

DO SENSE EXPERIENTIAL STATES HAVE CONCEPTUAL CONTENT?

BILL BREWER

My thesis in this paper is:

(CC) Sense experiential states have conceptual content.

I take it for granted that sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs; indeed this claim forms the first premise of my central argument for (CC).¹ The subsequent stages of the argument are intended to establish that a person has such a reason for believing something about the way things are in the world around him only if he is in some mental state or other with a conceptual content: a conceptual state. Thus, given that sense experiential states do provide reasons for empirical beliefs, they must have conceptual content.

The plan of the paper is this. After characterizing as precisely as possible conceptual content itself, I offer an argument for the claim that sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs only if they have conceptual content.² As I say, I assume without argument that sense experiential states do indeed provide such reasons. So this constitutes my prima facie argument for (CC) (section I). Then (in sections II and III), I consider a number of recent critical discussions of (CC).³

I

¹See my 1999, esp. chs. 2 & 3, for extended argument in support of this assumption.

²This draws heavily on my 1999, 5.1. It receives further elucidation and defence in 5.2 & 5.3; and I engage with a number of important criticisms in my 2001a and 2001b.

³ In particular, I discuss Heck (2000), Peacocke (2001), and Kelly (2001).

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, and which is of a form which enables it to serve as a premise or the conclusion of a deductive argument, or of an inference of some other kind (e.g. inductive or abductive).⁴ The requirement that the content has a form which enables it to serve as the premise or conclusion of an inference captures the idea that conceptual contents are the contents of judgements – those mental acts which are the source of, and are themselves susceptible to, rational inferential justification in the light of their essential concern with the truth, their norm of correctly registering how things are. The requirement that the component concepts, which articulate inferential premises and conclusions in a way which makes explicit this inferential justificational power, should, in the case of a conceptual state, actually be possessed by the subject, captures the idea that this should be a possible judgment by that very subject.⁵

⁴Note that such contents may be ineliminably demonstrative, the component concepts of which can only be grasped by a person actually standing in certain perceptual-attentional relations with their semantic values, or by someone who has done so within the range of his capacity to retain the relevant demonstrative concepts in memory. This inclusion is extremely important to my own account of how it is that sense experiential states provide the reasons which they do for empirical beliefs. See my 1999, esp. ch. 6.

⁵Note that this way of understanding ‘conceptual content’ is incompatible with a constraint upon the notion which Heck (2000, p. 486) ascribes to Evans (1982), and himself intends to respect, namely, that the claim that even the content of belief is conceptual should be substantive rather than trivially definitional. If, as I take is the case, belief is the upshot of judgement by the subject in question, then belief content is conceptual by definition on my understanding. Stalnaker (1998) clearly respects Heck’s

My central argument for (CC) has the following overall form.

- (1) Sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs.
 - (2) Sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs only if they have conceptual content.
- ∴ (CC) Sense experiential states have conceptual content.

I assume (1) without argument here. My argument for (2) proceeds in two stages, which mirror the two components of the notion of conceptual content identified above. The first stage makes explicit the connection between reasons and inference, and hence between giving reasons and identifying contents of a form which enables them to serve as the premises and conclusions of inferences. The second establishes a constraint upon genuine reasons - reasons for the subject - imposed by the way in which his own conceptual resources are available for the configuration of his mental states. Recalling the definition of conceptual mental states given above, as those with a representational content which is characterizable only in terms of concepts which the subject himself possesses and which is of a form which enables it to serve as a premise or the conclusion of a deductive argument or of an inference of some other kind, this yields the required conclusion, that having reasons in general consists in being in a conceptual mental state,

constraint in arguing that all content is non-conceptual. As he means it, this is certainly an interesting and substantive thesis; but it is not properly put in these terms as I use them here. My concern is with the extent to which perception is to be assimilated to judgement, in respect of the nature and type of its content. In the context of an understanding of conceptual states as those whose content is the content of a possible judgement by the subject, this raises precisely the question of my title: do sense experiential states have conceptual content?

and hence, in particular, that sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs only if they have conceptual content. I take each of the two stages in turn.

A reason is necessarily a reason for something. In the current context, sense experiential states are to provide reasons for the subject's making a particular judgement, or holding a certain belief, about how things are in the world around her. To give the subject's reason in this context is to identify some feature of her situation which makes the relevant judgement or belief appropriate, or intelligible, from the point of view of rationality. It is, paraphrasing McDowell (1985, p. 389), to mention considerations which reveal the judgement or belief as at least approximating to what rationally ought to happen in those circumstances. Now, making something intelligible from the point of view of rationality in this way necessarily involves identifying a valid deductive argument, or inference of some other kind, which articulates the source of the rational obligation (or permission) in question. This constitutes an explicit reconstruction of the reasoning in virtue of whose correctness this obligation (or permission) is sustained. For rational intelligibility, or appropriateness of the kind revealed by giving reasons, just is that mode of approbation which is made explicit by the reconstruction of valid reasoning of some such kind to a conclusion which is suitably related to the judgement or belief for which the reasons are being given.⁶ Hence, in making essential reference to the relevant valid inference, giving a reason involves making essential reference to its premises and conclusion, and so, trivially, to the kinds of things which can serve as the premises or conclusion of some kind of inference. In keeping with the standard usage, I call such contents propositions. This, then, is the first premise of my argument for (2): giving reasons involves identifying certain relevant propositions - those contents which figure as the premises and conclusions of inferences explicitly articulating the reasoning involved. In particular, sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs only in virtue

⁶Note here that I intend 'validity' to be interpreted very widely, to capture the correctness or acceptability of inductive and abductive reasoning as well as formal deductive validity.

of their appropriate relations with propositions suitably inferentially related to the contents of the beliefs in question.

Second, we are interested here, not just in any old reasons which there may be for making judgements or holding beliefs - such as their simply happening to be true, or beneficial in some mysterious way to the subject's overall well-being - but only in reasons for the subject to do these things, to take things actually to be the way she believes them to be. These must be the subject's own reasons, which figure as such from her point of view, in virtue of her being in the sense experiential states which provide such reasons. It follows from this that the premise propositions, suitably inferentially related to the contents of the beliefs in question, cannot be related to the relevant sense experiential states merely indirectly, as some kind of extrinsic characterization on the part of the theorist. Rather, they must actually be the contents of these experiential states, in a sense which requires that the subject has all of their constituent concepts. Otherwise, even though being in such states may make it advisable, relative to a certain external end or need, for her to make the judgement or hold the belief in question, it cannot provide her own reason for doing so. Thus, sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs only if they have conceptual content: this is (2) above.

The two stages of this argument for (2) can be illustrated by consideration of an apparently alternative conception of the rational role of sense experience. It is agreed on this conception, both that this role is to be characterized by the association between the sense experiences involved and some form of reasoning, and also that conceptual contents are identified by their role in deductive and other inferential reasoning. The key difference, it is claimed, between the rational role of sense experience and that of thought or judgement is that the relevant background reasoning capacities in the former case are essentially imagistic. So, crudely, just as the rational role of the thought that [p & q] in sustaining the judgement that p depends upon the deductive validity of the inference from [p & q] to p, the rational role of a perception of two figures in sustaining the judgement

that they are identical in size and shape depends upon the correctness of a certain imagistic rotation and translation of the one figure into the other in connection with this judgement. Thus, a person sees the two figures in question, A and B, say; and she arrives at the judgement that they are identical in size and shape by imaginatively transforming A into B by a certain rotation and translation. She has a reason for her resultant belief that A and B are identical in size and shape. Her sense experience of A and B provides her reason for this empirical belief. Yet there is, according to the proponent of this alternative conception, no need to regard the content of this sense experience as conceptual. For the reasoning in which it is involved, in virtue of which it provides the subject's reason for belief, is neither deductive, nor strictly inferential of any other kind. So we do not even need to postulate the involvement of conceptual contents in this process of reasoning at all, except at the final stage of judgement of course, never mind identify such propositions with the contents of the experiences in question.

This account faces at least the following two questions. First, what sustains the 'correctness' of this imagistic reasoning? Second, how does its correctness in this sense provide the subject with her reason for belief?

In connection with the first, I claim that the 'correctness' of the reasoning in question, with respect to the target judgement that A and B are identical in size and shape, is due to the deductive validity of the following argument.

- (a) If two figures can be moved one onto the other by translation and rotation, then they are identical in size and shape.
- (b) That_A figure can be transformed into that_B one by translating and rotating thus.⁷

⁷ Note that this second premise is only available to be thought by the subject in virtue of her actual experiential relations with A and B, and of the imaginative manipulation which

∴ (c) A and B are identical in size and shape.

Clearly, not any old experiential manipulation counts as genuine imagistic reasoning, in the sense in which such reasoning is what backs the rational role of sense experience, according to the proposal under consideration. In order to serve this role, the manipulation in question must make the subject's belief in the proposition that A and B are identical in size and shape rationally appropriate. Insofar as it succeeds in doing so, I can see no alternative to the deductive argument above as the ultimate source of this rational appropriateness. It is precisely because this argument is valid that the manipulation which she performs in transforming A into B by translation and rotation makes her judgement that A and B are identical in size appropriate, or intelligible, from the point of view of rationality; and this is what it is for her experience to provide her with a reason for her belief.

More is required than simply the abstract existence, as it were, of this rational appropriateness, if her sense experience is to provide her reason for the empirical belief in question, if it is to make her believing that A and B are identical in size and shape actually reasonable for her. It would be no good, for example, if she were simply manipulating the experienced figures at random in her imagination, and found herself believing that they are identical in size and shape as the first thing which came into her head. The correctness of the imagistic reasoning which she performs in connection with the judgement that A and B are identical in size provides her reason for this belief only if she has some recognition of its correctness in this regard. I contend that it is a necessary condition upon her recognizing her reason for belief as a reason, in this sense, that her grasp of (a) and (b) should be in some way operative in her transition from her imagistic

she performs on the basis of these relations. For 'that_A', 'that_B' and 'thus' are all essentially experiential perceptual demonstratives. Still, (b) is none the worse for that. Indeed, this fact helps to explain the sense in which the reasoning in question is imagistic.

manipulation to her belief in (c). Of course, (a) is most likely to be a standing piece of background knowledge on her part, informing her move from (b) to (c). The key point for present purposes is that she actually endorses (b), and effectively deduces (c) from it in the context of background knowledge of (a). This, I claim, is precisely what her performance of the relevant piece of imagistic reasoning consists in. It is no idle experiential manipulation, but the directed endorsement of (b) as a ground for (c), in the light of (a). What makes this a piece of imagistic reasoning is the point noted earlier, that grasp of (b) is essentially experiential. For ‘that_A’, ‘that_B’ and ‘thus’, as they occur in this premise, are all perceptual demonstratives, which depend for their correct understanding, both upon the subject’s actually standing in the relevant experiential relations with A and B, and upon her actually making the translational rotational transformation of A into B which she makes in imagination on this basis. The sense experience which provides her reason for belief therefore has precisely the content of premise (b), which is by definition conceptual: it constitutes the premise of a deductive argument, and has to be grasped by the subject in a sense which requires that she possess all of its constituent concepts. Contrary to initial appearances, then, the proposed alternative conception of the rational role of sense experience as grounded in peculiarly imagistic reasoning serves rather to illustrate and further reinforce the two stage argument set out above for premise (2) of my central argument for (CC). I therefore take (2) to be established: sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs only if they have conceptual content.

Given my standing assumption of premise (1), this completes the prima facie case for (CC). In what follows, I attempt to provide further support for the conceptualist claim, and to round out my initial argument, by considering a series of recent critical discussions of this idea that the content of sense experiential states is conceptual.

II

Richard Heck (2000) presents a number of considerations, both against the conceptualist claim itself, and also against premise (2) of my argument for (CC). I begin, in this section, with the former.

An initial objection to the conceptualist account of perceptual content is that this fails to capture the richness, or fineness of grain, in our sense experience. For surely a person can discriminate more shades of red in visual perception, say, than he has concepts of such shades, like ‘scarlet’, for example? The standard conceptualist response to this initial objection is to exploit the availability of demonstrative concepts of colour shades, like ‘that_R shade’, said or thought whilst is attending to a particular sample, R.⁸ Now, Heck agrees, both that such demonstrative phrases do express genuine concepts of determinate colour shades, and also that these are actually available for use in thought by a subject attending appropriately to the sample in normal viewing conditions; but he insists that the conceptualist claim that such concepts capture the way in which the colour of R is presented in sense experience is incompatible with a strong intuition that it is the way in which colours are so presented which explains how the subject had access to such demonstrative colour-shade concepts in thought.

The conceptualist claims that sense experiential states have conceptual content, in particular, that fine-grained colour shades are experientially presented as falling under demonstrative concepts. Heck objects that this is incompatible with the idea that it is a person’s experience of particular colour samples which explains his possession of such demonstrative concepts. His argument must be this.

⁸ For more detailed presentation of both the initial objection and the demonstrative response, along with supporting references, see McDowell (1994, Lecture III, and Afterword, Part II), and Brewer (1999, 5.3.1).

- (a) A person's sense experience of colour samples explains his possession of the demonstrative colour concepts under which they fall.
- (b) If experience is to explain a person's possession of a concept, C, then its content cannot involve C as a constituent.
- ∴ (c) Experiences of colour samples do not have demonstrative colour concepts as constituents.
- ∴ (d) The conceptualist's response to the Richness Argument fails.

Although Heck himself admits that he finds this argument compelling, he also grants explicitly that the conceptualist may, and indeed is likely to, resist it, by denying (b). The idea would be that, in the sense in which experience explains demonstrative concept possession, the explanation is constitutive rather than causal. On the conceptualist view, experience of a colour sample, R, just is a matter of entertaining a content in which the demonstrative concept 'that_R shade' figures as a constituent. Thus, it is, in a perfectly natural sense, because he has the experience which he has, that the subject is able to employ that concept in thought. In virtue of his entertaining the concept in experience, it is available for further use in judgement and belief.⁹ Still, Heck pushes the anti-conceptualist argument further. For there are two consequences of the conceptualist account as it is now set up which he finds unacceptable. First, it is incompatible with any substantive account of what fixes the semantic value of the demonstrative colour concepts involved. Second, it rules out the possibility of certain types of perceptual error, which evidently arise. I consider these in turn.

(CC) is indeed incompatible with an Evansian account of what fixes the semantic value of demonstrative concepts, on which 'that_R shade' is a concept of the fine-grained colour of R in virtue of the fact that the subject's attitudes towards contents containing it

⁹ See Brewer (2001a, in discussion with Eilan) for further development of the objection and reply here.

are suitably sensitive to information about that colour delivered mainly in perception (Evans, 1982, pp. 145ff; Heck, 2000, p. 493). For this account is rendered viciously circular by the claim that possession of such perceptual information is a matter of entertaining that very concept. It is not the only possible substantive account of what fixes the semantic value of demonstrative colour concepts, though. For example, the conceptualist may well be inclined to develop the following closely related proposal. ‘That_R shade’ is a concept of the fine-grained colour of R in virtue of the fact that the subject’s attitudes towards contents containing it are suitably sensitive that colour itself, where this sensitivity in large part depends upon his normal neurophysiological perceptual processing. So Heck’s first further consequence is no consequence at all of the conceptualist account as it now stands.

Nor, I argue now, is his second. He asks us to consider the perceptual judgement expressed by a person’s utterance of ‘that part of my desk is that colour’, pointing twice at the same part of her desk. This judgement is bound to be true. For the demonstrative ‘that colour’ refers to the colour which the relevant part of her desk actually has. Yet her perceptual experience may be mistaken in the colour it presents that part of her desk as being. So the content of her experience cannot be that of the perceptual demonstrative judgement, as the conceptualist account proposes. More generally, the present version of conceptualism is incompatible with the evident possibility of perceptual misrepresentation.

Evans’ own work on demonstrative thought suggests a response to this line of objection (1982, ch. 6, 1984). Demonstrative reference to a particular object depends, in Evans’ view, on the subject’s capacity to keep track of the object in question over time, appropriately modifying her attitudes and responses to its movement or her changing position in relation to it (1982, ch. 6). Failure to exercise this capacity results in a failed attempt at a demonstrative thought about that thing, although the subject may of course instead be capable of entertaining various other kinds of thoughts, some of which may be

true, some false. Similarly, then, the conceptualist might insist that there are tracking conditions upon successful demonstrative reference to the fine-grained colours of the things within her view. In particular, she must have some ability to keep track of the shade in question over certain variations in viewing conditions: some changes of perspective, lighting, the presence or absence of shadows and so on. Given that she is tracking the colour of something which she is looking at in this way, then her experience of it consists in her entertaining the conceptual content ‘that is coloured thus’, which is indeed bound to be true. Errors in colour perception are perfectly possible on this account, though, when the required tracking fails, and the relevant demonstrative colour concept ‘coloured thus’ is not available for the subject. Her experience in the relevant respect consists in a failed attempt to grasp that concept, a failed attempt at demonstrative reference to the specific shade in question, and is therefore, and in that sense, mistaken. So perceptual error is perfectly possible on the conceptualist account as it is now set up, and Heck’s second accusation is also mistaken.

Thus, I conclude that Heck’s first wave of arguments, targeted directly against the conceptualist thesis (CC) itself, fail.¹⁰

Christopher Peacocke (2001) offers a number of additional arguments in favour of the claim that a level of non-conceptual content is essential to a proper understanding of the relations between sense experiential states and full blown thoughts about the world presented in experience, and so against the conceptualist account of sense experiential content, (CC). I focus in this section on his treatment of two such issues: the roles of non-conceptual experiential content in, first, a philosophical account of perceptual demonstrative concept possession; and, second, a causal developmental account of observational concept acquisition. In each case, he argues that an account of sense

¹⁰ I consider below, in section III, his further arguments against premise (2) of my argument for (CC).

experiential content as involving demonstrative concepts of colours and other properties fails properly to capture the relevant role of experience in relation to thought.¹¹

An initial problem for the conceptualist is the apparent insistence that all colour experience depends upon possession of the general concept of a colour shade. For the canonical expression of the demonstrative concepts purportedly involved in colour experience is ‘that_R shade’, grasp of which clearly depends upon possession of this general concept. Yet the idea that a person must have the general concept in order to perceive objects as having various specific shades is quite implausible. Peacocke also claims that the conceptualist’s assumption that any “good, successfully referring perceptual demonstrative contain some general concept” (2001, p. 245) is independently objectionable. For there are “cases in which a wholly unsupplemented perceptual demonstrative ‘that’ still secures reference in a suitable perceptual context” (p. 246). This looks, at first sight, like a point conducive to the conceptualist, as it provides a way of avoiding the implausible suggestion that all colour experience depends upon possession of the general concept of a colour shade. Peacocke goes on to develop a natural treatment of these cases of conceptually unsupplemented perceptual demonstrative reference, though, which is incompatible with (CC). This is the first point mentioned above, against the conceptualist account of sense experiential content. The basic idea is that determinacy of reference is secured by the supplementation of the bare demonstrative element, ‘that’, by a non-conceptual way in which the relevant shade, shape, movement, or whatever, is presented in experience. He goes on to develop this idea with great subtlety and sophistication. It suffices for my purposes here, though, simply to remark once again upon the availability of an alternative treatment which is consistent with (CC). On this view, determinacy of reference is secured by the supplementation of the bare

¹¹ I return, in section III, to a discussion of his further claim, pace my premise (2) above, that a non-conceptualist account of the content of sense experiential states is capable of explaining their role in providing reasons for empirical beliefs.

demonstrative ‘that’, by the subject’s actual attention to the colour of the object in question, as opposed to its shape or movement, say, where this is a neurophysiologically enabled relation between the subject and that property, as opposed to any other, of the object which he is perceiving.

Second, Peacocke argues that the conceptualist cannot satisfactorily account for the phenomenon of learning a new observational concept, such as pyramid. For the subject’s sense experience, on presentation with a positive instance in a teaching context, must be sufficient for her rationally to apply the concept. Yet this experience cannot have a content which includes the concept pyramid itself, if it is to serve as a means to her acquisition of it. “The natural solution to this ... quandary”, Peacocke continues (2001, p. 252),

is to acknowledge that there is such a thing as having an experience of something as being pyramid shaped that does not involve already having the concept of being pyramid shaped. What such an experience will have is a non-conceptual content which, if correct, is sufficient for something’s falling under the observational concept pyramid.

I agree entirely with the first sentence of this passage; but reject the implication of the second that the conceptualist cannot make the required acknowledgement. Surely we may continue instead as follows. “What such an experience will have is a conceptual content involving the demonstrative concept, ‘that (shape)’, referring to the pyramid shape of the object in question”. Of course, the same cannot be said in explanation of her acquisition of the concept ‘that (shape)’ itself; but the conceptualist will claim that her appropriately attending to, and tracking, the shape of the object in question just is her entertaining that concept in experience. That is, she acquires it precisely in virtue of standing in these attentional and tracking relations with the actual shape of the object in the world.

Sean Kelley (2001) argues that colour perception fails to satisfy a plausible condition upon the possession of demonstrative colour concepts, and therefore that (CC) fails properly to capture the way in which colours are presented in experience. The condition which he cites is this: “in order to possess a demonstrative concept for x, a subject must be able consistently to re-identify a given object or property as falling under the concept if it does” (2001, 403, italics removed). He calls it the re-identification condition. I agree that the conceptualist should accept this as a necessary condition upon the subject’s possession of demonstrative colour concepts of the kind which are invoked in the present development of (CC). Kelley then presents us with the following case, in which a person is able to distinguish between colours on the basis of his experience, yet is incapable consistently of re-identifying one of them later. First, the subject is presented a number of times with samples of two similar shades of green, which he is consistently right in asserting are distinct. Second, his answers are at chance in response to the question, of one of these samples, whether it is the shade which was previously presented on the left. Generalizing, Kelley insists that “there’s nothing in the nature of perception to keep it from being true, that our capacity to discriminate colours exceeds our capacity to re-identify the colours discriminated” (2001, 411). He therefore concludes that the conceptualist account of colour experience is mistaken.

I entirely agree with Kelley that the conceptualist cannot simply deny the possibility of the case as described. I also acknowledge that a second response which he offers, of denying that the subject actually experiences either shade in the first phase, is desperate and quite ad hoc. There are cases where something along these lines may be correct, in which a person’s successful behaviour is controlled by a perceptually mediated sensitivity to a given feature of, or quantity in, the world, even though it is intuitively wrong to say that she actually experiences that feature, or quantity, as such (see, e.g., McLeod and Dienes, 1966). Still, I grant quite freely that Kelley’s case is not to be assimilated to these: the subject’s initial shade discrimination is genuinely experiential.

There are two points which can be made on the conceptualist's behalf, though. Both urge that an appropriate re-identification condition may still be met in Kelley's case, so as to reinstate the claim that the subject's initial experiential discrimination is conceptual.

First, consider the re-identification condition as it applies to possession of demonstrative concepts of particular individuals. This cannot require that a person be capable consistently of recognizing or re-identifying the particular in question after a complete break in experience. For nobody is capable under those conditions of distinguishing two qualitatively identical but numerically distinct such things, and any particular object could have such a twin; yet this does not make demonstrative reference to such individuals impossible. The right way to think of re-identification in this case, it seems to me, is in terms of the subject's capacity, first, to keep track of the thing in question over its movement or her changing position in relation to; and, second, to make sense at least of the possibility, under certain specific conditions, of its numerical identity with an object encountered after a break in experience. In parallel with this observation, then, the conceptualist may hold that that re-identification requires, insofar as this really is a necessary condition upon demonstrative colour concept possession, is rather the following two abilities on the subject's part: first, to keep track of the same shade over various changing viewing conditions – such as a gradual brightening/dimming of the light, the movement of shadows across the relevant coloured object and so on - during a single extended period of observation; second, to make sense at least of the possibility, under certain specific conditions, that things encountered in the future, after a break in experience, are genuinely identical in shade with the initial sample.

Now, nothing in Kelley's case, as described so far, rules out the subject's ability to keep track of both shades of green in just this sense. Still he may be inclined to modify the case in order stipulatively to rule this out, and continue to claim that nothing in the nature of perception makes the modified case impossible. A conceptualist might, with

more plausibility than earlier in my view, bite the bullet at this point, and rely on the force of the argument for (CC) to insist that this new case must in fact be impossible; but there is a second point which may be more compelling.

This would be to claim that the initial, discriminating sense experience is irreducibly relational in content, presenting the two samples as ‘coloured thus-in-relation-to-that’. This is a complex demonstrative colour concept, which picks out both of the shades of green presented, but in a way which is essentially context-dependent. It identifies them in relation to each other. Still, I contend, this complex demonstrative will display sufficient context-independence to meet the relevant re-identification requirement in Kelley’s case. The subject will be able consistently to re-identify both shades in relation to each other for some time at least after the initial encounter. Indeed, the case of the paint colour chips serves to my mind to reinforce this claim. Looking at a series of such chips together, suppose that you arrive at the view that one of them is the best colour for the room you are about to paint. Having dropped them, it may well be very difficult to re-identify that shade by picking them up and looking at them individually one by one. You can normally pick it out by looking at a few of them together, thereby recognizing it as ‘that-shade-in-relation-to-these’. This is precisely what is involved in meeting the relevant re-identification requirement for the complex, relational demonstrative colour concept concerned.

This response is similar in spirit to one which Kelley considers explicitly, according to which the conceptual content of the subject’s initial discriminating experience is “that there is that difference between the two samples” (2001, p. 417, italics removed). He replies, first, that it is not at all clear how the conceptualist could argue that this must be the right analysis of the situation; and, second, that this notion of a demonstrative identification of a colour shade difference needs to be worked out in detail before the suggestion is fully satisfactory. Both replies may equally be offered against my own proposal of invoking relational demonstrative colour concepts. The latter is perfectly

apt in that context; but I see no good reason to believe that the required detail cannot possibly be provided. I would counter the former by putting weight on my initial argument for (CC). In the light of that argument, the subject's initial discrimination must be made on the basis of a sense experiential state with some conceptual content. Given his failure in connection with the associated re-identification requirements, this cannot involve the simple demonstrative concepts of the two shades of green, 'that₁ shade' and 'that₂ shade', say. Further reflection on re-identifying paint colour samples, though, suggests an alternative candidate conceptual content, employing relational demonstratives. This is not in any obvious way objectionable, and indeed has in my view considerable independent plausibility. So there is good reason, provisionally at least, to accept that account of the case.

I conclude that the recent direct objections to (CC) which I have considered are unconvincing. The initial argument for (CC) has also attracted criticisms, though; and, especially given the additional weight which I just placed upon this in defending the conceptualist against direct attack, it is appropriate at this point to turn to these.

III

As I mentioned above, both Heck and Peacocke offer objections to the second premise of my argument for (CC): (2) sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs only if they have conceptual content. They focus on the second stage of the argument, which moves from the claim that the reasons in question are the subject's reasons for believing what she does to the conclusion that the sense experiential states which provide those reasons should actually have as their contents the conceptually articulated propositions figuring in the background argument which makes explicit their rational bearing on the beliefs in question. That move rests upon the requirement that reasons for the subject, must be recognizable as such, and susceptible to rational scrutiny and evaluation by her. Heck and Peacocke each accept the requirement; but they go on to

argue, along somewhat similar lines, that the move is a non-sequitur. I begin by discussion Peacocke's proposal by which he contends that the non-conceptualist is capable of meeting the recognition requirement.

His key idea is that the required recognition, scrutiny and evaluation of the status of the reasons provided by sense experiential states for empirical beliefs may be achieved by invoking the subject's capacity for demonstrative reference to the, nevertheless non-conceptual, ways in which things are presented in experience:

a thinker can ask 'Is something's looking that way a reason for judging that it's square?', for instance. On the approach I advocate, 'that way', in this particular occurrence, refers demonstratively to a way in which something can be perceived. The reference itself is made by something conceptual: demonstrative concepts can enter conceptual contents. There is no requirement that the reference of the demonstrative be conceptualized. ... So thought can scrutinize and evaluate the relations between non-conceptual and conceptual contents and obtain a comprehensive view of both. (2001, pp. 255-6)

I am not confident that I properly understand Peacocke's proposal here. For I find it difficult to interpret it other than as a variant of the second-order approach, which he grants is unacceptable. The suggestion certainly seems to be that a person's recognition of her experientially-based reason for believing that something she sees is square, say, consists in her appreciation, both that her experience presents that thing in the world in that way_w, and that something's looking that way_w is a reason to believe that it is square. Thus, she derives the conclusion that she has a reason for believing that it is square. Yet this suggestion has all the serious difficulties familiar from discussions of classical foundationalism, both in accounting for the subject's knowledge of the nature of her experience, as presenting the object in question in that way_w, and in explaining her

reasons for believing that something's looking that way_w is a reason to believe that it is square.¹²

The only alternative which I can see would be to interpret the subject's appreciation, both that her experience presents the relevant object in that way_w, and that something's looking that way_w is a reason to believe that it is square, simply in terms of her standing inclination, in conditions of perception which are not evidently abnormal in some relevant respect, to judge that something which is experientially presented to her in that way_w is square. Yet this is effectively to deny that she has any real recognition of her reason as a reason, or engages in any reflective scrutiny or evaluation of it as such.

On the conceptualist account, on the other hand, this dilemma is avoidable. For entertaining a conceptual content is a matter of grasping its truth condition on the basis of the way in which this is systematically determined by the semantic values of its components and their mode of combination, which are in turn precisely what determine its inferential relations with other such contents. Thus, a person's actually being in a sense experiential state with a conceptual content requires her grasp of that content in just the way which grounds its reason-giving status. Hence she automatically recognizes its status as such.

So, I contend that Peacocke's proposal, as I understand it at least, does not provide a satisfactory account of how the non-conceptualist is capable of meeting the recognition requirement upon the reason-giving role of sense experience.

Heck begins, along similar lines to Peacocke, by claiming that the conceptualist argument for (2) depends upon a mistaken assumption that any accurate reflective

¹² See my 1999, ch. 4, for extended criticism of any second-order account of how the recognition requirement is met in perceptual knowledge.

thought about sense experiential content must share, or at least embed, the actual content of the experience itself. More precisely, the assumption he uncovers is as follows. “The content of a judgement about how things appear to me, when such a judgement is correctly made, is the same as the content of one of my perceptual states” (2001, p. 513). This assumption is clearly illegitimate, as it entails conceptualism directly, with the addition only of the uncontroversial claim that correct judgements about how things appear to me in perception are possible. For the contents of any such judgements are themselves conceptual by definition. Like Peacocke, Heck continues by offering a positive account of how it is possible to engage in effective reflective recognition, scrutiny and evaluation, at the conceptual level, of the reason-giving status of non-conceptual sense experiential states. My complaint against this is, likewise, not that conceptual thought about non-conceptual contents is simply impossible - the assumption which Heck uncovers is not essential to the conceptualist case - but rather that it is bound to involve an unacceptable second-order account of how the recognition requirement is met for the reasons provided by sense experiential states.

Suppose that a person is in a sense experiential state with non-conceptual content. Evans offers the following description of how he may arrive at a correct conceptual judgement which captures how things appear to him in that experience.

[A] subject can gain knowledge of his internal informational [e.g., perceptual] states in a very simple way: by re-using precisely those skills of conceptualization that he uses to make judgements about the world. Here is how he can do it. He goes through exactly the same procedure as he would go through if he were trying to make a judgement about how it is at this place now, but excluding any knowledge he has of an extraneous kind. (that is, he seeks to determine what he would judge if he did not have such extraneous information.) the result will necessarily be closely correlated with the content of the informational state which he is in at that time. ... This is a way of producing in himself ... a cognitive state

[e.g., a judgement of appearance] whose content is systematically dependent upon the content of the informational state. (1982, pp. 227-8, quoted by Heck, 2000, at p. 515)

Even if this Evansian description is entirely unobjectionable, the consequent account of how the recognition requirement is met in perception, presumably, still has the following, second-order, form.

- (a) It appears to me that p.
- (b) Its appearing to me that p gives me a reason to believe that p.
- ∴ (c) I have a reason to believe that p.

It is therefore subject to all the familiar difficulties facing classical foundationalism, of providing satisfactory reasons, meeting, as they must, the recognition requirement, in connection with the subject's beliefs at both (a) and (b) of this argument.¹³

There is strong prima facie motivation for the conceptualist account of sense experiential content in my initial central argument for (CC). Objections to (CC) itself are unconvincing; and criticisms of the second premise of that central argument are also wanting. I therefore conclude that:

(CC) Sense experiential states have conceptual content.

References

¹³ Again, see my 1999, ch. 4, for far more on this.

- Brewer, B. 1999. Perception and Reason. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2001a. Précis of Perception and Reason, and response to commentators (Naomi Eilan, Richard Fumerton, Susan Hurley, and Michael Martin), Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, **63**, 405-464.
- 2001b. Précis of Perception and Reason, and response to commentator (Michael Ayers), Philosophical Books, **43**, 1-22.
- Evans, G. 1982. The Varieties of Reference. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1985. ‘Understanding Demonstratives’. In his Collected Papers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heck, R. G. 2000. ‘Non-Conceptual Content and the “Space of Reasons”’. Philosophical Review, **109**, 483-523.
- Kelly, S. D. 2001. ‘Demonstrative Concepts and Experience’. Philosophical Review, **110**, 397-420.
- McDowell, J. 1985. ‘Functionalism and Anomalous Monism’. In E. LePore and B. McLaughlin (eds.), Actions and Events. Oxford: Blackwell.
- 1994. Mind and World. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Peacocke, C. 2001. ‘Does Perception have a Nonconceptual Content?’. Journal of Philosophy, **98**, 239-264.
- Stalnaker, R. 1998. ‘What Might Non-Conceptual Content Be?’. Philosophical Issues, **9**, 339-352.