceptually perceive them to be the same length either. In such a case, the subject may see the lines as *looking* to be different lengths. But that would not be an instance of our notion of conceptual perception as defined as involving basic perception as a basic perceptual belief based on that basic perception. But, in the absence of any defeating evidence the subject will take the content of her basic perception at face value, and apply concepts accordingly.

If we construe the justificatory or reason-constituting relation between perceptual content and perceptual belief in terms of concept application, then why perceptual content needs to be nonconceptual becomes much clearer. If formation of perceptual belief consists of concept application, then nonconceptualism automatically follows. For, what would be the point of applying concepts to something that is given as already conceptualized? So, instead of constructing the rational relation between perception and belief as a kind relation that can occur only between contents of the same kind, I instead propose that the formation of the belief arises from the conceptualization of nonconceptual content. Why should we assume a notion of justification of perceptual belief that already limits justificatory relations to conceptual contents? There seems to be nothing implausible in conceiving perceptual content as being genuinely reason-constituting and yet nonconceptual.

Now let me reformulate the main claim of this chapter very shortly. Basic perception involves merely a perceptual state that is nonconceptual and that has nonconceptual representational content. Conceptual perception, on the other hand, involves both basic perception and a doxastic state that is acquired on the basis of basic perception. So, perceiving an object *to be* a tree requires both the basic perception of the tree and the belief that what this basic perception represents is a tree. In order to pass from basic perception to conceptual

perception, we need to acquire a perceptual belief, which occurs on the basis of the content of our basic perception. The central aim of this chapter was to establish this link between a perceptual belief and basic perception. The first premise of my argument defines the acquisition of a perceptual belief in terms of *concept application*. Therefore, any account of concept application would also be applicable to perceptual belief formation. The second premise highlights how the content of basic perception can provide appropriate *ground* for concept application. Finally, given that perceptual belief formation and perceptual concept application are claimed to be the same thing, it automatically follows from the second premise that the content of basic perception provides appropriate ground for perceptual belief formation. So, the basic perception of a tree represents the tree in a certain way as having certain observable properties. This way is such that it gives us appropriate ground to apply certain concepts. This act of concept application i.e. categorizing an object as falling under a particular concept amounts to the act of acquiring a perceptual belief: a belief that an object falls under a particular concept. Having a basic perception with the accompaniment of a perceptual belief, that is based on it, amounts to having a conceptual perception of an object. So, through applying the concept “tree” to an object that we basically see, we come to conceptually perceive the object in question *to be* a tree.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

In order to make sense of perception as contributing to our beliefs and knowledge about the external world we do not need to attribute to it capacities that are peculiar to more sophisticated mental phenomena such as thinking, judging or believing. If perception is supposed to be the source of such cognitive processes, I believe it should be more primitive or more basic than them. Therefore, my dissertation as a whole can be thought of as an endeavor to search a notion of perception that precedes thought and belief and that is nevertheless as epistemically relevant as them. To be more precise, the aim of this dissertation was to present a coherent notion of perception that does not involve conceptual capacities but that could still contribute to states that do involve those capacities. This central claim of my thesis is established within the context of the intractable debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists about perceptual content. Against the conceptualist view that perceptual content is conceptual through and through, I adopted the opposing view that perceptual content is nonconceptual and a subject can be in a contentful perceptual state without possessing any of the relevant concepts. This being so, I attempted throughout my dissertation to construct an account of perceptual content that is consistent with nonconceptualism but that can also satisfy conceptualist demands concerning the epistemological role perception is supposed to have in acquiring beliefs. This goal is achieved through the following steps:

– presenting philosophical arguments in support of nonconceptualism that may constitute serious challenge against conceptualism

– providing some positive empirical instances that illustrate how a subject can undergo a perceptual experience without possessing or deploying relevant concepts

– introducing a plausible notion of perception with nonconceptual content

– introducing an account of the rational relation between perception and belief in terms of concept application.

In order to provide a clear and solid ground for my claim, I began my dissertation by introducing some central notions of the conceptualist-nonconceptualist debate. I first of all presented Kant's position concerning the subject matter in order to highlight the philosophical roots of the debate. I later clarified notions such as 'perception', 'content' and 'concept possession'. Within the framework of these notions, I established the subject matter of the debate as the following: *whether perceptual representational content, which is a personal level phenomena and which is epistemically relevant, has conceptual content or not.*

Formulation of a satisfactory account of nonconceptual perceptual content cannot be achieved if it cannot invalidate the reasons that philosophers have for positing conceptual perceptual content. Therefore, in the third chapter I aimed to provide a clear exposition of the rival position: conceptualism. We have seen that the only motivation for conceptualists, such as McDowell, was based upon the epistemic role perceptual content has in justifying perceptual beliefs. Their claim was roughly the following: A notion of perceptual content that is *nonconceptual* cannot stand in rational relations to perceptual beliefs. Therefore, if we are to posit a notion of nonconceptual perceptual content, we cannot at the same time argue for its rational role in forming beliefs. However, perception does provide rational grounds for belief. Therefore, positing nonconceptual perceptual content is useless. It will either be committed to the Myth of the Given or lead to an unacceptable form of coherentism.

I, however, argued just for the contrary: that perceptual content is nonconceptual but nevertheless epistemologically relevant. The reasons for positing such a notion of perceptual content are numerous. I reserved the fourth chapter for arguments given against conceptualism. I have shown that though those arguments do not necessarily refute conceptualism, they nevertheless provide serious challenge for it. The underlying intuition of these arguments is mainly the fact that a subject can be in a contentful perceptual state without possessing concepts that are used to give a complete specification of the content of that perceptual state. For, isn't it obvious that a person can perceive a red round table, without at least possessing one of the concepts "round", "red" or "table"? If it can be shown that a subject may lack concepts that specify the whole or a part of the content of his perceptual experience, then conceptualism is forced to provide a plausible account of how the subject in question can have this perceptual state with such a content. So, the central aim of the fourth chapter is to show that even though as a matter of fact we do possess many concepts and as a result have difficulties in conceiving cases of perception totally devoid of concepts, there is no logical entailment from our having a perceptual state to our deploying corresponding concepts.

We have seen that we have strong reasons both philosophically and empirically to argue against conceptualism. Besides philosophical motivations in support of nonconceptualism, cognitive science also provides important cases that illustrate how perception can occur without conceptualization. We have seen that the case of pre-conceptual infants and perceptual agnosias are good examples where perception and conception are independent from each other.

The force of nonconceptualist arguments, I believe, was not sufficient for establishing a firm ground for nonconceptualism. Therefore, in the fifth chapter I aimed to provide a possible account of nonconceptual perceptual content that can undermine the conceptualist arguments against nonconceptualism. Instead of claiming that all kinds or levels of perception are necessarily nonconceptual, I, like many other philosophers, instead conceived perception as a multi-level

phenomenon whose main levels are: basic perception and conceptual perception. Basic perception, I argued, is a pure perceptual state that does not involve any kind of recognition, identification or conceptualization at all. It has nonconceptual content in the sense that it does not require that the subject possess concepts that fully characterize it. I argued that basic perception is a genuine case of perception for it is a personal-level phenomenon and has representational content. However, limiting the use of the term ‘perception’ to purely perceptual states may contradict the powerful intuition that perceiving also involves a conceptual achievement of the subject as well. For it is an undeniable fact that the terms “perception”, “perceiving” or “seeing” is commonly used to signify the way the subject comprehends, identifies and conceptualizes the external world. This is one reason for why I found it essential to posit another meaning or level of perception that involves conceptualization as well. “Conceptual perception”, as I construe it, is not a pure perceptual state but rather a hybrid state that involves both a purely perceptual component and a doxastic component. It has been claimed that conceptual perception has the form perceiving *to be*. For example, while it is possible to perceive an object basically, without having any idea about what you are perceiving, it is also possible to perceive it *to be* a table, red, round, etc. I highlighted the fact that conceptual perception should not be confused with other kinds of perceptual states that also involve conceptual capacities. I construed conceptual perception as merely a state of taking things to be as the way they appear. Conceptually perceiving an object to be a table, in that sense, is a matter of taking an object to be a table. I further claimed that perceiving things *to be* a certain way requires that the subject possess the belief that the object in question is that way, even though the object may not actually be that way. In this respect, all perceiving *to be* necessarily involves a perceptual belief about the object we perceive.

Conceptual perception, as I construe it, gives us a possible ground for accounting for the relation between perception and belief. The perceptual belief that is claimed to be involved in perceptual belief, I argued, is rationally grounded on the content of basic perception. In the sixth chapter of my dissertation, I aimed to

shed light on the epistemic role of basic perception through its grounding the perceptual belief involved in conceptual perception. As I characterized a basic perceptual belief in terms of concept application, I claimed that basic perceptual content give rational grounds for perceptual beliefs in terms of providing appropriate grounds for concept application.

Undoubtedly, there are still many issues concerning the epistemological role of perception that remain unanswered in this work. For instance, it is not further explored how perceptual content provides grounds for concept application. Or a complete theory of perceptual justification is not offered. Similarly, the role of concepts in shaping our perceptual experience, namely the implication of nonconceptual perceptual content for the argument from theory ladenness of observation may constitute another philosophical issue that this dissertation can extend. This however, though being an important task, is too big a project for my dissertation. My arguments for nonconceptual perceptual content can only be seen as a starting point to overcome further philosophical problems. Recall that the primary concern of this dissertation was to provide a plausible notion of nonconceptual perceptual content that stands in appropriate relations to perceptual beliefs. Such a notion, I believe, can at least shed some light on perceptual justification, on how perceptual beliefs differ from other beliefs, or how the well-known epistemological regress problem can be overcome.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: CURRICULUM VITAE

#### PERSONAL INFORMATION

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2. Sandıkciöđlu Arıkan, P. and Karademir A. (2009) “David Lewis’in Modal Realizminde Dünya-Ötesi Karşıolgusal Önergeler, İkinci Dereceden Dünyalar ve Dünyalar-Arası Nedensellik Sorunları” *Felsefe Tartışmaları*, December 2009 (1-15).
3. Sandıkciöđlu Arıkan P. (2011) “Holism and the Analytic-Synthetic Distinction” *Ethos Felsefe: Felsefe ve Toplumsal Bilimlerde Diyaloglar*, January 2011.

## APPENDIX B: TURKISH SUMMARY

Dünya bize algı deneyimi yoluyla belli bir şekilde sunulur. Örneğin, bir portakalı yuvarlak, gökyüzünü mavi, pamuğu yumuşak olarak algılarız. Birçok düşünür algı deneyimlerinin de tıpkı diğer yönelimsel zihin durumları gibi temsil edici içerikleri olduğunu iddia ederler. Ancak bu temsil edici içeriğin kavramsal olup olmadığı sorusu önemli bir tartışma konusudur. John McDowell ve Bill Brewer gibi düşünürlere göre algısal deneyimlerin içeriği tamamıyla kavramsaldır. Öyle ki, bir öznenin içerikli bir deneyime sahip olabilmesi için, o içeriği betimleyen kavramların tamamına sahip olması gerekir. Ancak karşı görüşe göre ise algı içeriği kavramsal olmayabilir. Bir öznenin içerikli bir algı deneyimine sahip olabilmesi için belirli kavramlara sahip olması gerekmez. Kavramsalcı görüşün temelinde yatan temel neden; algının, inanç ve yargıların rasyonel temeli olduğu ve bunun kavramsal olmadan mümkün olamayacağıdır. Bu tezin amacı, bu iki karşıt görüş arasındaki tartışmayı açık bir şekilde sunmak ve kavramsalcılığın aksine kavramsal olmayan ancak yine de inançları temellendirebilen bir algısal içerik anlayışını savunmaktır.

### 1. Kavramsal Çerçeve

Algısal içeriğin kavramsal olup olmadığı tartışması ancak tartışmanın üzerine oturtulduğu nosyonların ne anlama geldiği belirlenirse netlik kazanır. Aksi takdirde tartışmanın taraflarını değerlendirebileceğimiz ortak bir zemin oluşturamayız. Bu nedenle, tezin bu bölümünde önce tartışmanın çıkış noktası olarak nitelendirebileceğimiz Kantçı bakış açısı sunulacaktır. Daha sonra, “içerik,” “kavram,” “algı” gibi temel nosyonların açıklaması yapılarak tartışmanın genel çerçevesi çizilecektir.

Algısal içeriğin kavramsal olup olmadığı tartışması elbette ki Kant’a gönderme yapılmadan anlaşılabilir. Kant’ın kavramsal olmayan *sezgilerin* ve kavramsal

olan *düşüncenin* insan deney ve bilgisinin oluşmasındaki rolünü vurgulayışı, kavramsal ve kavram-dışısalcı görüşlerin tarihsel kaynağını teşkil eder. Kantçı bakış açısı iki şekilde yorumlanabilir. İlkine göre Kant kavramsalı savunmaktadır, çünkü kavramsız bilginin olamayacağını iddia eder. Diğer yoruma göre ise, Kant'ın kavramsal olmayan sezgilere biçtiği rol, onun kavramsal olmayan bir algı içeriği olduğu inancının göstergesidir.

Kant'a göre bilgi iki fakültenin işbirliği ile ortaya çıkar. Bunlar “duyarlılık (sensitivity)” ve “anlak (understanding)”tır. Duyarlılık kısaca nesnelere bize sezgi yoluyla verildiği fakülte. Anlak ise sezgi yoluyla verilmiş olan nesnelere hakkında düşünme yetisidir. Zihin, anlak yoluyla nesnelere kavram uygulayarak yargıya varmamızı sağlar. Kant'a göre duyarlılık ve anlak birbirinden ayrılmaz. Ancak hiçbirisi diğerinden daha üstün değildir ve birbirlerinin görevlerini yerine getiremezler. Anlak ve duyarlılığın bu karşılıklı dayanışması Kant'ın “görüş kavramlar boş, kavramsız görüşler kördür” sözüyle açıkça ortaya konmuştur ve kavramsal ve kavram-dışısalcılık tartışmalarının temelini oluşturmaktadır. Kavramsalcılara göre görüşlerin kör oluşu kavramsız algı olması ihtimalini ortadan kaldırmaktadır. Ancak kavram-dışısalcılara göre, bilgi için kavramlar zorunlu olsa dahi, görüşlerin veya sezgilerin kavramlardan bağımsız olarak temsil edici içerikleri vardır.

Daha önce de belirtildiği gibi bu çalışmanın esas amacı algısal deneyimlerin temsil edici içeriklerinin kavramsal olup olmadığını soruşturmadır. Bu nedenle, aydınlatılması gereken kavramlardan ilki “temsil edici içerik” kavramıdır. Kavramsalcılığın ve karşıt görüşün temel iddialarını anlamak için “temsil edici içerik” kavramına tarafsız bir açıklama getirmek şarttır.

Yönelimsel zihin durumları bir şey hakkındadır. Örneğin dünyanın yuvarlak olduğu inancı dünya hakkındadır. Bu “hakkındalık” kavramı genellikle içerik veya temsil edici içerik olarak tanımlanır. Tüm düşünürler hemfikir olmasalar da, birçoğuna göre algısal deneyimler de tıpkı inançlar gibi bir şey hakkındadır, yani temsil edici içeriğe sahiptirler. Temsil edici içeriğin ne olduğunu kısaca

açıklayacak olursak, deneyimlerin dış dünyayı temsil şekli olarak tanımlayabiliriz. Örneğin, dünyanın yuvarlak olduğu inancı dünyayı yuvarlak olarak temsil eder. Aynı şekilde, gökyüzünün mavi olduğu algısı da gökyüzünü mavi olarak temsil eder. Algısal deneyimlere temsil edici içerik atfetme eğilimi, illüzyonlar ve halüsinasyonlar gibi gerçeğe uygun olmayan algısal deneyimlerin varlığından kaynaklanır. Bir zihinsel durumun dünyayı yanlış bir şekilde temsil ediyor oluşu, onun temsil edici içeriğe sahip olduğunun göstergesidir. Eğer algısal deneyim, diğer yönelimsel zihin durumlarının aksine yalnızca birer ham his olarak kabul edilirse doğru veya yanlış temsil ediyor oluşundan söz edilemez. Algı deneyimlerinin bu özelliği, temsili içeriğin “doğruluk koşulları” üzerinden açıklanmasına neden olur. Bu tanımlamaya göre, zihinsel bir durumun içeriği onun doğru bir şekilde temsil ettiği durumdaki koşullardır. Öyleyse gökyüzünün mavi olduğu algısının içeriği bu deneyimin doğru temsil yaptığı, yani gökyüzünün mavi olduğu koşullar üzerinden verilir.

Herhangi bir yanlış anlaşılmaya neden olmamak adına “temsil” kavramından kaynaklanabilecek bir belirsizliği aydınlatmak yerinde olacaktır. Algısal deneyimlerin temsil edici içeriğe sahip olduğu iddiası “temsilcilik” görüşüyle karıştırılmamalıdır. Temsilcilik görüşü bir algı deneyiminin fenomenal karakterinin tamamıyla temsili özelliklere indirgenebileceğini savunur. Ancak algıya içerik atfetmek, onun fenomenal karakteriyle ilgili herhangi bir duruş gerektirmez. Kişi, algıya içerik atfederken bu deneyimin fenomenal veya niteliksel özelliklerinin temsil edici içeriğe indirgenebileceğini iddia edebileceği gibi, bu özelliklerin indirgenemez olduğunu da iddia edebilir. Hatta fenomenal özelliklerin varlığını bile reddedebilir.

Daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, kavramsalılık bir öznenin algı deneyimine sahip olabilmesi için bu deneyimin içeriğini betimleyen tüm kavramlara sahip olması gerektiğini iddia etmektedir. Bu noktada kavram sahibi olmanın ne anlama geldiği tartışmanın gidişatı açısından son derece önemlidir, çünkü bu tartışmaya karşı tutumumuz büyük ölçüde kavram sahibi olmayı nasıl tanımladığımızıza bağlıdır. Eğer kavram sahibi olmayı salt algısal ayırt edebilme olarak

tanımlayacak olursa, kavramsalcılık içi boş bir iddia olmaktan öteye gidemez. Kavramsalcılara göre kavram sahibi olmak basit bir yeti değildir. Algının gerektirdiği kavramsal kapasiteler yargı, düşünce ve inanç gibi durumlarda aktif olan kavramsal kapasitelere eşdeğerdir. Bu durumda kavram sahibi olmayı yalnızca algısal ayırt edebilme olarak tanımlayamayız. Kavram sahibi olmak çok daha karmaşık ve gelişmiş bir yetidir. Bir kavrama sahip olmak, o kavramı farklı düşüncelerde kullanabilmeyi gerektir. Gareth Evans'ın "Genellik Kısıtlaması" na göre, özne sahip olduğu kavramlarla farklı düşünceler oluşturabilmelidir. Yani, bir özne "a F" dir" düşüncesine sahipse ve G kavramına da sahipse, o özne "a G' dir" düşüncesini de oluşturabilmelidir. Kavram sahibi olmak için diğer bir gereklilik "Yeniden Tanımlayabilme Kısıtlaması"dır. Özne bir nesneyi belli bir kavramın kapsamında olarak yeniden farklı zamanlarda tanımlayabilmelidir. Öyleyse, kavramsalcı görüşe göre bir özne gökyüzünün maviliğini deneyimleyebiliyorsa, "mavi" ve "gökyüzü" kavramlarına sahip olmalı, bu kavramları farklı düşünce ve yargılarda kullanabilmeli ve farklı zamanlarda doğru şekilde uygulayabilmelidir.

Algı içeriğinin kavramsal olup olmadığını araştırmak için kavramsallığın ne olduğunu belirlemek elbette yeterli değildir. Algı veya algısal içeriğin ne olduğunu açıkça ortaya koymadan ona kavramsallık atfedip edemeyeceğimizi belirleyemeyiz. Algı, en basit haliyle, dış dünya ile özne arasında duyu organları yoluyla meydana gelen bir etkileşim olarak tanımlanabilir. Ancak "algı" teriminin anlamı belirsizdir; farklı bağlamlarda farklı anlamlarda kullanılabilir. Algılama bir sürece tekabül eder. Bu nedenle, "algı" veya "algısal içerik" terimleriyle ne anlatmaya çalıştığımız bu sürecin hangi safhasına gönderme yaptığımıza bağlıdır. Örneğin, bazı düşünürlere göre algı, algılama sürecinin en erken safhasıdır. Bazı düşünürlere göre ise, algılanan nesnenin kavramsallaştırma aşamasını da içerir. Bu nedenle, algısal içeriğin kavramsal olup olmadığı sorusu "algı" teriminin sınırları çizilmeden yanıtlanamaz. Kavramsalcılık tartışmasına baktığımızda, bir durumun algı sayılabilmesi için tartışmanın her iki tarafının da hemfikir olduğu bazı şartlar olduğunu görürüz. İlk olarak algı algısal inançlara rasyonel temel teşkil edebilmelidir. Bu da ancak temsili içeriği varsa mümkündür. O halde

algının temsil edici içeriği olmalıdır. İçerikten yoksun ham hisler algı olarak nitelendirilemez. İkinci olarak, algı “kişisel düzeyde (personal-level)” olmalıdır. Diğer bir deyişle, algı bilinç düzeyinde meydana gelmelidir. Öznenin farkında olmadığı fizyolojik süreçler bu tartışma bağlamında algı sayılmazlar. O halde, bu çalışmada sözü edilen algısal içerik *kişisel düzeyde olan temsil edici içerik* olarak anlaşılmalıdır.

Kavramsalcı argümanları sunmadan önce kavramsalcılığın ve karşıt görüşün farklı iki tanımından kısaca söz etmek yerinde olacaktır. Algı içeriğinin kavramsal olup olmadığı tartışması iki şekilde anlaşılabilir. Bunlardan ilkinde göre, algısal içeriğin kavramsal olup olmaması, algı sahibi öznenin içeriği betimleyen kavramlara sahip olup olmadığı sorusuyla ilgilidir. Yani, kavramsallık doğrudan algı içeriğinin doğasıyla ilgili değil, öznenin sağladığı şartlarla alakalıdır. Diğer tanımlamaya göre, algısal içeriğinin kavramsal olup olmaması doğrudan içeriğin kendisiyle ilgili bir durumdur. Yani, algı içeriğinin inanç içeriği gibi kavramlardan meydana gelip gelmediğine dayanır. Bu ayrım önemli olmakla birlikte, birçok felsefeci tarafından gözetilmemektedir. Bu nedenle, çalışmamın kapsamını bu tanımlamalardan herhangi birine kısıtlamak yerine, tartışmanın her ikisinin de bileşimi üzerinden sunulması ve yürütülmesi daha uygun görünmektedir.

## **2. Kavramsalcılık**

John McDowell ve Bill Brewer gibi bazı düşünürler, algının baştan aşağı kavramsal olduğunu iddia ederler. “Kavramsalcılık” olarak adlandırılan bu görüşe göre, algısal içerik inanç içeriği gibi kavramsaldir ve bir öznenin içerikli bir algısal deneyime sahip olabilmesi için, o algının içeriğini eksiksiz bir biçimde betimleyen kavramların tümüne sahip olması gerekmektedir. Kavramsalcılığın en temel argümanı, algının inanç ve yargıların oluşumunda üstlendiği rasyonel gerekçelendirme rolüne dayanmaktadır. Kavramsalcılara göre eğer algı inanç gibi kavramsal içeriğe sahip bir durumu gerekçelendirebiliyorsa, kendi içeriği de kavramsal olmak zorundadır.

### **McDowell ve “Uslamlama Alanı”**

McDowell kavramsalcı kuramını Kant’ın ünlü “görüsüz kavramlar boş, kavramsız görüler kördür” sloganından yola çıkarak şekillendirir. Ona göre Kant’ın bu söylemi düşüncenin algı yoluyla sağlanan içerikten, algının da düşüncenin kavramlarından bağımsız olamayacağı anlamına gelir. Dış dünya ile ilgili inanç ve yargılarımız algısal deneyimlerimiz tarafından kısıtlanmıştır. Aksi takdirde bir inanç veya yargının dış dünya hakkında oluşundan söz edilemez. Aynı şekilde inanç ve yargılarımızda etkin olan kavramlar daha en baştan algısal deneyim içeriğinde bulunmaktadır. Dünyayı algılarken dahi kavramsal kapasitelerimiz iş başındadır.

Daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, McDowell’a göre kavramsal olmayan hiçbir öge kavramsal olan inancı gerekçelendiremez. Bu nedenle, algısal içeriğin kavramsal olmadığını düşünmek bizi kavramsal olmayan bir unsura rasyonellik atfetmek veya algının inançları gerekçelendirebildiğini reddetmek zorunda bırakır. Bu da McDowell’a göre felsefenin umutsuz iki duruşu arasında gidip gelmemize neden olur. Bunlarda ilki Wilfrid Sellars tarafından öne sürülmüş olan “Verilen Miti” diğeri ise Davidson’un “Tutarlılık Kuramı”dır.

“Verilenin Miti” düşüncenin rasyonel temelini oluşturan şeyin yalın bir varlık olduğu iddiasıdır. Kavramsal olmayan bir olguya rasyonellik atfetmek McDowell’a göre algıya efsanevi bir rol biçmekten daha ötesi olamaz. Rasyonellikten ve kavramlardan tümüyle arınmış bir varlığın inanç ve yargılarla rasyonel bir ilişki içerisinde olduğunu söyleyemeyiz. Sellars’ın da dile getirdiği gibi dışarıdan gelen kaba bir etki inancın nedeni olamaz. Bu nedenle, McDowell’a göre algısal deneyimlerin inançları gerekçelendirebilen zihin durumları olduğunu iddia edeceksek, bu deneyimlerinin içeriklerinin de kavramsal olduğunu kabul etmek zorundayız.

Burada belirtilmesi gereken bir husus vardır. McDowell’a göre algı içeriğinin kavramsal oluşu, kavramların algı yoluyla elde edilen verilere uygulandığı anlamına gelmez. Sözü edilen kavramsallık hiçbir şekilde öznenin aktif bir

kavramsallaştırma etkinliği gerçekleştirilmesi olarak yorumlanmamalıdır. Algı sürecinde, kavramsal kapasiteler pasif bir rol oynarlar. Bu nedenle algı, yargılar gibi kavramsal içeriğe sahip dahi olsa, onların aksine öznenin tamamıyla edilgen olduğu bir durumdur. Öyle ki, kişinin dünyayı nasıl algıladığı kendi elinde değildir, oysa dünyanın algıladığı gibi olduğu yargısına varmak kendi elindedir.

McDowell'a göre Tutarlılık Kuramı inanç ve dış dünya arasındaki bağlantıyı yadsımaktadır. Tutarlılık Kuramına göre, inançların gerekçelendirilmesi bir inanç sistemi içindeki önermelerle tutarlı olmasına bağlıdır. Öyleyse, bu görüşe göre bir inanç ancak diğer inanç veya inançlar tarafından gerekçelendirilebilir. Algı ise inançları gerekçelendirmez onlara sadece sebep olur. Ancak McDowell için tutarlılık kuramı algıya yalnızca nedensel bir rol atfederek düşünce ve inançların dış dünya hakkında oluşuna açıklama getirmekten acizdir. Düşünce, yargı ve inançların deneysel içeriğe sahip olmaları dış dünyanın üzerlerindeki rasyonel kısıtlaması olmadan mümkün değildir. Bu nedenle, algı deneyimleri inanç ve düşüncelere sebep olabilecekleri gibi onların rasyonel temelini de oluştururlar.

Daha önce de belirtmiş olduğum gibi, McDowell gibi kavramsalcılara göre, algısal içeriğin inançları gerekçelendirebiliyor oluşu onların kavramsal olmasını da zorunlu kılar. Çünkü kavramsal olmayan hiçbir unsur inanca rasyonel bir neden teşkil edemez. McDowell ve Brewer'a göre bir inancın rasyonel nedeni olabilme ancak iki koşul sağlanırsa mümkün olabilir. Bunlardan ilkinde göre söz konusu neden öznenin kendi nedeni olmalıdır. Diğer bir deyişle, özne bir inancı bu neden doğrultusunda edinmeli ve bunun farkında olmalıdır. Bu sebeple, üçüncü kişiler tarafından verilmiş olan nedensel bir açıklama algının rasyonel nedeni olamaz. Aynı şekilde, bir inancın gerçek anlamda rasyonel nedeni olabilme için söz konusu neden "ifade edilebilir" olmalıdır. Örneğin, bir özneye neden belirli bir inanca sahip olduğu sorulduğunda, özne inancının nedenini ifade edebilmeli, söze dökülmeli, diğer bir deyişle inancının nedenini söyleyebilmelidir. Eğer bir şey, özne tarafından inancının nedeni olarak tanınabiliyor ve ifade edilebiliyorsa, McDowell ve Brewer'a göre kavramsal

olmak zorundadır. Eđer algıyı da algısal inançların nedeni olarak tasavvur edeceksek, içeriklerinin kavramsal olduğunu kabul etmek zorundayız.

Elbette kavramsalcılığın bu argümanının doğruluđu tartışmaya açıktır. Öncelikle bir inanca neden teşkil etmek için söz konusu nedenin özne tarafından tanınması ve ifade edilebilir olması gerektiđi reddedilebilir. Öte yandan, bu koşulların sağlanması gerektiđi düşünülse bile, özne tarafından tanınıyor ve ifade edilebilir olmanın zorunlu olarak kavramsallığı gerektirdiđi de şüphe götürür. Bu konuya beşinci bölümde daha ayrıntılı bir şekilde değinilecektir.

### **3. Kavram-dışısalcılık**

Kavram-dışısalcılık, kavramsalcılığın aksine, algısal içeriğın kavramsal olmadığını ve bir öznenin içerikli bir algı deneyimine sahip olabilmesi için içeriđi betimleyen kavramlara sahip olması gerektiđini savunan görüştür. Bu görüştün öncülerinden biri olan Gareth Evans'a göre algı deneyimlerimizden yola çıkarak yargıya vardığımız zaman, kavramsal olmayan bir algısal deneyimden kavramsal olan bir yargıya varırız. Kavram-dışısalcılığı makul hale getiren en temel unsur, algının kavramsallık gerektiren diđer yönelimsel zihin durumlarına göre daha temel ve birincil olduğu sezgisidir. Algılayabilme yetisinin kavram sahibi olmayı gerektirmesi kabul edilmesi güç bir iddiadır. Kavram-dışısalcılığı destekleyen sayısız argüman vardır. Bu argümanlar kavramsalcılığı zorunlu olarak yanıřlamasa da, önemli birer sorun teşkil etmektedirler.

#### **Kavramsalcılıđa Karşı Verilen Argümanlar**

##### **Algısal İçeriğın Granüler İnceliđi Argümanı**

Kavramsalcılıđa karşı sunulan ve ilk olarak Evans tarafından dile getirilen argümanlardan birincisi algısal içeriğın granüler inceliđine dayanmaktadır. Bu argümana göre algısal deneyimler sahip olduğumuz kavramlardan daha ince taneli bir yapıya sahiptir. Algısal deneyimlerimiz esnasında nesnelere oldukça

belirli renk, şekil veya dokularda algılarız. Örneğin kırmızı bir nesneyi kırmızının belirli bir tonunda algılarız. Eğer algısal içerik kavramsal ise, öznenin algısının içeriğini betimleyen kavramların tümüne sahip olması gerekmektedir. Ancak algılarımız renklerdeki, şekillerdeki veya seslerdeki çok ince farkları bile temsil edebilirken, bizlerin bu her küçük farkı kapsayabilecek farklı kavramlarımızın olması çok olası görünmemektedir. Algısal olarak ayırt edebileceğimiz renkler onları tanımlayabileceğimiz kavramlardan çok daha fazladır, yani ayırt edebildiğimiz her bir renk için ayrı birer kavramımız yoktur. Öyleyse, ya algısal içerik ince taneli değildir, ya da algısal içerik baştan aşağı kavramsal olamaz.

Ancak McDowell'a göre Algısal İçeriğin Granüler İnceliği Argümanı kavramsallığı hiçbir şekilde tehdit etmez. Çünkü ona göre, aslında kavramsal içeriği tüm inceliği ile kapsayacak kavramlarımız vardır. Evans'ın önerisi sadece "kırmızı", "kare" gibi genel kavramlar için geçerlidir. Ancak "bu kırmızı", "bu ton" gibi gösterimsel (demonstratif) kavramlarımız algısal içerikte temsil edilen özelliklerin tümünü tanımlayacak kadar ince tanelidir. Kavramsal repertuarımızda bu kavramlar hali hazırda bulunmasa dahi, genel kavramlara sahip olduğumuz sürece gösterimsel kavramları oluşturabiliriz. Öyleyse "kırmızı" kavramı kırmızının iki farklı tonu arasındaki farkı kapsayamasa da "bu kırmızı" kavramı bu ayrımı yapabilir.

Gösterimsel Kavramlar Stratejisinin güçlü bir yanıt olmasına karşın, sözünü ettiğimiz kavram-dışsalcı argümanı etkisiz hale getiremediği iddia edilebilir. Bunun en önemli nedeni, gösterimsel kavramların gerçek anlamda birer kavramsal yeti olup olmadıkları sorusudur. Örneğin Wayne Wright'a göre gösterimsel kavramlar, gerçek kavramlar olarak nitelendirilmemelidirler, çünkü farklı zamanlarda farklı nesnelere tanımlamayı sağlayacak kadar uzun bir süre varlıklarını sürdürmezler. Mesela, "ağaç" kavramına sahip olmak için bu kavramı farklı zamanlarda farklı nesnelere sınıflandırmak veya tanımlamak için kullanabiliyor olmak gerekir. Fakat "bu renk" gibi bir kavram deneyim anında doğru bir şekilde kullanılsa dahi, gelecekte karşılaşılabilecek aynı tondaki bir rengi tanımlamada kullanılamaz. Öyleyse, gösterimsel kavramların gerçek birer

kavramsal yeti oldukları gösterilmediği sürece, kavram-dışısalcı argümanlara karşı kullanılamazlar.

### **Algısal İçeriğin Zenginliği**

Kavramsalcı görüşe karşı sunulabilecek diğer bir argüman algısal içeriğin zenginliğine dayanır. Algısal deneyimler sayısız ayrıntıyı aynı anda temsil ederler. Örneğin bir nesneye baktığımız zaman nesnenin sayısız özelliğini ve bu nesnenin arka planında bulunan diğer birçok nesneyi de aynı anda algılarız. Fred Dretske'nin analog ve dijital kodlama arasında yaptığı ayrım algısal içeriğin zengin oluşunu daha iyi anlayabilmek için önemli görünmektedir. Dretske'ye göre eğer bir zihinsel durum  $s$   $F$ 'dir bilgisini analog olarak veriyorsa, bu zihinsel durum  $s$ 'nin  $F$  olmasına ilave olarak farklı bir bilgi de veriyordur. Örneğin bir elmanın kırmızı olduğu algısı, elmanın kırmızı olmasının yanı sıra o elmanın şekli, konumu gibi farklı özelliklerini de temsil eder. Buna karşın inanç bilgiyi dijital olarak taşır. Bir elmanın kırmızı olduğu önermesi elmanın diğer özellikleri hakkında bize herhangi ilave bir bilgi vermez. Kavram-dışısalcı görüşe göre algısal içeriğin bu özelliği, onun kavramsal olmadığı bir göstergesidir çünkü bir öznenin algısal içeriğin temsil ettiği tüm ayrıntıları betimleyecek olan kavramların hepsine aynı anda sahip olması, dahası bu kavramları aynı anda kullanıyor olması mümkün değildir.

Kavramsalcılar bu argümana iki şekilde karşı çıkabilir. Bunlardan ilki algısal içeriğin sanıldığı aksine hiç de zengin olmadığını iddia etmektir. Diğeri ise, algısal içeriğin zenginliğini kabul etmek, ancak bu zenginliğin yine de öznenin sahip olduğu kavramlarla betimlenebileceğini göstermektir.

Elbette algı içeriğinin zengin olduğu iddiası algıladığımız her ayrıntıya dikkatimizi verdiğimiz iddia etmek olarak anlaşılmalıdır. Algılamakta olduğumuz her ayrıntıya aynı şekilde dikkatimizi yoğunlaştırmamız pek de mümkün değildir. Her ne kadar dikkatimizi verdiğimiz ayrıntılar son derece sınırlı olsa da, bu algıladıklarımızın da aynı ölçüde sınırlı olduğunu göstermez.

Kavram-dışısalcılara göre dikkat dışında kalan ayrıntılar algımızın içeriğine dahildir çünkü algının fenomenolojisine katkıda bulunur. Aynı şekilde duyumsal hafıza da bu ayrıntıların gerçek anlamda algılandığını destekleyen bir olgudur. Her ne kadar algısal deneyim sırasında kimi ayrıntılara dikkatimizi vermesek de daha sonra bu ayrıntıları hatırlayabiliyor olmamız bize bu ayrıntıların aslında algılanmış olduğunun ve dolayısıyla algı içeriğinin zengin olduğunun bir göstergesidir.

Yukarıda belirtildiği gibi algısal içeriğin zenginliğini ortaya koymak kavramsalcılığı zorunlu olarak yanlışlamaz, çünkü kavramsalcılığın sunduğu kavramsallık nosyonu öznenin etkin olduğu bir kavramsallaştırma süreci gerektirmez. Oysa zengin bir içeriğin kavramsal olamayacağı iddiası öznenin aynı anda sayısız kavramsallaştırma yapamayacağı iddiasına dayanır. Bir öznenin böylesi büyük bir bilişsel ödevi yerine getirmesi ihtimal dışı görünmektedir. Ancak, eğer algısal içeriğin kavramsallığı McDowell'ın sözünü ettiği gibi öznenin bilişsel bir etkinliğini gerektirmeyen pasif bir durumsa, algının hem içerik olarak zengin hem de kavramsal olduğu iddiaları çelişmemektedir.

### **Gösterimsel Strateji ve Algısal İçeriğin Zenginliği**

Gösterimsel kavramların gerçek birer kavramsal yeti olduğu ve zengin olan algısal içeriğin yine de kavramsal olabileceği gösterilebilirse, yukarıda sunulan argümanların tek başına kavramsalcılığı reddetmede başarılı olamayacağını gördük. Ancak birbirinden farklı bu iki argümanı birleştirirsek, sanıyorum kavramsalcı görüşe çok daha büyük bir hasar verilebilir. Başka bir deyişle algısal içeriğin hem ince taneli hem de ayrıntı bakımından zengin olduğunu iddia ederek kavramsalcıların Gösterimsel Strateji ile başa çıkamayacakları bir eleştiri sunmak mümkündür.

Algısal deneyimlerimizin içeriği hem zengin hem de ince taneli ise, genel kavramlarımızın kapsayamadığı incelikte dikkat dışı bir algısal içerik olduğu sonucuna varabiliriz. Örneğin bakmakta olduğumuz bir nesnenin geri planındaki

ayrıntıları sahip olduğumuz genel kavramlardan daha ince taneli olarak algıladığımızı söyleyebiliriz. Şu an bakmakta olduğum bilgisayarın yanında duran mavi kalem her ne kadar dikkatimin dışında kalsa da, mavinin belli bir tonunda algılanmaktadır. Ancak göreceğimiz üzere, gösterimsel kavramlar tanım gereği bu durumu açıklamakta yetersiz kalmaktadır.

Gösterimsel kavramlar “bu renk”, “bu şekil” gibi bir işaret sıfatı içeren kavramlardır. Bu kavramlar demonstrasyon yani işaret etme yoluyla elde edilirler. Öte yandan işaret etme öznenin etkin olduğu bir eylemdir. Bu bağlamda, demonstrasyon dikkatin belirli bir nesneye yoğunlaştırılmasını gerektirir. Dolayısıyla, demonstratif kavram edinme, algısal yolla bize sunulmuş olan nesnelerin arasından belirli bir nesnenin seçilmesidir. Ancak algısal içeriğin zengin olduğu durumda öznenin bu zengin detayların ince taneli özelliklerini demonstratif kavram yoluyla algılıyor olması, özneyi kaçınılmaz olarak yerine getirilmesi güç, hatta imkânsız bir zihinsel eylemle karşı karşıya bırakır. Öznenin tek bir deneyim esnasında ve aynı zamanda dikkatini birden fazla nesneye yoğunlaştırılması mümkün görünmemektedir. Aynı şekilde, tanımı gereği dikkat gerektiren demonstratif kavramların nasıl olup da dikkat dışı algı içeriğine uygulanabildiği de şüphe götürmektedir. Öyleyse algı içeriğinin hem zengin hem de ince taneli oluşu, kavramsalıcıları Gösterimsel Strateji'nin bile aşamayacağı onulmaz bir çelişkiye sürükler.

### **Algının Önceliği ve Öğrenme Argümanı**

Kavram-dışısalcılığı destekleyen diğer önemli bir sebep algının kavramlara kıyasla daha birincil, daha temel ve zamansal olarak öncül olduğu inancıdır. Bu inancın temeli ise algı deneyimlerinin kavramlarımızın kaynağı olduğunu düşündüren empirisist sezgidir. Eğer bir özne algısının içeriğini betimleyen kavramlara sahip olmak zorunda ise *kavram sahibi olmak* algının kendisine gönderme yapılarak açıklanamaz, aksi takdirde bu açıklama döngüsel olacaktır.

Algının Önceliği Argümanı öncelikle Gösterimsel Strateji'yi hedef almaktadır. Richard Heck, Christopher Peacocke ve Wayne Wright gibi kavram-dışsalcılara göre, bu strateji başarılı olamaz çünkü demonstratif kavramlar algının öncülü olamazlar. Bunu nedeni ise gösterimsel kavramların deneyimler yoluyla elde ediliyor olmalarıdır. Örneğin “bu renk” gibi bir kavram, ancak söz konusu rengi deneyimledikten sonra kullanılabilir olur.

Algının Önceliği Argümanı, yalnızca gösterimsel kavramları değil, genel kavramları da kapsayacak şekilde genişletilebilir. Tıpkı gösterimsel kavramlar gibi, genel kavramların da algısal deneyim yoluyla edinildiği düşünülebilir. “Öğrenme Argümanı” olarak adlandırılan bu argümana göre, kavramların nasıl öğrenildiği açıklayabilmek ancak algısal içeriğin kavramsal olmadığını kabul edersek mümkün olur. Önce şeyleri algılarız daha sonra o şeylerin kavramlarını ediniriz. Eğer kavramların öğrenilen şeyler olduğunu kabul edeceksek, algıların hali hazırda kavramsal olduğunu iddia edemeyiz. Adina L. Roskies' e göre böyle bir tutum, bizi kavramları doğuştan gelen olgular olduğunu kabul etmek zorunda bırakır. Eğer deneyim bir takım kavramlara sahip olmamızı gerektiriyorsa, bu kavramların öğreniliyor olması mümkün görünmemektedir.

Brewer'a göre öğrenme argümanı kavram ve algısal içerik arasındaki ilişkinin nedensel olduğu varsayımına dayanmaktadır. Ancak ona göre bu varsayım yanlıştır. Kavram ve algısal içerik ilişkisi daha ziyade yapısal bir ilişkidir. Diğer bir deyişle, kavramlar algısal içeriğin bir parçasıdır. Bu nedenle, kavram ve algı eşzamanlı olarak görülebileceğinden, kavramları deneyim yoluyla edindiğimizi ve bu deneyimlerin kavramsal olduğunu iddia etmek düşünülenin aksine dögüsel değildir.

### **İlk Algı: Nesnelere İlk Karşılaşma**

Kavram sahibi varlıklar olarak, dünyayı, kendimizi sahip olduğumuz kavramlardan soyutlayarak, algılamaya çalışmamız imkânsızdır. Ancak, kavramların dünyayı algılayış biçimimizde üstlendiği rol algının zorunlu olarak

kavramsal olduğunu göstermez. Bu bölümde algı ve kavramlar arasında mantıksal bir ilişki olmadığını göstermek amacıyla “Molyneux Problemi”nden yola çıkarak, kavramsız algının olabirliğini göstermeye çalışacağım.

William Molyneux, John Locke’a gönderdiği bir mektupta kör olarak doğmuş ve dokunarak bir küpü ve küreyi ayırabilen bir insanın, gözleri görmeye başladığında nesnelere dokunmadan hangi nesnenin küp hangisinin küre olduğunu bilip bilemeyeceğini sorar. Bu sorun farklı duyu modaliteleri arasındaki ilişkiyi irdelemek adına ortaya konmuş olsa da, algı içeriğinin kavramsal olup olmadığı sorusuna da ışık tutabilir. Örneğin, sözü edilen insanın renk kavramlarına sahip olmadığı söylenebilir, çünkü renk şekil ve dokunun aksine yalnızca tek bir duyu modalitesiyle algılanabilir. Öyleyse, Molyneux’nun adamı gözleri ilk açıldığında herhangi bir renk kavramına sahip olmamasına karşın renkleri algılayabilecek olması kavramsalcılığa ters düşmektedir.

Kavramsalcılar, hali hazırda sahip olduğu diğer kavramlar üzerinden Molyneux’nun adamının renkleri algılayabileceğini öne sürebilirler. Ancak Molyneux sorununu daha radikal bir senaryoya büründürerek hiçbir algısal kavrama sahip olmayan bir insan düşünebiliriz. Örneğin, doğuştan komada olan ve tüm hayatı boyunca tek bir algısal deneyim yaşamamış bir insan düşünelim. Bu insanın komadan uyandığı anda yaşadığı ilk deneyim kavramsız bir deneyime örnek teşkil edebilir. Bu kişinin tüm uzuvlarının doktor gözetimi altında sağlıklı bir şekilde gelişmesi sağlanabilirse, komadan uyanıldığı anda gerçek anlamda algısal bir deneyimin yaşanmaması için hiçbir neden yoktur.

Bu argümana karşı verilebilecek en güzel yanıt yukarıda sözü edilen “ilk algı”nın gerçek anlamda bir algısal deneyim olmadığıdır. Kavramsız algı olarak nitelendirilen şeyin aslında sınıflandırılmamış duyular yığını olduğu ve dolayısıyla temsili içeriklerinin olmadığı söylenebilir. Ancak ilk algının gerçek anlamda bir algısal deneyim olduğu kavram sahibi olmayan bebeklerle yapılan çalışmalardan yola çıkılarak gösterilebilir. Ampirik çalışmalar bebeklerin de yetişkinler gibi nesnelere ve bu nesnelere özelliklerini ayırt edebildiklerini

göstermektedir. Örneğin yeni doğmuş bebeklerin uyarılar arasında tercih yapabildikleri ve desenli nesnelere daha uzun süre baktıkları gözlemlenmiştir. Buna benzer çalışmalar çocuk ve bebek algısının gerçek anlamda algı deneyimleri olduğunu desteklemektedir. Aynı düşünce şeklinden yola çıkarak, komadan uyanan bir insanın da aynı şekilde algısal deneyimler yaşayacağını söyleyebiliriz. Kişinin herhangi bir algısal kavrama sahip olmaması ise kavramsalcılığın iddia ettiğinin aksine, kavram olmadan da içerikli algı deneyimleri olabileceğini göstermektedir.

#### **4. Kavramsal Algı ve Temel Algı**

Her ne kadar algısal içeriğin kavramsal olmadığı konusunda kavram-dışısalcılarla hem fikir olmasam da, kavramların algı sürecindeki rolünü yadsımam mümkün değildir. Bu nedenle algıya iki aşamalı bir açıklama sunarak kavramların algı sürecinin hangi safhasında etkin olduğunu göstermek yerinde olacaktır. Algının farklı aşamaları, dolayısıyla da farklı anlamları olduğu iddiası yeni değildir. Algının basit bir durumdan ziyade, bir süreç olduğu pek çok düşünür tarafından kabul edilir. Aynı şekilde, “algı” sözcüğünün farklı bağlamlarda farklı anlamlarda kullanıldığı çoğumuzun hemfikir olduğu bir durumdur. Bu nedenle “algı” sözcüğüyle ne anlatılmak istendiği değişiklik göstermektedir. Kavramsalcılara göre algı kavramsallaştırma sürecini de kapsarken, kavram-dışısalcılara göre bu süreç algının olmazsa olmazı değildir. Bu bölümde Dretske’nin “epistemik algı” ve “epistemik olmayan algı” ayrımından yola çıkarak iki kademeli bir algı anlayışı sunulacaktır. Buna göre algıyı kavramsal yetilerimizi gerektiren “kavramsal algı” ve bu yetileri gerektirmeyen “temel algı” adı altında iki ana kademeye ayırmaktayım. Her ne kadar sunduğum ayrım Dretske’nin ayrımı ile büyük ölçüde örtüşse de, özellikle “kavramsal algı” nosyonum Dretske’nin “epistemik algı” nosyonundan oldukça farklıdır. Tezimin bu bölümünde kavramsal algının bir ön koşulu olarak sunduğum temel algının, temsil edici içeriği ve epistemik önemi olduğunu iddia ederek kavramsalcılığa karşı çıkmaktayım.

## Temel Algı

Temel algıyı kısaca algının kavramsal yetilerimizi gerektirmeyen evresi olarak tanımlayabiliriz. Bu nedenle temel algı deneyimi yaşamak, öznenin kavramsal repertuarından bağımsızdır. Gerçekte sahip olduğumuz kavramları gördüklerimizi kavramsallaştırmada kullanıyor olsak dahi, temel algı hiçbir şekilde kavramsallaştırma gerektirmez. Temel algıya en açıklayıcı tanımlardan birisi Dretske tarafından görsel algı bağlamında verilmektedir. Dretske'ye göre temel algı (onun terminolojisiyle epistemik olmayan algı) nesnelere sahip olduğumuz inançlardan bağımsız olarak algılama biçimidir. Bu çeşit bir algı deneyimi, algılanan nesne hakkında herhangi bir inanç gerektirmez. Benzer bir şekilde, G. J. Warnock temel algıyı tanıma, isimlendirme, betimleme gibi yetileri içermeyen algılama şekli olarak tanımlar.

Eğer temel algının gerçek anlamda bir algılama deneyimi olduğunu iddia edeceksek, onun temsil edici içeriği ve epistemik önemi olduğunu da gösterebilmeliyiz. Diğer bir deyişle temel algıyı karmaşık bir duyular yığını değil, algıladığımız şeyleri bize belli bir şekilde sunan bir deneyim çeşidi olarak kurgulamalıyız. Bu bağlamda, temel algı, “bakıp görmemek” olarak anlaşılmamalıdır. Gözlerimizin bir nesnenin üzerinde olması elbette ki her zaman o nesneyi algıladığımız anlamına gelmez. Dretske'ye göre bir zihinsel durumun temel algı olabilmesi için “Ayırt Etme Koşulu” nu sağlaması gerekmektedir. Yani, özne algıladığı söylenen nesneyi yakın çevresinden ayırt edebilmelidir. Bu durumda, bej bir duvara asılı olan ve hiçbir şekilde ayırt edilemeyen bej bir kağıda bakmak, o kağıdı algıladığımız anlamına gelmez.

“Ayırt Etme Koşulu” temel algının önemli bir işlevini açığa çıkarmaktadır: nesnelere arka planlarından ve diğer nesnelere ayırabilme, yani görsel bir sahneyi nesnelere ayrıştırabilme işlevi. Bunun anlamı temel algının nesnelere kavramsal olmayan bir şekilde bireyselleştirebileceğidir (individuating). Örneğin, bilişsel bilimci Zenon Pylyshyn, kavramsal olmayan “erken görüş” safhasında öznenin nesnelere görsel olarak takip edebildiğini iddia etmektedir. Erken görüş,

öznelere görsel olarak takip ettikleri nesnelere uzamsal ve zamansal süreklilikleri olan nesnelere olarak görmelerini sağlamaktadır. Öyleyse temel algı yoluyla, nesnelere birtakım kavramların veya tanımların kapsamında algılamasak da, onları yine de belli bir şekilde algılarız. Bu nedenle, temel algının temsil edici içeriği olduğunu iddia edebiliriz.

Daha önce sunmuş olduğumuz Radikal Molyneux Sorunu ve bebek algısı, bizlere kavramların olmadığı durumda dahi algının var olabileceğini göstermektedir. Şimdi ise, algının kademeli oluşunu ve kavram sahibi olursa dahi kavramsız algı olabileceğini örneklemek adına “görsel agnozi” olarak adlandırılan tıbbi durumlardan bahsetmek yerinde olacaktır. “Özalgısal agnozi” adı verilen ilk agnozi çeşidine sahip olan kişiler algıda meydana gelen bir sorundan dolayı nesnelere tanıyamazlar. “Assosiyatif agnozi” sahibi kişiler ise, görsel algı ile ilgili bir sorun yaşamazlar ancak algıladıkları nesnelere tanıyamazlar. Assosiyatif agnozi bilişsel bir problemdir ve algıların kavramsallaştırılmasından kaynaklanır. Bu agnozi çeşitleri bize algının en az iki kademedan oluştuğunu göstermekle kalmaz, aynı zamanda kavramsız algı olabileceğine dair somut bir örnek teşkil eder.

### **Kavramsal Algı**

Temel algı, adından da anlaşılacağı üzere algının en temel formunu oluşturursa da, “algı” teriminin her kullanımını ve algının her evresini açıklamakta yetersiz kalır. Kavramlarımızın neredeyse her deneyimimizde etkin olması, bizi kaçınılmaz olarak kavramsal olan bir algı formunu kabul etmeye zorlar. “Algılamak” teriminin birçok bağlamda öznenin nesnelere nasıl kavramsallaştırdığını içerdiği inkâr edilemez bir olgudur. Dretske’ye göre “epistemik algı” veya “anlamalı algı” olarak adlandırılan bu algı formu ile *hakikatleri* algılarız. Her ne kadar ortaya koyduğum “temel algı” nosyonu Dretske’nin “epistemik olmayan algı” kavramı ile örtüşse de, “kavramsal algı” olarak nitelendirdiğim algı çeşidi epistemik algıdan oldukça farklıdır.

Dretske'ye göre epistemik algı inanç ve yargı içeren algıdır. Bu nedenle, epistemik olmayan algının aksine öznelerin kavramlara sahip olmasını ve bu kavramları kullanmasını gerektirir. Dretske epistemik algı yoluyla hakikatleri algıladığımızı düşünür. Hakikat ise doğru bir ifadenin tekabül ettiği şeydir. Dretske'ye göre epistemik algı “—duğunu görmek” formunda ifade edilir ve öznenin algılanan nesne ile ilgili bir inanca sahip olmasını gerektirir. Örneğin “gökyüzünün mavi olduğunu görmek” epistemik algıdır. Eğer epistemik algı ile algılanılan bir hakikat ise, gökyüzünün mavi olduğu doğru olmalıdır. Diğer bir deyişle, algı gerçeğe uygun ve içerdiği algısal inanç da doğru olmak zorundadır.

Kavramların algı sürecinde yer aldığı bir evreden söz edeceksek, Dretske'nin epistemik algı anlayışı fazla talepkardır. Bir zihinsel durumun kavramsal olup olmayışı o durumun içeriğinin gerçeğe uygun olup olmamasına bağlı değildir. Bu nedenle kavramsal algı hakikatlerin algısı olmak zorunda değildir. Özne tarafından kavramsallaştırma yapılması yeterli bir koşuldur. “Kavramsal algı” olarak adlandırmayı uygun gördüğüm bu algı çeşidi “—duğunu görmek” formunda değil, “olarak görmek” formundadır. Örneğin bir şeyi kırmızı olarak görmek kavramsal algıdır ve öznenin o şeyi kırmızı olarak kavramsallaştırdığını gösterir. Bununla beraber, algılanan şeyin gerçekten kırmızı olmasını gerektirmez.

Kavramsal algı iki şey içermektedir: temel algı ve temel algısal inanç. Temel algı her türlü kavramsal algının olmazsa olmaz bir önkoşuludur. Bir nesneyi temel olarak algılamadan kırmızı olarak da algılayamayız. Aynı şekilde, tüm kavramsal algılar algılanılan nesnelere hakkında bir görsel inanç barındırır. Örneğin bir nesneyi kırmızı olarak algılamak, o nesnenin kırmızı olduğu inancını zorunlu olarak içerir. Ancak Dretske'nin iddia ettiğinin aksine, bu inanç doğru olmak zorunda değildir.

Kavramsal algının barındırdığı algısal inanç öznenin açık bir yargısı olmak durumunda değildir. Zira çoğu zaman algısal inançlarımızı açık yargılara çevirmeyiz. Aynı şekilde algısal inançlar çıkarımlar yoluyla elde edilmezler.

Algısal inanç, öznenin algıladığı nesneyi kavramsallaştırması yoluyla elde edilen inançtır. Diğer bir deyişle, bir nesnenin kırmızı olduğu inancını edinme süreci, o nesneye “kırmızı” kavramını uygulama sürecine tekabül eder. Daha açık hale getirmek gerekirse: bir nesneye *algısal bir kavram* atfetmek, o nesne hakkında *algısal bir inanç* edinmekle aynı şeydir. Bu inanç nesnenin söz konusu kavramın kapsamında olduğu inancıdır.

## **5. Kavram-dışı Algısal İçerik ve Gerekçeleştirme**

Bu bölümde kavram-dışı algısal içerik ve algısal inanç arasındaki ilişkiyi irdeleyecek ve kavram-dışı algısal içeriğin algısal inançların rasyonel nedeni olabileceğini göstermeye çalışacağım. Bu bağlamda amacım eksiksiz bir gerekçeleştirme kuramı sunmaktan ziyade, kavram-dışı içeriğin nasıl olup ta gerekçeleştirme yapabileceğine ışık tutmaktır.

### **Algısal İçerik ve İfade Edilebilirlik Koşulu**

Birçok durumda sahip olduğumuz inançların nedenlerini ifade edebildiğimiz yadsınamaz bir gerçektir. Örneğin, gökyüzünün mavi olduğuna neden inandığımız sorulduğunda birçoğumuz “çünkü mavi görünüyor”, “çünkü gökyüzünün mavi olduğunu görüyorum” veya “gökyüzünün görünüşünden dolayı” cevaplarından birini veririz. Kavramsalcılara göre bu durum algısal içeriğin kavramsal olduğunun göstergesidir, çünkü inancımızın nedeni olarak ifade ettiğimiz şey algısal içeriktir ve bir şeyin kavramsal olmadan ifade edilebiliyor olması mümkün değildir. Ancak ben inançlarımızın nedenlerini ifade edebiliyor oluşumuzun algısal içeriğin kavram-dışı olmasıyla son derece tutarlı olduğunu iddia etmekteyim.

Daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, kavramsalcılara göre bir şeyin gerçek anlamda inançlarımıza neden teşkil edebilmesi için ifade edilebilir olması gerekmektedir. Öyleyse, algısal deneyimlerimizin algısal inançların nedeni olduğunu kabul ediyorsak içeriklerinin de kavramsal olduğunu kabul etmeliyiz. Bu iddiaya karşı

çıkmanın bir yolu, inançlarımızın nedenlerini ifade etmek zorunda olmadığımızı söylemektir. Örneğin, gerekçelendirilmiş bir inancımız olsa dahi, bu inancın nedenini ifade etmemizi sağlayacak kavramlardan yoksun olmamız pekala mümkündür. Örneğin bir çocuğa bir önermeye neden inandığı sorulduğunda, çocuğun cevap veremiyor olması inancının gerekçelendirilmemiş veya nedensiz olduğu anlamına gelmez. Ben bu konuda çok daha radikal bir tavır sergileyerek algısal içeriğin, inanç içeriği gibi ifade edilebilir olmadığını iddia etmekteyim. Bu iddia ilk bakışta kabul edilmesi zor gibi görünse de “ifade etmek” ve “gönderme yapmak” kavramları arasındaki ayrımı vurgulayarak bu iddiamı temellendireceğim.

Kavramsalcıların argümanlarını dayandırdıkları “ifade edilebilmek” nosyonu herhangi bir şeyin söze dökülebilmesi anlamına gelir. Bu bağlam içerisinde, ifade edilen şey, ifade etmekte kullandığımız terimin veya tümcenin anlamıdır. Bu nedenle ifade edilebilen her şey kavramsalıdır. Öte yandan, gönderme yapmak bir ifadenin anlamı ile ilgili değil bu ifadenin göndergesi ile alakalıdır. Örneğin “ağaç” terimi bir ağacı ifade etmez, ona gönderme yapar. Bir şeyin gönderme yapılabilir olması onu kavramsal olmasını gerektirmez. Tıpkı ağaca gönderme yapılmasının ağacın kavramsal olmasını gerektirmediği gibi. Bu ayrımı daha açık hale getirmek adına, gökyüzünün mavi olduğu inancıyla ilgili şu iki ifadeye bir göz atalım: “inancımın içeriği” ve “gökyüzü mavidir.” İlk ifade inancın içeriğine gönderme yapmaktadır, bu nedenle “inanç” ve “içerik” kavramlarının inancın içeriğinin bir parçası olduğunu göstermez. İkinci ifade ise inanç içeriğinin dolaysız olarak ifade eder, bu ifadenin anlamı inanılan önermenin kendisidir. Bu durumda, “gökyüzü” ve “mavi” kavramları inancın içeriğinin parçalarıdır. Bu ifadelerin her ikisi de birtakım kavramsal yetiler gerektirsel de, yalnızca ikincisi bir inancın içeriğini gerçek anlamda ifade etmektedir.

İfade etmek ve gönderme yapmak arasındaki bu ayrım İfade Edilebilirlik Argümanı’na karşı kullanılabilir. Algısal bir inanca neden olarak gösterilen “gökyüzünün görünüşünden dolayı” ifadesine bir bakalım. Kavramsalcılara göre algının içeriğini ifade ettiği düşünülen bu söz, o içeriğin kavramsal olduğunun

göstergesidir. Ancak yukarıda değinilen ayrım göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, aslında bu sözün algısal içeriği ifade etmediği, daha ziyade ona gönderme yaptığı iddia edilebilir. Algısal içerik “gökyüzünün görünüşü” sözünün anlamı değil, göndergesidir. Ve bir şeye kavramlar yoluyla gönderme yapmak, o şeyin kavramsal olmasını gerektirmez. Bu nedenle, algısal inancımızın nedeni sorulduğunda “görünüşünden dolayı” cevabını veriyor oluşumuz kavramsalcılığı hiçbir şekilde desteklememektedir.

### **Kavram-dışı Algısal İçerik İnançlara Nasıl Neden Olabilir?**

Bu bölümde kavramsal olmayan algısal içeriğin inançları gerekçelendirme rolünü üstlenmek için uygun bir aday olduğunu göstermeye çalışacağım. Daha önce belirtildiği gibi, kavramsalcılara göre bir şeyin inançlara gerçek anlamda neden olabilmesi için, söz konusu nedenin *öznenin kendi nedeni* olması gerekmektedir. Neden olarak öne sürülen kavram-dışı açıklama çabaları ise bir inancın sebebini açıklasa da, özne açısından o inancı neden edinildiğini ve öznenin kendi nedeninin ne olduğunu açıklayamaz. Ancak bana göre, kavramsal olmayan algısal içerik de kavramsalcılarının “neden” kavramına yüklediği bu koşulları sağlayabilmektedir. Bunun başlıca göstergeleri:

1. Kavram-dışı algısal içeriğin temsil edici olması
2. Kişisel (personal) düzeyde meydana gelmesi
3. İnançların nedeni olarak gösterilebilir ve gönderme yapılabilir olmasıdır.

Kavramsal olmayan algısal içeriğin inançları gerekçelendiremeyeceği genel olarak onun temsili olmayan kişi-altı (sub-personal) durumlar olarak kurgulanmasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, öznenin farkında bile olmadığı ve içi boş bir algı anlayışının inançları temellendiremeyeceği açıktır. Ancak, algısal içeriğin temsil edici olduğuna temel algının işlevleri bağlamında değinmiş ve temel algının, nesnelere kavramsal olmayan bir düzeyde temsil edebildiğini göstermiştik. Aynı şekilde sunmakta olduğum “temel algı” kavramı öznenin bilinç düzeyinde gerçekleşmektedir. Bununla beraber, algısal içeriğe

gönderme yapılabilmesinin de onun kavramsal olduğunu göstermeyeceğini bir önceki bölümde gördük. Ancak belirtmek gerekir ki, algısal içeriğe inançların nedeni olarak gönderme yapılabiliniyor oluşu, diğer bir deyişle, bir özneye inancının nedeni sorulduğunda algısal içeriğe işaret edebilmesi, algısal içeriğin özne tarafından inancının nedeni olarak tanındığını göstermektedir. Algısal içeriğin bu özellikleri onun tamamen kavram-dışı olmasıyla tutarlı olmakla kalmaz, kavram-dışı olmasına rağmen inançlarımıza rasyonel temel teşkil edebileceğini de gösterir.

### **Temel Algıdan Kavramsal Algıya Geçiş**

Bir önceki bölümde kavramsal algının temel algı ve bu temel algıya dayalı bir algısal inanç içerdiğini söylenmişti. Öyleyse, temel algının algısal inançları nasıl gerekçelendirdiği veya rasyonel temel oluşturabildiği gösterilebilirse, temel algıdan kavramsal algıya geçiş açıklık kazanacaktır.

Sahip olduğumuz birçok inancı çıkarsama yoluyla edindiğimiz yadsınamaz bir gerçektir. Ancak temel algısal inançların oluşumu ve gerekçelendirilmesi farklı bir süreç takip eder. Yukarıda kavram uygulama ile eşdeğer tutmuş olduğum algısal inançların oluşumunu anlamak, kavramların hangi temel üzerinden uygulandığını anlamaya bağlıdır. Eğer inanç edinme bir kavram uygulama süreci ise, kavram uygulamayı rasyonel olarak temellendiren şey, algısal inancı da temellendirir. Bu düşünce şeklinden yola çıkarak oluşturulan kavram-dışı algısal içeriğin inanç edinmedeki rolü ile ilgili argüman basit olarak şöyledir:

- (1) Algısal inanç edinme temel olarak algılanan nesneye kavram uygulamak ile aynı şeydir.
- (2) Temel algının kavram-dışı içeriği, algılanan nesnelere kavram uygulamak için rasyonel dayanak teşkil ederler.
- (3) Öyleyse, temel algının kavram-dışı içeriği algısal inanç edinmek için rasyonel dayanak teşkil eder.

Kavram-dışı algısal içerik algılanan nesnelere belirli kavramların uygulanmasına *uygun zemin* sağlayarak, algısal inançların oluşmasını sağlar. Kırmızı bir masayı algıladığımızı düşünelim. Bu deneyimin içeriği, diğer bir deyişle masayı bize nasıl temsil ettiği, masaya “mavi” kavramından ziyade “kırmızı” kavramını uygulamamız için uygun zemini verir. José Luís Bermúdez’in de belirtmiş olduğu gibi, öznenin bir nesneye “kırmızı” kavramını uygulaması ancak deneyimi o nesneyi uygun bir şekilde sunarsa mümkün olur. Böylelikle, algıladığımız nesneye “kırmızı” kavramını atfederek o nesnenin kırmızı olduğu inancını edinmiş oluruz. Ve bu inanç temel algımızın içeriği tarafından rasyonel olarak temellendirilmiş olur.

Algısal içerik ve algısal inanç arasındaki rasyonel ilişkiyi kavram uygulama ile açıklamak, algısal içeriğin neden kavram-dışı olması gerektiğini daha açık hale getirir, çünkü içeriğin hali hazırda kavramsal olduğu bir durumda, ona kavram atfedilmesinin bir anlamı olmayacaktır çünkü. Öyleyse, algısal inanç-algısal içerik ilişkisi yalnızca kavramsal içerikler arasında gerçekleşebilen bir ilişki değildir ve gerekçelendirme işlevi kavramsal olmayan unsurlar tarafından da gerçekleştirilebilmektedir.

Sonuç olarak, algının inanç ve bilgi oluşumunda sahip olduğu rolü anlamak için ona, yargılama, inanma, düşünme gibi daha karmaşık zihinsel durumlara özgü özellikler atfetmek gereksizdir. Eğer algı tüm bu zihinsel faaliyetlerin kaynağı ise, bir anlamda onlardan daha temel ve birincil olmalıdır. Bu nedenle bu tez, genel olarak düşüncüyü ve inancı önceleyen ancak en az onlar kadar epistemik önem taşıyan bir algı anlayışı sunma çabası olarak görülebilir. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı kavramsal ve kavram-dışı tartışma zeminine oturtulmuştur. Algısal içeriği baştan aşağı kavramsal olarak nitelendiren kavramsal görüşe karşı, kavram-dışı bir anlayış benimsenmiş ve bir öznenin gerekli kavramlara sahip olmasa dahi içerikli bir algı deneyimi yaşayabileceği iddia edilmiştir. Kavram-dışı algısal içeriğin inançları gerekçelendirme rolü üstlenebileceği gösterilerek, kavramsalcılarının en temel dayanağı çürütülmeye çalışılmıştır.

## APPENDIX C: TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

### ENSTİTÜ

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enformatik Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>

### YAZARIN

Soyadı : Arıkan Sandıkcıoğlu

Adı: Pakize

Bölümü : Felsefe

**TEZİN ADI:** Perception with and without Concepts: Searching for a Nonconceptualist Account of Perception

**TEZİN TÜRÜ :** Yüksek Lisans  Doktora

1. Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.
2. Tezimin içindekiler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.
3. Tezimden bir (1) yıl süreyle fotokopi alınamaz.

**TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ:**