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**Perceptual Experiences, Concepts and the Reasons Behind
our Beliefs.**

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of Master of Arts in Philosophy at Massey University

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Introduction

How does perception tell us about the world around us? Do our perceptual experiences represent the world to us? If so, how are they representational? Moreover, how do our perceptual experiences provide the basis for our empirical beliefs?¹ These questions are among those that are central to the philosophy of perception. Let us look at the first one: How does perception tell us about our environment? Many philosophers agree that perception tells us about the way the world is by being representational of the world. This theory of perception is one of many amongst the philosophy of mind that fall under the umbrella of Intentionalism, or representationalism.

Intentionalism

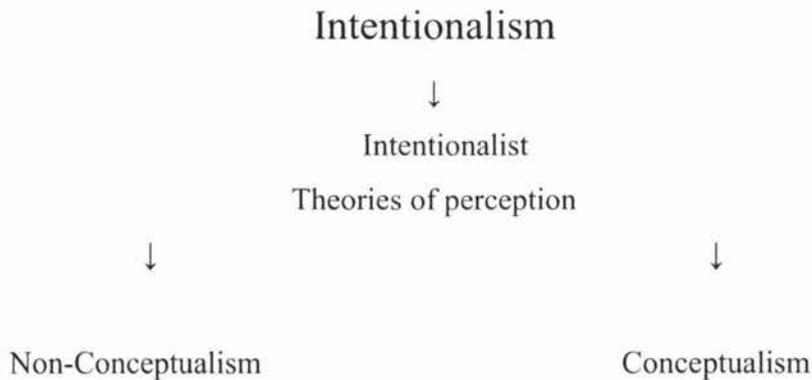


Intentionalist

Theories of perception

However, intentionalist theories of perception differ from each other in certain ways. One prominent point of disagreement is over *how* the content of perception is representational. Some writers claim that perception, like other mental states such as beliefs and desires have *conceptual* contents. That is, their contents are like the contents of thoughts: conceptually structured and dependent upon possession of a conceptual capacity. This is ‘conceptualism’ and these theorists will be called ‘conceptualists.’ There are other writers, however, who deny this claim and argue that the content of perception is non-conceptual. These are the ‘non-conceptualists’ and they advocate ‘non-conceptualism’. Let us first turn to a brief introduction into non-conceptualism.

¹ The way in which one characterises perceptual experience shapes one’s subsequent account of how perceptual experiences cause empirical beliefs. Therefore the answer to the question ‘what is a perceptual experience?’ will largely affect the response to ‘how can perceptual experiences cause beliefs?’ (Why this is the case will be shown in the following discussion.)



Non-Conceptualism

In a nutshell, the non-conceptualist thesis is that there are intentional, representational contents of mental states that do not require their bearer to possess concepts in order for them to be present. These mental states are states with non-conceptual content. A widely discussed mental state that has, on this view, non-conceptual content is perceptual experience. Non-conceptual perceptual experience represents the world as being a certain way and yet does not require the perceiver to possess concepts that characterise the content of her experience.

There are two prominent arguments given in favour of the non-conceptualist's theory of perceptual experience:

- 1) The "Richness Argument" (Heck, 2000). Writers have argued that we can have perceptual experiences that represent worldly things for which we do not possess concepts. Look at all the different shades of colour we can perceive, they proclaim. Clearly, we can perceive many shades that we do not possess concepts for. Christopher Peacocke writes:

There are many dimensions – hue, shape size, direction – such that any value on that dimension may enter the fine-grained content of an experience. In particular, experience is not restricted in its range of possible contents to those points or ranges picked out by concepts – *red, square, straight ahead* – possessed by the perceiver (1992:68).

- 2) The Argument from Evolution. This argument claims that it is likely that perception is primitive and we had the ability to perceive the world around us long before our conceptual linguistic capacities evolved. For this reason, we probably share the non-conceptual operations of our perceptual systems with some animals. Peacocke offers a complex account of the nature of perceptual content. He holds that perception has non-conceptual content mainly because we must be able to

Describe correctly the overlap between human perception and that of some of the non-linguistic animals. While being reluctant to attribute concepts to the lower animals, many of us would also want to insist that the property of (say) representing a flat brown surface as being at a certain distance from one can be common to the perceptions of humans and of lower animals...it is literally the same representational property that the two experiences possess, even if the human experience also has richer representational contents in addition (2001a: 613-614).

In summary, these arguments claim that the content of perceptual experience is non-conceptual and it is not necessary that a perceiver possess the concepts that characterise this content in order for the state to have this type of content. That is, the content of perceptual experience cannot be identified with the content of propositional attitudes. It is non-conceptual. Tim Crane succinctly sums up the non-conceptualist theory of perception: ‘for something, X, to believe that *a* is F, X must possess the concepts *a* and F. But for X to merely represent that *a* is F, X does not have to possess these concepts. It is in the latter case that X is in a state with non-conceptual content’ (1992:141).

As a final note, there are two general approaches to the definition of non-conceptual content. Crane, as shown in the quote above, defines a non-conceptual state in terms

of whether or not concepts need to be possessed in order for it to be entertained. This is also the approach I have taken in this brief section on non-conceptual content. Christopher Peacocke, however, defines non-conceptual content more directly as content with certain types of non-conceptual constituents. This leads him to a more detailed formulation of a theory of non-conceptual content as he attempts to precisely characterise this type of content. Peacocke's theory of non-conceptual content is one of the fundamental positions in this literature and so it is to Peacocke's theory that we will turn below.

Conceptualists such as Bill Brewer and John McDowell have put forward a succession of arguments against the non-conceptualist position; focussing on the notion that the content of perception is non-conceptual. Let us look at conceptualism and briefly examine some of the objections they raise against non-conceptualism.

Conceptualism

The general conceptualist position is that the content of perceptual experience is conceptual: it is composed of concepts and requires the bearer to possess the concepts that characterise them. This conceptual content is a proposition, or thought. Conceptual contents, or propositions, then, are structured by concepts and are representational in virtue of these concepts. Consider this example. The cat hopes the bird is tasty. The content 'the bird is tasty' is composed of the concept 'bird' which, when combined with the predicate 'is tasty', forms a proposition that represents a state of affairs: 'the bird is tasty'. And, to reiterate, possession of the concepts that comprise the content of perceptual experience is required in order to entertain that particular perceptual experience. There are several motivations behind this theory:

- 1) This is a response to the richness argument mentioned above.² The conceptualists hold that an entirely conceptual perceptual experience can in fact accommodate all the detail of a scene. McDowell is the strongest proponent of this argument. In his *Mind and World*, McDowell argues:

In the throes of an experience of the kind that putatively transcends one's conceptual powers – an experience that *ex hypothesi* affords a suitable sample – one can give linguistic expression to a concept that is exactly as fine-grained as the experience, by uttering a phrase like “that shade”, in which the demonstrative exploits the presence of a sample (1994:57).³

- 2) But the most fundamental argument behind the conceptualist thesis is based on the premise that we must be able to justify our empirical beliefs. That is, we must be able to give reasons for our beliefs about the world. These reasons must necessarily be conceptual. McDowell puts several arguments for why reasons require conceptual contents. Here are two of the main ones:

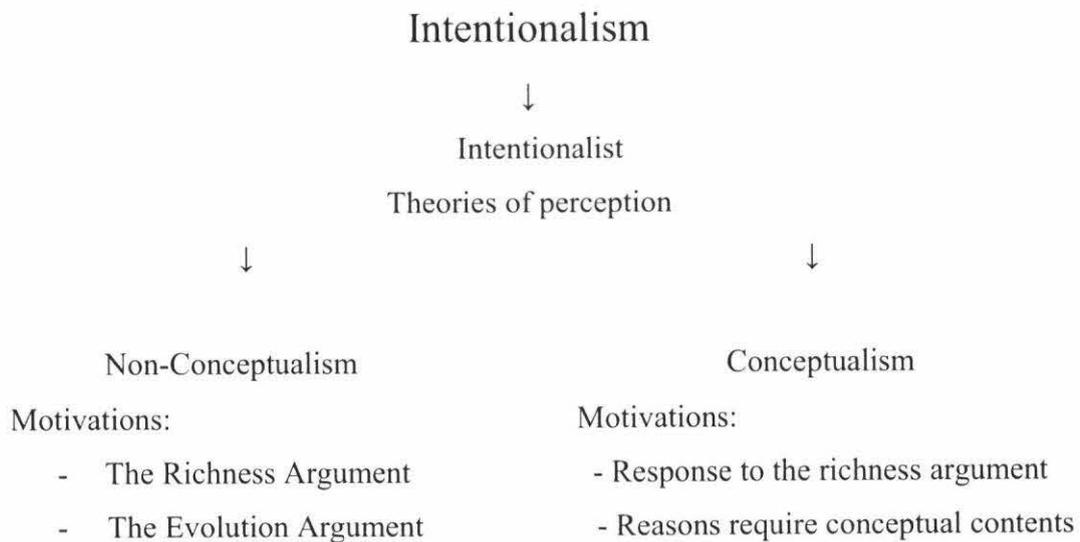
1 - In order for experience to justify belief, a logical, inferential relation must relate experience and belief. Only conceptual contents can stand in this logical relation to beliefs. Experiences do justify beliefs, Therefore the content of perception is conceptual.

² This argument is that we should hold that perception has a non-conceptual content because we can have perceptual experiences of greater detail than we have concepts to conceptualise and express that detail with. By detail, I mean there may be more spatial features, colour shades or frequencies of sound, for example, in an environment than the perceiver can accommodate using the concepts within her grasp.

³ Demonstrative concepts are concepts such as ‘that shade’ or ‘that spatial feature’, or ‘that sound’. There are several defining conditions of a demonstrative concept. A person can be said to possess a demonstrative concept only if she can, at least for a short time after, correctly apply the concept in the absence of the sample. For example, she might see a colour chart and pick out the colour she likes for a wall and then for a few moments afterwards be able to use that concept correctly in thought and speech. This is what McDowell terms a ‘recognitional capacity, possibly quite short lived, that sets in with the experience’ (1994:57).

2 - Reasons must be articulable. Only that which is conceptual is articulable. Therefore, in order for perceptual experience to justify, or provide reasons for, our beliefs perceptual experience must be conceptual.

To sum up, on one hand we have non-conceptualists, such as Peacocke and Crane, who hold that the content of experience is non-conceptual. On the other, we have the conceptualists, such as McDowell and Brewer who maintain that the content of perceptual experience is conceptual.



The arguments in favour of and against conceptualism and non-conceptualism have been the subjects of much debate. Conceptualists have responded to both of the motivations for non-conceptualism, but the non-conceptualists find these responses implausible. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to look beyond the dilemma that arises from the argument that reasons require conceptual contents. The dilemma is this: if reasons do require conceptual contents, then we find ourselves in one of three unattractive positions: (1) we'll be forced to accept the implausibilities that

non-conceptualists claim inherently exist in the idea that conceptual contents alone justify beliefs, (2) we'll be forced to accept the implausibilities that conceptualists claim are present if we hold that non-conceptual experiences justify our beliefs, or (3) we must deny that experiences provide reasons for our beliefs at all. Therefore, in order to shed some light on why this dilemma arises and how we can go some way to resolving it, I will now focus on the debate that has arisen around McDowell's claim that reasons require conceptual contents. Recall that there were two main claims that McDowell makes for why reasons require conceptual contents:

- 1- Only conceptual contents can stand in the necessary logical inferential relation to beliefs.
- 2- Reasons must be articulable. Conceptual contents alone are articulable; therefore if experiences are to provide reasons, they must be conceptual.

Christopher Peacocke, our main non-conceptualist, claims that reasons do not, in fact, require conceptual contents.⁴ He provides arguments for why we should not accept either of McDowell's claims above. In short, Peacocke tackles McDowell's arguments like this:

- 1- In order for experience to justify belief, experience and belief ought to be rationally related. But this relation does not have to be the logical, inferential kind that McDowell maintains it is.
- 2- In response to what he calls McDowell's 'Argument from Articulability', Peacocke argues that reasons do not have to be conceptual in order for them to be articulable.

⁴ Contrary to how it may appear here, Peacocke originally grounded reasons in non-conceptual content (1992: 80). McDowell's later refutation of his argument is a response to this. Peacocke was not, initially, responding to McDowell.

Let us now inspect these two pairs of opposing claims that McDowell and Peacocke have put forward. I will address the first pair of opposing claims - around the relation between experience and belief - because it demonstrates exactly how experience provides reasons for beliefs for each author.

I will then examine the second pair of opposing claims - around whether or not reasons have to be conceptual in order for them to be articulated - for quite a different reason. There is, I think, an interesting point to be made about Peacocke and McDowell's disagreement over this issue. I will show that this particular disagreement rests on an equivocation.

The equivocation stems from the fact that two different theories of concepts are used in the arguments for the opposing positions. I will demonstrate that there is a radical difference between the theories of concepts on either side of this debate. And according to McDowell's theory of concepts we can but conclude that conceptual contents alone are articulable, and by Peacocke's theory of concepts, exactly the opposite must follow.

This debate takes place in some very difficult literature. Therefore, before an inspection of the two sets of opposing claims can begin, the positions of Peacocke and McDowell must be expounded. For clarity's sake, the exegesis that follows of McDowell and Peacocke's theories is in the form of a textual analysis. It is hoped that this textual analysis will provide some clarification of these two major theories and work towards a demonstration of the presence of an equivocation in the 'Argument from Articulability' debate. In summary, the aims of this paper are:

- To provide a clear exposition of Peacocke and McDowell's theories of perceptual content and concepts.
- To point out that their theories of concepts are radically different.
- To shed some light on why they both adopt a different stance with regard to the argument from articulability by arguing that their different positions are in part motivated by different theories of concepts.

Chapter one of this essay examines Peacocke's non-conceptualism. The second chapter attempts an explanation of McDowell's conceptualism and theory of concepts. Chapter three enters into a discussion of the first pair of opposing claims around the relation between experience and belief. The fourth chapter looks at the second pair of opposing claims around the argument from articulability. This essay concludes with the proposal that the argument from articulability rests on an equivocation.

Chapter One: Peacocke's Non-Conceptualism

1.1 Peacocke's Non-Conceptualism

Let us begin with an explanation of Peacocke's account of non-conceptual perceptual content. Because it is so closely linked with what concepts are taken to be, this explanation will be followed by Peacocke's theory of concepts and concept possession. I will now set forth some of the claims that a theory of non-conceptual content must make, following the way in which Peacocke lays out his article 'Does Perception have a Non-Conceptual Content?' (2001b).

- 1) Non-conceptual, perceptual content makes perceptual concepts available to a subject by 'providing the canonical, inferential basis for the application of these concepts to things given in experience' (2001b: 242). In addition, the conditions under which a subject is said to possess a concept are defined by the 'relations of those concepts to the non-conceptual content of experience' (Ibid: 242).
- 2) A perceptual experience with non-conceptual content can 'provide an empirical basis for the acquisition and so enter the causal explanation of the learning of such general concepts as *regular-diamond shaped*' (Ibid: 242).
- 3) An experience with non-conceptual content can provide justifications and reasons for conceptual contents such as the contents of belief.
- 4) It is possible that humans and other animals with more primitive or no conceptual capacities at all can still have a perceptual experience with identical representational content.
- 5) The non-conceptual content of experience can 'enter the explanation of features of intentional action' (ibid: 242).

1.2 Spatial types and Scenarios

Peacocke develops a position to accommodate these demands. He takes the non-conceptual content of perceptual experience to consist of two types, or levels, of content: a basic type, scenario content; and a more complex type, protopositional content. Peacocke identifies scenario content with spatial types and describes this most basic type of non-conceptual content in the following:

I suggest that one basic form of representational content should be individuated by specifying which ways of filling out space around the perceiver are consistent with the representational content's being correct. The idea is that the content involves a spatial *type*, the type being that under which fall precisely those ways of filling the space around the subject that are consistent with the correctness of the content. On this model, correctness of a content is then a matter of instantiation: the instantiation by the real world around the perceiver of the spatial type that gives the representational content in question (1992:61-62).

Let us look more closely at this passage. Peacocke writes:

'The idea is that the content involves a spatial *type*, the type being that under which fall precisely those ways of filling the space around the subject that are consistent with the correctness of the content'

Spatial types comprise a type of non-conceptual content. These spatial types precisely pick out the particular ways that objects fill out space around a person.

'Correctness of a content is then a matter of instantiation: the instantiation by the real world around the perceiver of the spatial type that gives the representational content in question'

Representational content has a correctness condition. That is, it either represents the world correctly or incorrectly. When the world precisely falls under a spatial type, this most basic level of representational non-conceptual content represents the world correctly.

In order to characterise the precise spatial type that constitutes a person's non-conceptual content, we must specify these spatial properties of the object:

- The angle from which the perceiver is viewing an object
- Its distance from the perceiver
- And its location in relation to the perceiver.

This is important because, for example, the perceptual experience of an object that you are standing directly in front of will be different from the perceptual experience of an object that you are viewing from an angle. Similarly, the perceptual experience of an object close by will be quite different to one of a distant object. What is more, once the angle, distance and location of an object are specified we must then describe the hue, texture and brightness and orientation of any surfaces the object has. Having done this, we are:

Now in a position to say, with slightly more precision, what one of the spatial types is. It is a way of locating surfaces, features, and the rest in relation to such a labelled origin and family of axes. I call such a spatial type a "scenario" (1992:64).

To sum up, scenarios or spatial types, constitute the basic level of non-conceptual content (Peacocke, 1992:90). They represent the precise way that space around a perceiver is filled out. That is, they represent its texture, hue, brightness of its surfaces, its point of origin and location on a set of axes relative to a perceiver.⁵ Furthermore, a scenario has a correctness condition. It can represent the world correctly or incorrectly.⁶ However, whether the scenario content is correctly or incorrectly representational must be 'assessable outright' (Peacocke, 1992:65). That is, we should be able to say whether a scenario is true or false right now without needing to appeal to certain conditions that may obtain in the future or that have

⁵ It is important to point out that whatever conceptual terms we use to specify a spatial type need not imply that those conceptual capacities are possessed by the beings whose perceptual content we are specifying.

⁶ Incorrect representation produces hallucinations, or are the result of an illusion.

already been the case in the past. For this, Peacocke writes, we need to ‘position’ the scenarios in time.

1.3 Positioned Scenarios

On positioned scenarios, Peacocke remarks:

A positioned scenario consists of a scenario together with ... an assigned time. The time assigned ... is the time at which the perceptual experience occurs: perceptual experience has a present tense content. We can then say that the content given by the positioned scenario is correct if the scene [the space around a perceiver] at its assigned place falls under the scenario at the assigned time (1992:65).

Peacocke then emphasises that ‘the positioned scenario is literally meant to be the content itself’ (1992:65). In summary, the idea is that the orientation, distance and location of an object together with the hue, brightness and texture of the surfaces of perceived objects must be specified in order to correctly characterise the scenario content of a person’s perceptual experience. In addition, we must position the scenario in time.

There are advantages in accepting this account of the nature of non-conceptual content. Firstly, a major criticism of theories of *conceptual* content and, conversely, an argument for non-conceptualism is the Richness Argument: that we can have perceptual experiences with a much finer-grained content than we possess concepts for. A scenario, however, can capture the fine-grained richness of a scene; therefore non-conceptual scenario contents can accommodate the non-conceptualist’s argument that we can perceive scenes involving details for which we do not possess concepts. In *articulating* the scenario, of course, we will have to employ concepts that capture the scene. But possession of them is not necessary for the enjoyment of the perceptual experience of the scene.

Secondly, Peacocke argues that non-conceptual perceptual content can play a role in justifying the conceptual contents of beliefs, desires and other propositional attitudes in virtue of the relation in which conceptual content stands to the

perceptual content. That is, we can ground the reasons for some of our beliefs, desires, fears and so on, in non-conceptual content. Scenarios are a ‘promising resource for anchoring notions of conceptual content in some level of non-conceptual content’ (1992:66). To explain this further he introduces protopositional content.

1.4 Protopositional Content

As an introduction to this second layer of non-conceptual content, Peacocke writes:

There is a sense in which perceiving something as symmetrical does not require possession of the concept *symmetrical*, what is that sense? I suggest that perceptual experience has a second layer of non-conceptual representational content. The contents at this second layer cannot be identified with positioned scenarios, but they are also distinct from conceptual contents. These additional contents I call *protopositions* (1992:77, his emphasis).

So over and above the positioned scenario, there is a higher, although still sub-conceptual, level at which objects are perceived. This layer of content represents symmetry and other properties and relations about objects such as ‘curved’ or ‘parallel to’, or ‘equidistant from’. Perceiving something as square, at this level, is identical with perceiving something as having two sets of symmetrical opposing sides that are all equal in length. The difference between perceiving something as a square or a diamond lies in a perceptual experience having different constituent protopositional contents.

Furthermore, in virtue of these protopositional non-conceptual contents, our perceiver now has good reasons for forming the belief that the object she perceives is square. That is, a person ‘must find the present-tense demonstrative thought that the object is square to be primitively compelling’ (1992:74). More will be said on what Peacocke means by ‘primitively compelling below’. For now, let it be noted that by primitively compelling, I take Peacocke to mean that a person is disposed to form the belief that the thought *that object is square* is true. Why she finds it primitively compelling is due to the idea that:

If the thinker's perceptual systems are functioning properly, so that the non-conceptual representational content of his experience is correct, then when such experiences occur, the object thought about will be really square (1992:80).

Therefore, Peacocke's non-conceptual content can justify our beliefs about the world because, according to Peacocke, we find certain beliefs about the world primitively compelling if our experience represents the world as being a particular way. In other words, non-conceptual content gives us reasons for our beliefs about the world. Peacocke states:

If I take one of my current observational beliefs about an object, there is a way *W* of which I can say this: concerning that (demonstratively given) way, my reason for believing the object is thus-and-so is that my experience presents it as *W* (1998:383).

Elsewhere he writes on the same point:

On my treatment, however, 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 (2001a:255-256).

This is how Peacocke claims that our perceptual experiences can justify beliefs and explain concept possession without maintaining that our perceptual experiences are conceptual. What is more, an explanation grounded in non-conceptual content can now be given as to what it is, according to Peacocke, to possess a concept. Peacocke comments, 'on this theory we do not need to appeal to that conceptual representational content in giving the possession condition for the concept square' (1992:80). This point is the focus of the next section. For now, note that Peacocke is making two claims; the first of which is hopefully clear in light of the above and the second of which will be expounded in the following:

- 1) Beliefs and judgements about the world can be justified by non-conceptual content.
- 2) The conditions under which a person can be said to possess a concept can be grounded in non-conceptual content.

1.5 Peacocke's Theory of Concepts and Concept Possession Conditions

Above, we saw that Peacocke grounds the possession of concepts in non-conceptual content. To understand how he attempts this we need to ask 'For Peacocke, what does it mean to possess a concept?' Using a prime (') to indicate reference to a property of experience, the concept 'white' and the perceptual demonstrative concept 'that mouse', I present Peacocke's concept possession conditions as I understand them:

- 1) The person must be disposed to believe a conceptual content that consists of a singular perceptual demonstrative concept (mode of presentation) i.e. 'that mouse' in predicational combination with the concept 'white'. For example, he must – when the perceptual experience that makes 'that mouse' available to the perceiver presents its object in a white' region of the perceiver's visual field, be disposed to be in a propositional attitude (in this case he must be disposed to have a belief) towards the content 'that mouse is white'. This must occur when he has a perceptual experience of the white mouse, which features the sensational qualities indicated by the prime. Also, this must happen in situations the perceiver takes to be normal. What is more, a person's disposition to believe the conceptual content 'that mouse is white' arises from the fact that the mouse is presented to the perceiver as being that way. (I.e. represented as white in the representational non-conceptual content of perception).
- 2) The person must also be disposed to believe a content not meeting all the conditions in (1) when she takes the reference of the content (in our example this is the mouse) to have the sort of qualities that are necessary in an object to produce the perceptual experience identical to those in condition (1). So, for example, the mouse may no longer be visible to the perceiver (it might have run into a hole), but the perceiver must still be disposed to believe the

conceptual content ‘that mouse is white’ because she takes it to have the properties responsible for causing white experiences (1992:7).

As an additional note, not all intentionalist theories of perception posit *qualia* (the entity referred to in the above possession conditions as the sensational qualities of an experience – marked by the prime). This is not, however, a problem for Peacocke. The possession conditions can be reformulated so:

Even if you think there are no sensational properties [qualia], you can still use techniques similar to those used in these possession conditions to avoid circularity in the account of possession of the concept *red*. Suppose that the concept *red* is regarded as not explicable in terms of sensational properties and is regarded as covering a range of more finely sliced shades of surfaces and volumes. A theorist who accepts that can adapt the above possession condition by removing from it the clause in (1) “presents its object in a red’ region of the subject’s visual field.” That theorist should replace these words with “represents its object as having a shade that is in fact a shade of red.” In the resulting possession condition, the concept *red* is used in classifying shades. It does not occur within the scope of the thinker’s psychological attitudes (1992:8).

Therefore, the explanation without *qualia* is this: to say that a subject possesses a concept is to say that she must be disposed to form beliefs and other propositional attitudes about conceptual contents that involve the concept in question. This must occur when a perceptual experience represents the referent of that concept to a perceiver in the content of her perceptual experience. In addition, the perceiver must be in conditions she takes to be normal and when she takes her perceptual mechanisms to be fully functional. What is more, the thinker must also be disposed to form the belief for the reason that the object is so presented. (The second condition remains the same.)

Meeting these two possession conditions amounts to possessing a concept, or knowing what the world would be like if the concept were instantiated. But what is it to be ‘disposed to have a belief or form a judgement towards a conceptual content?’ As I understand it, to say that one is disposed to form a belief about a

content is the same as saying that one finds a content ‘primitively compelling’. This notion was mentioned only briefly above, so let us look more closely at it now.

Taking a small step back, recall that in virtue of the protopositional layer of non-conceptual content, Peacocke claims that we can perceive something as square, without possessing the concept *square*. In the same way, we can perceive something as symmetrical without possessing the concept *symmetrical*. And this perception of something as square is grounded in non-conceptual content. He then makes the point that even though experiences are conceived as not having a conceptual content, this is not a good reason for denying the overwhelmingly plausible view that we see things *as* trees or hear a sound *as* that of a car approaching (1992:88). We simply, on the basis of our non-conceptual perceptual experience find certain conceptual contents primitively compelling. That is, when we see something as a tree, we naturally make the transition from our perception of the tree to judging that it is a tree. In an attempt to explain this transition Peacocke’s writes that a conceptual content must be found to be primitively compelling by a subject and this ‘respects the Wittgensteinian insight’. The insight in question here is, ‘When I obey a rule (possess a concept), I do not choose. I obey the rule *blindly*’ (*PI*, s219):

How is mastery of such apparently partially perceptual-shape concepts such as *square*, *cubic*, *diamond-shaped*, or *cylindrical* related to the non-conceptual content of experience? We can enter the issues by considering a natural, simple suggestion about what is necessary for possession of the concept *square*. This simple suggestion is built up from the materials developed so far. Suppose that a thinker is taking his experiences at face value. Suppose too that in the positioned scenario of his experience, the area of space apparently occupied by a perceived object is square. Then this simple account suggests the thinker must find the present-tense demonstrative thought that the object is square to be primitively compelling. This simple account is not circular. It uses the concept *square* in fixing a certain sort of scenario... it does not require the thinker to possess the concept *square* (1992:74).

This idea, Peacocke writes, is that:

Someone who has grasped a particular rule, possesses a particular concept, has already settled how to apply it in some future case.... A thinker who meets the possession condition [for a concept] does not need examples of an impossible kind that somehow determines a unique application in a new case. Nor does he need to have surveyed in advance all the correct applications. He just has to find certain transitions compelling in a certain way (1992:13).

So it seems that for Peacocke, being primitively compelled to believe a content is the natural reaction of a person who possesses a concept. Therefore, a person who possesses the concept *tree* moves quite instinctively from the perception of a tree, as such, to the judgement 'that is a tree'. Therefore, if a person has grasped a concept he is disposed to have certain reactions, such as believing that the thing she perceives is a tree. This idea is then followed by one of Peacocke's key remarks, 'all that follows is that which concepts a thinker is capable of possessing depends on the ways in which he finds it natural to go on' (1992:14). So to say that a person possesses a concept, is to say that she entertains certain non-conceptual contents in experience and finds it natural to form certain beliefs or judgements about the world. In other words, possessing a concept involves being primitively compelled to form particular beliefs or judgements about the world.

Let us return to Peacocke's concept possession conditions. Peacocke remarks that stating the concept possession conditions is *identical with* defining concepts since, according to the principle of dependence, 'there is no more to a concept than is determined by a correct account of what it is to possess that concept' (1992:71).

However, in order to give a full account of the nature of Peacocke's concepts, it is not enough to state the principle of dependence and give Peacocke's concept possession conditions. There is still more to be said on how Peacocke defines concepts. Naturally, he holds that conceptual contents can be the content of our propositional attitudes. But, for Peacocke, conceptual contents are composed of Fregean senses (1992:3). That is, Fregean senses are what Peacocke holds to be concepts.

Frege's senses have referents: they pick out whatever it is that a proper name designates. However it is important to note that:

In grasping the sense of a proper name, we are not merely aware that the name is associated with a particular object as its referent, but we connect the name with a particular way of identifying an object as the referent of the name. Hence two names may have the same referent but different senses: with the two names are associated different methods of identifying some object as the referent of either name, although it happens that it is the same object which satisfies the two pairs of conditions of such identification (Dummett, 1973:95).

Therefore, like Frege's senses, Peacocke's concepts are modes of presentation for their referents. Two concepts may be two different particular modes of presentation for, or ways of identifying, the same referent.

Now, for Peacocke, senses (or concepts) are 'abstract entities' (Peacocke, 1992:99).⁷ For both Frege and Peacocke concepts are not part of the world; nor are they mental entities. Peacocke states, 'I have conceived concepts as not having any spatiotemporal locations. By themselves, that is, apart from any mental states, they do not have any causal interactions' (1992:99). These concepts, or senses, can be combined to structure whole contents and, incidentally, the whole content itself has a sense, which is a truth-value.

Peacocke discusses a particular kind of concept: perceptual-demonstrative concepts. A perceptual-demonstrative concept is a concept 'made available by' the perception of a particular object. More specifically, the way in which that object is perceived together with what is expressed by 'that' makes the perceptual demonstrative concept available to a person. Different experiences of the same object are characterised with different perceptual demonstrative concepts. That the perception of a particular object makes a perceptual demonstrative concept available to a person is to say that the conceptual content in which this type of concept figures is a singular content, and these perceptual-demonstratives are one particular sort of Fregean sense. More will be said on these concepts and singular contents below.

⁷ It is worth pointing out in advance that McDowell, as we shall see below, does not adhere to this reading of Fregean senses; he gives us quite a different conception of senses.

Now, Peacocke adds that meeting the possession conditions for a concept, or grasping that concept also, 'can be identified with knowing what it is for something to be the concept's semantic value (its reference)' (1992:22). This line of reasoning follows Dummett's idea in the quote above that grasping a sense (concept) ought to be the same as knowing what it is for something to be that concept's reference (Dummett: 1973). This notion, Peacocke calls 'the Identification'.

In summary, Peacocke writes, 'possessing a concept is knowing what it is for something to be its semantic value' (1992:23). Grasping a concept comes hand in hand with knowing the reference of that concept. It is not as if one can grasp a concept and *then* come to know its reference. But remember that Peacocke identifies meeting the possession conditions with knowing the semantic value of a concept. So an account of what it is to know a concept's semantic value need not be formulated. It is already present in the possession conditions outlined above.

Chapter Two: John McDowell's Conceptualism

1.1 *The Conceptual Content of Perception*

McDowell puts forward the claim that the content of perception is conceptual:

Experiences have their content by virtue of the fact that conceptual capacities are operative in them, and that means capacities that genuinely belong to the understanding: it is essential to their being the capacities they are that they can be exploited in active and potentially self-critical thinking. But when these capacities come into play in experience, the experiencing subject is passive, acted on by independent reality. When experience makes conceptual content available to one, that is itself one's sensibility in operation, not understanding putting a construction on some pre-conceptual deliverances of sensibility. At least with "outer experience", conceptual content is already borne by impressions that independent reality makes on one's senses (1994:67).

McDowell also comments:

In a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*. *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can be also the content of a judgement: it becomes the content of a judgement if the subject decides to take the experience at face value. So it is conceptual content. But *that things are thus and so* is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are. Thus the idea of conceptually structured operations of receptivity puts us in a position to speak of experience as openness to the layout of reality. Experience enables the layout of reality to exert a rational influence on what a subject thinks. This image of openness to reality is at our disposal because of how we place the reality that makes its impression on a subject in experience.... *That things are thus and so* is the conceptual content of an experience, but if the subject of the experience is not misled, that very same thing, *that things are thus and so*, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world (1994:26).

But what does he mean? In an attempt to explain McDowell's position, I will examine the quotes above as individual sentences.

‘Experiences have their content by virtue of the fact that conceptual capacities are operative in them.’ ‘They can be exploited in active and potentially self-critical thinking’

Conceptual capacities are inherently employed in perceptual experiences. These capacities can be used in active, rational thought. For example, we can make judgements about, or involving, our experiences.

‘But when these capacities come into play in experience, the experiencing subject is passive, acted on by independent reality’

However, McDowell adds, when conceptual capacities are exercised in perception the perceiver is passive. That is, independent reality acts on, influences, or makes an impression *on the perceiver*. The perceiver does not *actively decide*, as it were, to perceive something in the particular way that it is presented to her. In other words, mind-independent reality, or the way things are in the world, makes a particular impression on the perceiver and thereby determines the content of her perceptual experience.

‘At least with “outer experience”, conceptual content is already borne by impressions that independent reality makes on one’s senses’

The impressions that reality makes on the perceiver bear conceptual content.

To sum up, what McDowell is saying is (I think) this. Reality leaves an impression on a perceiver. The perceiver does not determine, or have any control over, the way in which she perceives the world around her. Rather, in much the same way as a mould determines the shape of a piece of clay, mind-independent reality determines the shape, or content, of a person’s perceptual experience. A perceptual experience is something that a subject passively entertains. Furthermore, the impressions, or shape, that reality makes on perceptual experience (thereby determining its content) are ‘*conceptual impressions*’. The term ‘conceptual impressions’ is introduced here to try and highlight the point that for McDowell, the world has a conceptual impact

on a person's perceptual experience, an impact which is somewhat out of her control. Brewer, as I understand him, characterises McDowell's concepts in a similar way. He writes:

Experience is passive. In experience one is saddled with content (McDowell, 1994:10). What exactly does this mean though? And how is it supposed to help? ... The idea, I think, is rather that *which particular* contents a person's experiences have is in an important sense quite outside his control. Given the way things are in the mind-independent world, the subject's location, direction of gaze and attentional set – which question he is directing at which part of his environment to be answered by perception – then the particular conceptual content delivered by his perceptual experience is something over which he has no control: it just comes to him. Things strike him as thus and so... Rather, concepts are provided directly by his attentional relations with the particular things around him. By the way in which he is interrogating his environment in perception (Brewer, 1999:185).⁸

Here Brewer is making the point that the particular conceptual contents that feature in a person's perceptual experiences are not under her control. In addition, in my reading of McDowell, conceptual content comes to the perceiver: it is received in much the same way as a perceiver receives the conceptual impressions of reality. McDowell expresses similar thoughts in the second quote presented above.

'In a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so...* *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience ... it is conceptual content... But *that things are thus and so* is also ... an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are'

In veridical perception, what a perceiver takes in – the impression that reality makes on a perceiver – is that *things are thus and so*. Things are presented as being a certain way. The way reality is from a perceiver's perspective *is* the conceptual content of experience. *It is also the way things are in reality.*

⁸ For a further discussion of the passivity of perceptual experience, see Naomi Eilan, (1997b).

‘Experience enables the layout of reality to exert a rational influence on what a subject thinks’

The important thing to glean from McDowell’s position so far is that reality impresses upon a perceiver the way things are in the world. But the impressions that reality leaves are conceptual ones. Because reality leaves *conceptual* impressions upon the perceiver, the impressions are conceptual. Because concepts are an inherent part of rational thought, reality’s influence is a rational one.

‘*That things are thus and so* is the conceptual content of an experience, but if the subject of the experience is not misled, that very same thing, *that things are thus and so*, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world’

In summary, the ways things are in the world are facts about the world, for example, a fact about the world might be, say, ‘that table’s being brown’. These facts are conceptual. In experience, we passively take in these conceptual facts about the world. They leave impressions upon our minds which become the conceptual content of our experiences. In other words:

The conceptual contents that are the most basic ... are already possessed by impression themselves, impingements by the world on our sensibility... In experience one finds oneself saddled with content. One’s conceptual capacities have already been brought into play (1994: 9-10).

And when we combine this quote with the remark above – ‘that things are thus and so is the conceptual content of an experience ... [and] is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world’, what we have is the idea that there are facts about the world. These facts can *literally* feature in our thoughts about the world, and constitute the contents of our perceptual experiences. McDowell writes elsewhere on this point: ‘when we see that such and such is the case, we, and our seeing, do not stop anywhere short of the fact. What we see is: that such and such is the case’ (1994:29). Facts themselves comprise the contents of perceptual experience in

virtue of the conceptual impressions they leave upon a person in perceptual experience. On this latter point, McDowell comments:

The thinkable contents that are ultimate in the order of justification are contents of experiences, and *in enjoying an experience one is open to manifest facts*, facts that obtain anyway and impress themselves on one's sensibility (1994:29, My emphasis).

Let us look a little more at the position I have outlined McDowell as taking. McDowell seems to be suggesting that reality has a conceptual nature; that there are conceptual facts about the world, which *exist in the outside world*. For example, the 'sun is bright today' or 'the grass is green outside' are, because they are true, facts about the world. It is important to realise that what I am suggesting is that, for McDowell, these facts are not human constructions, dependent on the human mind for their existence, but part of the objective world itself - recall McDowell's words, '*that things are thus and so*, is [...] a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world' (1994:26).

Now as we learn about the world, it seems that we can become responsive to these facts. I suggest this in light of this passage:

The ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them. We are alerted to these demands by acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities. When a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons (1994:82).

Here, McDowell claims to be giving a reading of Aristotle's ethical theory. The thought is that Aristotle's ethical laws are mind-independent entities that are recognised by human beings rather than created by them. They are part of the world. As humans grow up, assuming a 'decent upbringing' is provided, we come to recognise these ethical laws and they begin to shape our moral behaviour and thoughts. Recognising this aspect of reality amounts to 'moulding ethical character, which includes *imposing a specific shape on the practical intellect*' (1994:84, my

emphasis). Additionally, the process by which we come to be acquainted with the ethical laws and by which our moral character develops is one instance of what McDowell terms 'second nature':

Moulding ethical character, which includes imposing a specific shape on the practical intellect, is a particular case of a general phenomenon: initiation into conceptual capacities, which include responsiveness to other rational demands besides those of ethics... If we generalize the way Aristotle conceives the moulding of ethical character, we arrive at the notion of having one's eyes opened to reasons at large by acquiring a second nature (1994:84).

Acquiring this second nature is achieved mainly in virtue of learning language:

In our conception of the *bildung* (second nature) that is a central element in the normal maturation of human beings, we give pride of place to learning a language. In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene (1994:125).

With this firmly in mind, it seems that McDowell is claiming that as we learn language our conceptual capacity develops. This allows us to be responsive to the conceptual aspect of the world around us. In short, we come to be able to recognise and have our thinking shaped by facts about the world.

Now, McDowell is part of the neo-Fregean tradition which claims, like Peacocke, that concepts are Fregean senses. However, until now, my exposition of McDowell's concepts has not looked anything like the traditional description of Frege's senses I gave in chapter one (see above). For a start, as we saw in section 1.5, Frege's senses are supposed to be part of an abstract realm, not part of the world. Secondly, Frege's senses are modes of presentation for objects and when they are combined in thoughts they form true propositions, or facts, which *refer to states of worldly affairs*. However, in contrast, McDowell's concepts seem to combine to *actually be* facts about the world.

But, if we look into McDowell's earlier work we find an argument for how his concepts could still be seen as Fregean senses. In short, McDowell holds concepts to be *de re* senses. By aligning concepts with *de re* senses, McDowell is, I think, able to hold that concepts can be part of the world and yet still Fregean senses.

Here is how I will make sense of this claim. First, I will look at what *de re* senses are. Then I will give McDowell's case for why Frege's senses can, in fact, sometimes be seen as *de re* senses. I will end by looking at how identifying concepts with *de re* senses allows McDowell to hold that concepts are part of the world but still at the same time Fregean.

2.2 *De Re* Senses

De re senses are the constituents of singular contents. A singular content is about a particular object, but cannot exist without that object. One obvious example is the content 'this is white', where 'this' picks out the object being pointed to. If that particular object were to vanish – the content too would evaporate. The reason for this is because the object of the content, what the content is about, itself features (according to Russell) in the content as a constituent. It is not merely expressed by constituents of that content. A singular content is, therefore, object-dependent. In contrast, general contents are those contents which do not depend on the existence of certain objects. An example of a content of this sort is 'there is a cat that is black'. These sorts of contents are object-independent. Now, contemporary philosophy has inherited this distinction between singular and general contents, or thoughts, from Russell. Russell's Principle of Acquaintance yielded the idea of singular contents: object-dependent contents. The contents are object dependent because they contain the objects themselves as constituents. Russell comments:

In every proposition that we can apprehend (i.e. not only in those whose truth or falsehood we can judge of, but in all that we can think about), all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance (Russell, 1905: 203).

However, in Russell's hands, the only constituents of a singular content with which we have direct acquaintance (propositions that we can apprehend) are sense data. McDowell does not hold this entailment – rather, as we'll see, the objects/constituents of singular contents are worldly facts.

Now, singular contents, on McDowell's Fregean view of concepts, are composed of senses. But the type of senses that comprise these singular contents are *de re* senses (*de re* modes of presentation). These constituent *de re* senses are *object-dependent modes of presentation* which are only available to a person if the referent of the mode of presentation exists (Boër, 1989:187).⁹ According to McDowell, Frege's senses can, in fact, be construed as *de re*. Also in this passage, McDowell argues that we can accommodate Russell's idea about the object dependence of certain thoughts in this way. That is, as I understand him, we can take Russellian singular contents to be contents comprised of *de re* senses. Using 'singular senses' synonymously with '*de re* senses', he writes:

There are propositions, or thoughts in Frege's sense, which are object-dependent. Frege's doctrine that thoughts contain senses as constituents is a way of insisting on the theoretical role of thoughts (or contents) in characterizing a rationally organised psychological structure; and Russell's insight can perfectly well be formulated within this framework, by claiming that there are Fregean thought-constituents (singular senses) which are object-dependent, generating an object dependence in the thoughts in which they figure (1986:142).

Brewer (1999) who, recall, develops McDowell's position, also argues that perceptual content is essentially object-dependent. It has also been suggested before that intentionalist theories of perception could maintain that perceptual content is singular (Burge, 1992 and Martin, 2002). So, McDowell is not making an entirely novel claim when he appears to suggest that the contents of perception are object-dependent singular contents (*de re* propositions) composed of *de re* senses.

But, there is still more to be said about what, precisely, *de re* propositions are. They are, McDowell remarks, 'Russellian propositions which are "not completely

⁹ General contents contain *de dicto* types of modes of presentation. Which do not depend on the existence of their object.

expressed” but contain objects as constituents along with expressed items that are less than “complete” propositions’ (McDowell, 1984:284). McDowell footnotes this remark with ‘ Burge (1982:343) remarks: in Russellian propositions, the relevant *res* are not expressed but shown’ (1984: n4). We can suggest, therefore, that if McDowell’s concepts are *de re* senses, and *de re* senses comprise singular contents in which the relevant *res* are ‘not expressed but shown’, then concepts as *de re* senses are worldly objects which literally figure in singular conceptual contents.

Naomi Eilan also comments on McDowell’s integration of *de re* senses with Russell’s Principle of Acquaintance. She also claims that Brewer and Peacocke make the same link too:

Russell himself restricted the objects of acquaintance to sense data. Like most modern appeals to this relation Brewer wants to extend the range of objects to everyday external objects in the immediate environment... And, as far as I understand him, the move he makes is one we find both in Christopher Peacocke and in McDowell, namely, linking the notion of acquaintance, essentially, to a neo-Fregean sense, or mode of presentation (Eilan, 2001:436).

However, contrary to Russell, the objects of acquaintance are not sense data for McDowell. That is, his account of singular contents (comprised of *de re* senses) does not include sense data as the constituents of singular contents. Rather, worldly objects are the constituents of singular conceptual contents in virtue of their constituent concepts being identified with *de re* senses. Eilan continues:

In Peacocke’s version, acquaintance is conceived of a three-term relation (as opposed to a two-term one as Russell has it) between subject, mode of presentation and object (Peacocke, 1982, 180-201). In McDowell’s case, acquaintance is still a two-place relation but not between an object and the subject, as Russell has it, but between the subject and an object -dependent sense (McDowell, 1986, 141-45) (Eilan, 2001:436).

In summary, McDowell’s concepts are part of the world. They are also, *de re* senses. To be more explicit, *de re* senses, as I understand them are worldly objects. When *de re* senses (McDowell’s concepts) figure in contents, they bring the world

into that content. That is, part of the content is not expressed but shown in virtue of the constituent *de re* senses.

Furthermore, because the content of perceptual experience is conceptual, if we are to understand McDowell's concepts in this way, the worldly object itself features in the content of perception. In other words, the world itself is part of the content of our perceptual experiences. There is no gap between the mind and the world. And I agree with Eilan that McDowell's subject is not in a three-term acquaintance. She is in a two-term acquaintance. That is, the subject is acquainted with the *de re* sense. But this *de re* sense, is part of the world and not sense data. Hence, the acquaintance with a *de re* sense is identical with an acquaintance with a worldly fact.

This reading, however, faces a problem. If we are to accept that concepts as *de re* senses are worldly objects which can figure singular conceptual contents, then something must be said as to how a *de re* sense can be both a worldly object and a mode of presentation for that worldly object. This is because, recall, Fregean senses are essentially modes of presentation for their referents and, at first blush, it seems hard to swallow that an object that features in a singular content as a *de re* sense could be a mode of presentation for itself. But, as I see it, it is in fact possible to equate worldly objects with modes of presentation. Consider the fact that a particular object may appear in a variety of ways. Now, when an object figures in a singular content, it figures in that content in a particular way. For example, say I have the perceptual experience of a wall painted light beige. Now, the light beige wall that figures in the content of my perceptual experience may not figure in my experience in this particular way should I come back and look at it in the evening light. The object, then, does figure in the content of my perceptual experience, but it figures in it *in one of the many ways that it might appear to a person*. The particular way in which it figures in the content of experience is a mode of presentation. Therefore, the object appearing in one of these ways is still, clearly, the object itself and it can still figure in the singular content of experience. And the *de re* sense is still a worldly object, except it must be noted that the object figures in the content in a particular way. And this way is one of the many modes of presentation for that object.

Chapter Three: The First Pair of Opposing Claims

3.1. *Why Reasons require Conceptual Contents*

McDowell argues that perception has conceptual content. Conceptual contents are required in order for experience to justify our *beliefs and judgements* about the world. Let us try to see how he comes to this conclusion.

McDowell begins with Kant's claim. On this, he writes:

'Thoughts without content are empty'. For a thought to be empty would be for there to be nothing one thinks when one thinks it; that is, for it to lack what I am calling "representational content". That would be for it not really to be a thought at all, and that is surely Kant's point; he is not, absurdly, drawing our attention to a special kind of thoughts, the empty ones. Now when Kant says that thoughts without content are empty, he is not merely affirming a tautology [...] "Without content" points to what would *explain* the sort of emptiness Kant is envisaging. And we can spell out the explanation from the other half of Kant's remark: "intuitions without concepts are blind." Thoughts without content – which would not really be thoughts at all – would be a play of concepts without any connection with intuitions, that is, bits of experiential intake. It is their experiential intake that supplies the content, the substance, that thoughts would otherwise lack (1994:4).

Let us breakdown this paragraph.

'Thoughts without content are empty'

Thoughts are about the world. That is, thoughts have representational content. If they lack representational content, they are not thoughts about the world.

'That would be for it not really to be a thought at all'

In fact, thoughts that lack representational content (ones which are not about the world) are not actually thoughts at all.

‘Thoughts without content – which would not really be thoughts at all – would be a play of concepts without any connection with intuitions, that is, bits of experiential intake’

Thoughts without content lack a connection between their composite concepts and perceptual experience. That is, a thought that is not about the world (one which lacks content) is a thought whose concepts are not connected in any way to perceptual experience (bits of experiential intake).

‘It is their experiential intake that supplies the content, the substance, that thoughts would otherwise lack’

Therefore the connection, or linkage, between thought, belief and experience ensures that thoughts and beliefs really are about the world – or have representational content. Brewer shares this thought and writes:

It is only in virtue of their relations with her perceptual experiences – the impact of mind-independent reality upon her conscious mental life – that a person’s beliefs can be said to have genuine empirical [representational] content. These relations contribute essentially to fixing a given belief as a belief *about* a particular mind-independent thing *to the effect* that it is determinately thus and so (1999:21 his emphases).

It ought to be noted that in insisting that beliefs are sensitive to the mind-independent world Brewer is not advocating the extreme verificationist position - that all beliefs a person holds are verified entirely by a tribunal of experience. Nor is he proposing that we adopt the empiricist view that all concepts either have their ‘source in experience or [are] composed exclusively from simple concepts which do’ (1999:23). Instead, Brewer maintains that we ought simply to hold that unless *certain beliefs* are related to perceptual experience in some way, then a person’s ‘purported beliefs about the way things are in the world around her collapse into an empirically empty game’ (1999:23).

This, as we shall see, is the foundation of McDowell's argument that reasons require conceptual contents. What is more, this link between perception and concepts not only ensures that thoughts have representational content; it also ensures that we have good reasons for holding the beliefs we do about the world.

Before I demonstrate how this suggestion leads to the conclusion that reasons require conceptual contents, two of McDowell's claims need to be clarified:

- 1) There is a rational, reason-giving link between the conceptual contents of perceptual and our thoughts, beliefs and judgements.
- 2) The content of perception is conceptual and directly relates a perceiver to the mind-independent world.

The first claim is that, according to Brewer, there must be a reason-giving link between experiences and beliefs. This link is provided by the presence of singular demonstrative concepts in the content of perceptual experience. On this first claim, he writes:

Any account of the nature of conscious perceptual experiences can only be elucidated through the use of demonstrative contents of the form 'this is thus', in which the singular demonstrative paradigmatically refers to a persisting mind-independent thing and the predicative demonstrative identifies the mind-independent way that that thing is experientially presented as being. Second, a correct account of the way in which these perceptions refer in this way to mind-independent spatial particulars and their properties itself yields an account of precisely how they provide non-inferential reasons for certain of our beliefs about the world around us, and therefore of how perception is fit to serve as a peculiarly direct source of knowledge about the way things are out there (1999:17).

Now, the non-inferential reason-giving link between experience and belief also ensures that a person's beliefs really are about a particular object in the mind-independent world. That is, and this is the second claim, it is because of this relation that a person's beliefs have representational content:

It is only in virtue of their relations with her perceptual experiences – the impact of mind-independent reality upon her conscious mental life – that a person’s beliefs can be said to have genuine empirical content. These relations contribute essentially to fixing a given belief as a belief *about* a particular mind-independent thing *to the effect* that it is determinately thus and so (1999:21 his emphases).

So perceptual content is linked to our beliefs and thoughts and thereby furnishes them with representational content. What is more, the demonstrative content of perception is related to our beliefs and thoughts with a reason-giving rational link. It also enables a person to have direct, non-inferential knowledge about the mind-independent world:

A correct account of the way in which these perceptions refer in this way to mind-independent spatial particulars and their properties itself yields an account of precisely how they provide non-inferential reasons for certain of our beliefs about the world around us, and therefore of how perception is fit to serve as a peculiarly direct source of knowledge about the way things are out there (Brewer, 1999:17).

As I understand it, then, Brewer is saying that experience is comprised of demonstrative concepts. This type of perceptual content is rationally related to a thought or belief. This rational relation is of the sort that the when a person grasps the demonstrative concept that figures in the content of her perceptual experience, her perceptual experience provides her with a reason for holding a particular belief. Brewer states, ‘a person’s grasp of the reference of demonstrative contents provides him with a reason to endorse them in belief: they are presented to him as his epistemic access to the objective facts’ (1999: 206). Brewer aligns this position with Russell’s Principle of Acquaintance:

The idea is that a person’s capacity determinately to refer to [for her thoughts to have representational content about] a particular object, say, depends upon her being in a position to express direct, non-inferential knowledge about that object... A person is in a position to express such knowledge, either if she currently has a non-inferential reason, on the basis of her own perceptual experience or perhaps the

testimony of others around her, for a belief about *a*, or if she has previously been in such a position and has retained knowledge about *a* of this kind of memory... I think that Russell's principle of acquaintance is a version of precisely this thesis (1999:251-252).¹⁰

Russell's principle of acquaintance leads Russell to the claim that the only things a person can directly refer to are mind-dependent sense data of worldly objects. Contrary to this conclusion, Brewer argues that reference to determinate *mind-independent* objects in the world can, in fact, be achieved when she grasps a demonstrative concept.¹¹ Therefore, thoughts have representational content and really are about the world around a perceiver when the concepts that comprise her perceptual experiences are demonstrative concepts.

Brewer writes:

Possession of genuine beliefs about particular mind-independent things depends upon a person's exploiting a more fundamental form of reference to such spatial particulars than is possible with the use of purely descriptive Ideas alone... Reference to spatial particulars rests fundamentally upon a level of *perceptual demonstrative reference* which is essentially experiential... A complete account of perceptual reference to mind-independent particulars ineliminably involves an essentially experiential component (1999:28-29).

Recall McDowell's point. What makes thoughts refer to determinate objects in the world, and have representational content is their connection to 'bits of experiential intake' or perception. In other words, Thoughts *refer to, or represent*, the world when their constituent concepts are closely connected to perception. For Brewer,

¹⁰ This said, a slightly tangential point that Brewer explores and endorses is the claim that a person could in fact sometimes be in a position to express non-inferential knowledge about objects other than those we have direct perceptual acquaintance with. Specifically, we can still demonstratively refer to people based on testimonial information about them (1999: 258).

¹¹ Demonstrative concepts are grasped when a person can imagine the alternative ways in which that object may have been perceived from different perspectives (see the quote above from page 202). A person grasps a demonstrative concept by appreciating the relation between the way things appear to her to be and the way that worldly things actually are. This allows her to grasp also that things may appear in several different ways to the way that she perceives them. That is, a person must be able to imagine, 'the possibility of alternative experiential snapshots of the very same phenomena under alternative perceptual circumstances. This is *what makes it the case* that her essentially experiential demonstrative thinking nevertheless has an objective content' (1999: 200 his emphases).

this is achieved when the concepts that comprise the content of a person's thoughts or beliefs are demonstrative.

But what is McDowell's link between the conceptual content of perception and our beliefs and judgements about the world? For McDowell, as we have seen, concepts combine to be facts about the world. What is more, because concepts are *de re* senses, the mind-independent world is already present in the content. But what exactly is this relation between perceptual experience and beliefs, thoughts and judgements? McDowell comments that, 'rational relations ... link the conceptual contents of judgements of experience with other judgeable contents' (1994:12). But, how do we understand this claim?.

McDowell writes, 'the topography of the conceptual sphere is constituted by rational relations' (1994: 5). Leaving the relation between experience and belief to one side for the moment, an uncontroversial suggestion is that there are rational relations between all the judgements that we entertain. In Davidson's terms, we have a conceptual scheme, constituted by judgements and beliefs, all of which are interconnected with rational relations (Davidson, 2006:197). These rational relations enable a person to perform deductions, and other inferences involving the contents of other judgements. In short, the rational relations between judgements allow people to form other beliefs or make new judgements justified by pre-existing ones.

But McDowell claims more than this. He holds that rational relations also link experiences to judgements. He asserts, 'minimally, it must be possible to decide whether or not judge that things are as one's experience presents them to be' (1994:11).

We know this, McDowell continues, because the only way in which we can make the judgements that we do about our experiences is if experiences are rationally related to judgements. In other words, *because* we can make judgements and form beliefs about our experiences of the world, we must conclude that the content of experience is rationally related to the contents of belief and judgement.

Let us look at this more carefully. Above are what seem to be two of McDowell's fundamental claims:

- 1) The contents of judgements are rationally related to other judgements' contents ['the topography of the conceptual sphere is constituted by rational relations' (1994:5)].
- 2) The content of experience is also rationally related to the content of judgement and belief ['Minimally, it must be possible to be able to judge whether or not things are as one's experience presents them to be' (1994:11)].

The first of these two claims - that the content of one judgement is rationally related, or linked with the contents of other judgements, is relatively uncontroversial. Consider the following example. Suppose I come to believe that James enjoys watching musicals and doing ballet in his spare time. I also, rather stereotypically, believe that most men that enjoy musicals and do ballet are gay. Therefore, I conclude that James is probably gay. What we have here is an inference with two initial judgements with the contents: that James enjoys doing ballet and watching musicals and that those men who enjoy doing ballet and seeing musicals are usually gay.

Clearly, these two contents form the premises for my inference, that James is probably gay. As judgeable contents, they are linked by what McDowell would call a rational relation. The rational relation between these two beliefs is what enables them to be linked with each other and proceed to form the premises for my inference that James is probably gay.

Now, the inference above seems a reasonable description of how I might come to form a belief based on two of my existing judgements. As far as I am aware in (1), McDowell is suggesting that the two contents were able to serve as premises for my inference in virtue of them being rationally related. But what is this rational relation, and how did it enable my premises to fulfil this role?

What I propose is that we understand McDowell's rational relation as being functionally similar to what Crane terms an 'inferential relation'. Crane writes, 'the elements in a thinker's network of intentional states are essentially inferentially related to one another. Concepts are the constituents required to explain the inferential relations' (1992:147). Therefore, what comprises this rational relation – what links the content of one belief or judgement to the content of another – is the fact that the contents of both judgements share the same concepts. They are, therefore, similarly structured. In other words, if two judgements or beliefs are rationally related they share some of the same concepts and structure. In the example above, then, the two contents *James enjoys doing ballet and watching musicals* and *those men who enjoy doing ballet and seeing musicals are usually gay* are rationally related because their contents share the conceptual structure 'enjoy(s) watching musicals' and 'enjoy(s) doing ballet'. In summary, the fact that both belief contents share the same concepts and a similar structure means that they are rationally related. The link, or rational relation, between the two contents then enables them to serve as premises for an inference.

Claim (2) is more contentious.¹² McDowell argues that the content of *experience* is rationally related to the contents of judgements and beliefs. Experience and judgement are rationally related because must be able to make judgements about our experiences.¹³

¹² It is contentious because it is not readily accepted that the relation between experiences and judgements is of this logical, inferential kind that requires the content of experience to be conceptual. Peacocke, for example, maintains that experiences can still justify beliefs in virtue of the relation between experience and belief being of rational kind which need not be reduced to a logical inferential relation (see Peacocke 1992: 80). Also, no argument seems to be given as to why we ought to accept that only conceptual contents can be in such a rational, or inferential, relation with judgements or beliefs.

¹³ What is more, the thought that reasons require the possession of concepts need not necessarily entail that the content of perception is conceptual. On this point, Heck writes:

If reflection on how things appear necessarily plays a central role in the rational evaluation of the reasons perception gives me for my belief, and if to treat perceptual states as giving me *reasons* for belief, I must be able to rationally evaluate their bearing on my beliefs; then, if my perceptual states are to give me reasons for my beliefs, I must be able to exercise, and must therefore have, certain concepts. So the above reflections do show that thinkers must possess certain concepts if their perceptual states are to provide them with reasons for their beliefs. One might think that this establishes, or at least constitutes some evidence for, McDowell's claim that perceptual content is conceptual. But this conclusion is of no help to him at all, and we did not need a sophisticated argument to arrive at it. I cannot so much as *have* a particular belief unless I

This leads to McDowell's much-discussed conclusion that the only way in which this is possible is if the contents of experience are conceptual. Conceptual contents alone can provide us with reasons for our beliefs because they are the only type of content that can be in the required rational relation with a belief. How he comes to conclude this should now be clear. Remember that when McDowell says that the content of experience can serve as premises for inferences, judgements and beliefs, he seems to also be saying that experience *justifies or provides us with reasons for* beliefs and judgements. And this, again, can only occur if the content of experience is conceptual. On this point McDowell comments:

Conceptual capacities, capacities that belong to spontaneity, are already at work in experiences themselves, not just in judgements based on them; so experiences can intelligibly stand in rational relations to our exercises of freedom that is implicit in the idea of spontaneity (1994:24).

In other words, experiences, because they are *themselves* conceptual, can be rationally related to our judgements, beliefs and other exercises of what McDowell calls 'spontaneity.' And this rational relation is an inferential relation that enables the experience in question to act as a premise, or reason, for an inference or judgement. Hence, in much the same way that beliefs or judgements can be rationally related to each other, experiences can be rationally related to beliefs and judgements:

According to the position I am recommending, conceptual capacities are already operative in experience itself... Having things appear to one a certain way already is itself a mode of actual operation of conceptual capacities. This mode of operation of conceptual capacities is special because, on the side of the subject, it is passive, a reflection of sensibility. In the context of that claim, it takes work to ensure that the capacities are recognizable as genuinely

have certain conceptual capacities, that is, unless I possess the concepts that figure in my belief: it should be no surprise that my evaluating the reasons perception provides for believing a particular Thought requires me to exercise the same conceptual capacities I must have if I am so much as to *entertain* that Thought (Heck, 2000:516).

conceptual capacities – that the invocation of the conceptual is not mere word-play. What is needed is that the very same capacities can also be exploited in active judgements. And what secures this identification, between capacities that are operative in appearances and capacities that are operative in judgements, is the way appearances are rationally linked into spontaneity at large: the way appearances can constitute reasons for judgements about objective reality – indeed, do constitute reasons for judgements in suitable circumstances (1994:62).

This reading of McDowell's relation between experience and judgements is based on Brewer's explanation (Brewer, 1999: 149) and entails that experiences are conceptual. Experiences must be conceptual on this view because, recall, for there to be a rational relation between two judgements or between an experience and a judgement, both sets of content must share some of the same concepts and structure. In summary of this second claim and its entailment McDowell says:

In the lectures, I claim that we can coherently credit experiences with rational relations to judgement and belief, but only if we take it that spontaneity is already implicated in receptivity; that is, only if we take it that experiences have conceptual content (1994:162).

Clearly, this is a challenge to anyone who thinks that perception is non-conceptual. If McDowell is correct then one can never form beliefs or make judgements on the basis of non-conceptual perceptual experiences. That is, one's non-conceptual experiences can never justify one's beliefs or judgements, 'if we conceive experience in terms of impacts on sensibility that occur outside the space of concepts, we must not think we can appeal to experience to justify judgments or beliefs' (McDowell, 1994:14). McDowell continues:

The idea of the Given [the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content] is the idea that the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere. The extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought. But we cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgement is warranted except as relations within the space

of concepts... The attempt to extend the scope of justificatory relations outside the conceptual sphere cannot do what it is supposed to do (1994:7).

In summary, McDowell seems to claim that non-conceptual content is unable to play the justificatory role that is required of the content of experience. Justifications can only occur as relations between conceptual contents. Why this is exactly will be examined below.

McDowell concludes that non-conceptual content cannot justify beliefs and thoughts about the world because we:

Cannot be blamed for the inward influence of what happens there [at the level of non-conceptual content]. What happens there is the result of an alien force, the causal impact of the world operating outside the control of our spontaneity [our reasoning capacity] ... In effect, the idea of the Given offers exculpations where we wanted justifications (1994:8).

Thus, McDowell concludes, if non-conceptual experiences can impact on our conceptual capacities, the effect they will have on them will not be a rational, effect that is under our control. That is, it would not be possible for us to *actively* make judgements, or form beliefs based on our experiences. Non-conceptual content cannot provide us with reasons for our beliefs; it can only ever offer excuses for why we hold a certain belief about the world.

In addition, McDowell gives another quite Wittgensteinian reason why we ought not accept that non-conceptual experiences can justify beliefs:

If one becomes convinced that the ultimate grounds for judgements of experience must be bits of the Given [if one takes Evans' view that experiences are non-conceptual] one will naturally take oneself to be committed to the possibility of concepts that sit as closely as possible to those ultimate grounds in the sense that their content is wholly determined by the fact that judgements involving them are warranted by the right sort of bare presence [one is committed to the view that judgements that feature demonstrative concepts will be justified by non-conceptual content]. These concepts will be the concepts that are supposed to be expressible by the words of a private language. Only

one person could be the subject to whom a particular piece of Given is given. So any concept that was constituted by a justificatory relation to a bare presence [any concept that referred to non-conceptual content] would have to be, to that extent, a private concept (1994:19).

His point is that concepts that are grounded in non-conceptual content would be private concepts: concepts that can only figure in a private language. However, private concepts, like words of a private language, 'refer to what can only be known to the person...to his immediate private sensations' (Wittgenstein 1953: s243). It would, therefore, be impossible for anyone else to truly understand the language in which private concepts figured.

Leaving these objections aside, we ought to conclude, then, according to McDowell, that experience cannot coherently be held to extend beyond the bounds of the conceptual. It must be conceptual and:

One who holds that the content of experience is conceptual, and who places the idea of the conceptual in the right context [one who holds that experience is passive and comes pre-packaged with conceptual content], must register a link between the conceptual capacities that she takes to be at work in perception and the active exercise of spontaneity in judgements (1994:61).

This link, as I have just been discussing is one 'that connects experiences to judgements as reasons for them' (ibid :62). It is a logical, inferential relation between experience and judgement, much the same as the rational, inferential link between judgements and beliefs.

Brewer also works to demonstrate that the link between perceptual experience and empirical belief is such that experiences *provide reasons* for empirical beliefs, and at the same time gives beliefs representational contents:

A person's experiences enable her to grasp various contents which are apt to figure in rationalising explanations of her holding various beliefs about the mind-independent world around her, to figure, that is, as her reasons for holding them (1999: 49). (See also Brewer 1995b.)

Brewer develops McDowell's argument further by focussing on the rational relation that McDowell claims exists between beliefs, judgements and experience. Because the rational relation argument is the main motivation for the conclusion that the content of experience is conceptual, Brewer's development also inevitably aims at the strengthening of the claim that perception is conceptual.¹⁴

So let us look at Brewer's development of the claim that experience provides us with reasons for our beliefs. Here are the bare bones of what he argues:

Successfully giving such a reason involves making essential reference to the premise of an inference of some kind, whose conclusion is appropriately related, most likely by identity, to the content of the belief for which the reason is being given (1999:154).

The subject's having such a reason consists in his being in some mental state or other... (1999:151).

Additionally, a person must be able to articulate her reasons for beliefs. Her articulation will involve an identification of an inference in which her reason is a premise. In other words, reasons are the identification of:

Some feature in a subject's environment which makes the relevant judgement, belief or action appropriate, or intelligible, from the point of view of rationality... 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... Hence, in making such essential reference to the relevant valid inference, giving a reason involves making essential reference to its premises and conclusion (1999:150 -151).

¹⁴ Brewer defines perceptual experiences as 'the world's impact on a person's mind' (1999: 23). The beliefs in question here are empirical beliefs. They take a 'worldly object to be thus and so' (1999:25). For Brewer, the contents of beliefs are propositions constituted by Fregean senses, otherwise known by him as Ideas or, presumably, concepts. Brewer remarks that the content of a belief, 'depends in part upon the subject's Idea of the thing in question, where an *Idea* here is a singular Fregean sense' (1999:25). The function of the most basic empirical Ideas, or concepts – those which refer to objects that a person directly perceives at a given time – is to present those objects to her conscious experience (1999:28). They can also be recombined in many ways in an infinite number of thoughts, conforming to Evans' generality constraint (See Evans, 1982:104).

In other words, giving a reason entails identifying and making reference to the premises and conclusion of an inference.¹⁵

So a person can make a judgement based on her perceptual experiences as long as she can articulate some kind of valid deduction, say a deductive argument, using her perceptual experiences as a premise. And Brewer seems to be claiming that her reasoning might go like this.

P1) I see a black cat in front of me

C) There is a black cat in front of me

When a person is asked to justify her belief that there is a black cat in front of her, she refers to her inference above, in which her perceptual experience of the black cat forms a premise. Therefore, only experiences that are conceptual can be reason giving. This is because only experiences with conceptual content can serve as premises for deductions and other inferences. The only way in which the content of experience can provide reasons for a belief is if the content of experience is conceptual. This is because, as I understand it, the only type of content that can stand in the appropriate inferential, reason giving relation to belief is conceptual content.

3.2 Why Reasons don't Require Conceptual Contents

Peacocke places the justifications and reasons for our beliefs in his level of protopositional non-conceptual content. Protopositional content is, to recap, a layer of content above scenario contents. It is the content that represents:

An individual or individuals, together with a property or relation The protopositions that enter the representational content of ordinary human visual experience contain such properties and relations as SQUARE, CURVED, PARALLEL TO, EQUIDISTANT FROM, SAME SHAPE AS, AND SYMMETRICAL ABOUT. (I use small capitals for a word to indicate that I referring to the property or relation to which it refers, rather than to the concept it expresses.) These

properties and relations can be represented as holding of places, lines, or regions in the positioned scenario, or of objects perceived as located in such places (Peacocke, 1992:77).

For example, the difference between perceiving an object as a square or as a diamond is a difference at the level of protopositional content: the protopositional content of the perceptual experience of the object as a regular square represents the symmetries of the object differently to the protopositional content of the perceptual experience of the object as a diamond. A different way of thinking of this level of content is to view it as the content that captures the aspectual shape (see above) of the object. Now, this level of non-conceptual content gives:

A thinker who possess the relatively observational concept *square* not merely reasons but good reasons for forming the belief that the demonstratively presented object is square... That they are good reasons is intimately related to the condition required for the belief "that's square" to be true. If the thinker's perceptual systems are functioning properly, so that the non-conceptual representational content of his experience is correct, then when such experiences occur, the object thought about will really be square. In this description of why the linkages are rational linkages, I make essential use of the fact that the nonconceptual content employed in the possession condition has a correctness condition that concerns the world. The account of the rationality of this particular linkage turns on the point that when the correctness condition of the relevant nonconceptual contents is fulfilled, the object will really be square... This explanation of why the linkage is rational can proceed without appealing to the fact that the justifying experience mentioned in the possession condition represents the object as falling under the concept square. The point is just that on this theory we do not need to appeal to that conceptual representational content in giving the possession condition for the concept square, nor in explaining the correctness and rationality of forming beliefs containing this concept in accordance with its possession condition (1992:80).

This paragraph contains the heart of Peacocke's argument that non-conceptual content can justify beliefs. Let us break down his argument into its separate parts.

¹⁵ This seems a lot like McDowell's articulability requirement (see McDowell, 1994:166).

‘A thinker who possesses the relatively observational concept *square* [has] not merely reasons but good reasons for forming the belief that the demonstratively presented object is square’

Peacocke is saying that someone who possesses the concept, say, ‘square’ can have good reasons for believing that the object picked out is, in fact, square.

‘If the thinker’s perceptual systems are functioning properly, so that the non-conceptual representational content of his experience is correct, then when such experiences occur, the object thought about will really be square’

A perceiver has good reasons for believing that the object is square in virtue of the correctness condition of her representational content: if the non-conceptual content of her experience represents the object correctly (which it should assuming everything is working properly) then she can confidently form the belief that the object presented to her is actually square.

‘The account of the rationality of this particular linkage turns on the point that when the correctness condition of the relevant nonconceptual contents is fulfilled, the object will really be square...’

Peacocke writes elsewhere that forming a belief about an object of perception is a rational reaction ‘to one’s perceptual states in coming to make judgements about the world’ (Peacocke, 2001: 22). This link between experience and belief was touched on when we discussed possession conditions above. It was mentioned that Peacocke held that a perceiver ‘must find the present-tense demonstrative thought that the object is square to be primitively compelling’ (1992: 74). Finding something primitively compelling amounts to making the rational transition from having a perceptual experience and forming a belief about the object of that experience.

That is, the link, or transition from the content of a person’s experience to her forming the belief is a rational one. It is the knowledge that when the non-conceptual content correctly represents an object as being square, the object it represents is actually square. This gives a person good reasons for forming the belief that the object is square. Alex Byrne characterises this transition in the same way. He writes that Peacocke seems to be suggesting:

Simply that if my perceptual state is veridical (in Peacocke's strange usage, if my perceptual systems are "functioning properly"), then a certain kind of experience is an infallible indication of a square object before me. Modulo a worry about whether my experience is veridical, I am thereby justified in believing, on the basis of this kind of experience, that there is a square object before me (Byrne 1996: 262).

Chapter Four: The Second Pair of Opposing Claims

4.1 McDowell: *The Argument from Articulability*

McDowell puts forward the objection that Peacocke's non-conceptual content cannot justify a person's beliefs. Peacocke calls this argument 'The Argument from Articulability' (Peacocke, 1998:383). McDowell bases this objection on an articulability requirement, which states that a perceiver must be able to express her genuine reasons for her beliefs. That is, the reasons that a perceiver gives for her beliefs ought to be, and are, her actual reasons for holding that belief (McDowell, 1994:166). McDowell, writes:

[Peacocke] must sever the tie between reasons for which a subject thinks as she does and reasons she can give for thinking that way. Reasons that the subject can give, in so far as they are articulable, must be within the space of concepts (McDowell, 1994:165).

He continues:

Suppose one asks an ordinary subject why she holds some observational belief, say that an object within her field of view is square. An unsurprising reply might be "Because it looks that way"... In that simplest kind of case, what the subject says counts as giving a reason for her belief because the way the object looks is the way she believes it to be... The reason is articulable (even if only in the form "It looks like *that*"), so it must be no less conceptual that what it is a reason for (McDowell. 1994:166).

Heck puts McDowell's articulability requirement like this: 'McDowell speaks, at one point, of "a time honoured connection between reason and discourse." Apparently suggesting that only what I can articulate in *language* can be a reason for me' (Heck 2000:520).

Brewer posits something like McDowell's articulability requirement when he remarks that a person must be able to articulate her reasons for beliefs. Her

articulation will involve an identification of a premise within the inference that she is making. Brewer states:

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. In keeping with the orthodoxy as I perceive it, I call such contents *propositions* (1999:151).

It ... follows that it cannot be the case that the proposition, reference to which is required...above in characterizing the reason in question, can merely be related to this mental state of the subject's indirectly, by the theorist in some way. Rather, it must actually *be* the content of his mental state in a sense which requires that the subject has all of its constituent concepts (1999:152).

This entails that there is no need to interpret, or conceptualise experiences for them to count as reasons. A non-conceptual state, however, must be conceptualised and requires second-order thought for it to count as a reason for something.

Furthermore, a

Non-conceptual mental state can only possibly figure in an account of a person's own reason for believing or doing something if it is conjoined with his second-order knowledge of the appropriate rational relations between the two – between mental states of that type... and beliefs or actions of the relevant kind. In that case though, his reason is really provided by his second-order belief that he is in a mental state which is F. This is clearly a conceptual state... So such experiences themselves do not after all provide the subject's reasons for his beliefs about the world around him (1999:168-169).

So only conceptual contents can feature as reasons for a subject's belief partly because, they are the only entities that can stand in the required inferential relation to belief, and partly because they can be articulated directly. We don't need to articulate them indirectly, by something which has been conceptualised – instead we can make direct reference to them.

In summary, if something is to count as a subject's reason for her belief then she must be able to articulate that reason:

Successfully giving such a reason involves making essential reference to the premise of an inference of some kind, whose conclusion is appropriately related, most likely by identity, to the content of the belief for which the reason is being given (1999:154).

And this content must be conceptual.

4.2 Peacocke's Response to the Argument from Articulability

Peacocke responds to this criticism. He argues that the reply to the question "Why do you believe that is square" would, indeed, be given in conceptual terms: "Because it looks that way". But the words "it looks that way" express the sense of the reference and are not a reflection of the nature of the referent (i.e. the non-conceptual content). The referent remains non-conceptual even while the expression of the sense of the referent is conceptual. So although you need to rely on conceptual contents to articulate your reasons for a belief, it does not follow that the reasons *themselves* are conceptual.

Peacocke writes:

The demonstrative "that way" is indeed conceptual. But our question was whether the way thought *about* is conceptual. This is a question about the reference of the demonstrative, not its sense. It would be a non sequitur to move from the conceptual character of this sense to the conceptual character of its reference. The conceptual character of the demonstrative is entirely consistent with the non-conceptual character of *the way to which it refers* (1998:383).

So it looks as though, in light of the above, that some of Peacocke's Fregean concepts have non-conceptual content as their reference. This is a divergence from a traditional Fregean reading of concepts, and also is a very different approach to the account of Fregean concepts that McDowell holds. There is much evidence to be found in Peacocke's work that suggests that this is what some of his Fregean concepts have as their referents. So, some conceptual contents characterise the way someone is experiencing the world, rather than the world itself.

Additionally, we find the same thought again when Peacocke says that we can capture contents (presumably non-conceptual ones) with perceptual demonstratives (1992:83). He writes elsewhere that:

The use of the demonstrative 'that way' construed in the way it is on my approach, would allow the friend of nonconceptual content to meet any such demand. 'I believe it's square because it looks that way' is an articulation of the subject's reasons. Once again, 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 (Peacocke, 2001a: 20).

And, again, he observes that:

On my treatment, however, 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 (2001b:255-256).

Thus some of Peacocke's Fregean concepts seem to pick out non-conceptual content. That is, they have non-conceptual content as their referents. This is his primary rebuttal to the argument from articulability.

4.3 The Equivocation Argument

In regards to the argument from articulability, we have two opposing claims: McDowell maintains that only that which is conceptual is articulable and, because we must be able to articulate the reasons behind our beliefs, our reasons for our beliefs must be conceptual. On the other hand, Peacocke tells us that on the contrary, we can, using Fregean concepts, articulate the reasons for our beliefs even when those reasons are non-conceptual. Now, on the face of it, these two writers appear to be disagreeing over what is, or is not articulable. For instance, McDowell

seems to be suggesting that only conceptual contents are articulable and Peacocke is trying to show us that, actually we can articulate non-conceptual contents. And this is how the argument is generally conceived to be. But what I propose is that contrary to how this argument appears on the surface, what really lies at the source of the disagreement is simply the fact that McDowell and Peacocke hold two radically different theories of concepts.

For example, when McDowell writes that we can only articulate reasons which are conceptual – I believe that this is not a metaphysical statement about the nature of the entities that we can express or refer to. What he is saying is that when we have a reason for our belief, say, “the world’s being that way”, “*the world’s being that way*” is *conceptual*. That is, because McDowell’s concepts are, at least in the case of a person’s perception of her immediate environment, *de re* senses. *De re* senses bring the world into the conceptual content. In other words, the cat’s being brown is a conceptual fact about the world. Therefore, it inevitably follows that if the reason we believe the ‘cat is brown’ is because *the cat is brown*, the reason for our belief is conceptual. Because the object of the content is part of the content, our belief is justified by conceptual content and the way the world is – simply because the world’s being a certain way is identical with the conceptual content of perception.

For McDowell to say that we can only articulate conceptual reasons is to say that the only reasons we could have are conceptual ones. This is because the world comes to us – or impresses itself upon us in a conceptual way. It is the same as saying, really, that the reason for our belief, is because the world is that way.

There simply is (because of the way that McDowell conceives of concepts), no gap between the mind and the world. McDowell is not making the idealistic claim that our mind creates the world we perceive. Instead, McDowell is arguing that the world impresses itself upon us in a conceptual manner. So the world’s very impact comes equipped with conceptual content: inherent in the impressions that the world makes upon our consciousness are conceptual contents. Therefore, the ultimate reason why we hold beliefs about our immediate environment is because the world is that way. And the way the world is, is conceptual. So there simply is nothing else, no other reason that we could give. We should, then, view McDowell’s argument

from articulability, not as an argument based on the nature of what is articulable, but more as an argument that the only reasons we could possibly give are conceptual ones.

On the other hand, Peacocke's Fregean concepts can sometimes refer to non-conceptual content. This is a use of Fregean concepts that is vastly different to McDowell's. It highlights the difference between the two theories of concepts. In fact, the difference is such that McDowell's *de re* senses/concepts are identical with their referents; but Peacocke's concepts and Fregean senses are very much distinct from their referents. In contrast to a traditional reading of Fregean senses, however, Peacocke's senses (concepts) can pick out referents that are essentially the non-conceptual contents of a person's mental state. So, of course on Peacocke's view we can articulate any non-conceptual reasons that we may have for our beliefs. This is an inevitable conclusion because he presupposes that his Fregean concepts can pick out, or have as their referents, non-conceptual content.

4.4 Conclusion

Due to the vast difference between McDowell and Peacocke's theories of concepts, both authors are led to argue for two very different positions. Given their different theories of concepts; their individual positions follow as an inevitable consequence.

Therefore, the argument from articulability - an argument over whether in order for experiences to count as reasons they must be conceptual or not - rests on an equivocation: it arises from an ambiguity over the term 'conceptual'. Once this is recognised, it becomes clear that the disagreement is not over whether conceptual contents alone are articulable; it is really over which theory of concepts ought to be adopted. This is because, (as I have hoped to show) the theory of concepts one adopts determines whether one holds that non-conceptual contents can be articulated or whether one concludes that conceptual contents alone are articulable.

In the introduction to this essay I stated that I would provide an exposition of Peacocke and McDowell's theories of perceptual content. This task was, I hope, at least partially achieved. Part of the difficulty in understanding the various theories

of conceptual and non-conceptual content arises out of vagueness around the notion of a concept. Bermúdez shares this thought:

The significance of the notion [of non-conceptual content] depends upon the particular way of understanding concepts with which it is contrasted... Before we can plausibly claim to have a full understanding of the possibilities of the notion of non-conceptual content, we need to have a much clearer view than we currently have of what it is to possess a concept (Bermúdez, 2003: ref).

This paper has left aside questions such as ‘is McDowell’s theory of concepts a tenable one?’, and ‘can McDowell’s conceptualism still, in light of the exposition above, be legitimately seen as representational?’ But it is hoped that the explanation of what both McDowell and Peacocke hold concepts to be has served two ends. Firstly, as Bermúdez suggests is necessary, it has helped the reader to grasp their respective notions of conceptual and non-conceptual content. Secondly, it has demonstrated that due to McDowell’s and Peacocke’s widely different notions of concepts, the argument from articulability rests on an equivocation: it arises from an ambiguity in the way that concepts are defined.

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