

The Contents of Perception and the Contents of Emotion

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Abstract

Several philosophers think there are important analogies between emotions and perceptual states. Furthermore, considerations about the rational assessability of emotions have led philosophers—in some cases, the very same philosophers—to think that the content of emotions must be propositional content. If one finds it plausible that perceptual states have propositional contents, then there is no obvious tension between these views. However, this view of perception has recently been attacked by philosophers who hold that the content of perception is object-like. I shall argue for a view about the content of emotions and perceptual states which will enable us to hold both that emotional content is analogous to perceptual content and that both emotions and perceptual states can have propositional contents. This will involve arguing for a pluralist view of perceptual content, on which perceptual states can have both contents which are proposition-like and contents which are object-like. I shall also address two significant objections to the claim that emotions can have proposition-like contents. Meeting one of these objections will involve taking on a further commitment: the pluralist account of perceptual content will have to be one on which the contents of perception can be non-conceptual.

1. Introduction

Several philosophers have been attracted to the view that there are significant analogies between perceptual states and emotions.¹ One attraction of this view is that both emotions and perceptual states seem to be occurrent intentional states with distinctive phenomenological properties. Since both perceptual states and emotions are kinds of content-bearing state, and since the fact that they are both examples of content-bearing states plays an important part in motivating the analogy between them, one might wonder whether the analogy can be pushed further. In particular, one might wonder whether there are significant analogies between the kinds of content which emotions have and the kind of content which perceptual states have.

Some philosophers have thought that emotions have contents of a sort which is appropriately described as propositional.² If the analogy between perceptual states and emotions holds good, and if one finds it plausible that perceptual states have propositional contents, then this might be thought to provide some support for the view that emotions have propositional contents. Unfortunately the view that perceptual states have propositional contents has recently been subjected to

vociferous criticism.³ If these criticisms are correct then philosophers of emotion are apparently faced with two options: either play down—or simply abandon—the idea that there are significant analogies between emotion and perception; or draw back from the claim that emotions have propositional contents.

One might attempt to blunt this dilemma by suggesting that although there are interesting analogies between these two kinds of state, the interest of the comparison does not depend on emotions and perceptual states having precisely the same kinds of content. The idea here would be to insist on the existence and fruitfulness of the analogy while avoiding detailed examination of the kinds of content which either emotions or perceptual states possess.⁴ However, this strategy seems somewhat limiting. If we hope that the perceptual model of emotion will shed light on the nature of emotions our discussions ought to make contact with the state of the art in philosophy of perception. Unfortunately, much of the existing literature does not do so.

In this paper, I shall address issues about perceptual content ‘head-on’ by looking in detail at the kind of account of perception which might be available to someone who wanted to draw on the supposed analogy between emotion and perception, and considering what kinds of views about the contents of emotion this would commit us to. I shall argue that we can sustain the analogy between perception and emotion, without giving up on the view that emotions have propositional content, provided we adopt a particular view of perceptual content. I shall call this view a ‘Pluralist View’ of perceptual content.

On the Pluralist View, perceptual states can have more than one kind of content. However, since there are a number of logically possible, but distinct views all of which might lay claim to the title ‘Pluralist View’, more needs to be said about what kind of pluralism is in question here. I shall argue that, the sort of theory of perception which we are likely to need in this context will need to be pluralistic in two different ways. First, it will need to be pluralistic with respect to the logical form of the contents of perception: it will be a view on which perceptual states can have both contents which are proposition-like and contents which are object-like. Secondly, the account will need to be pluralistic about the kinds of propositional content perceptual states can have: it will have to allow for both conceptual and non-conceptual forms of propositional content.

I have said that we will need a view on which perceptual states *can* have more than one kind of content. This formulation is ambiguous. We might want to distinguish between ‘Weak Perceptual Pluralism’ and ‘Strong Perceptual Pluralism’. ‘Weak Perceptual Pluralism’ is the claim that different perceptual states can have different kinds of contents, but no single state can have more than one kind of content. ‘Strong Perceptual Pluralism’ the view that what we intuitively regard as a single perceptual state—say, the state that I am in when I am looking at a bowl of flowers in front of me—may have several different kinds of content.

The view of perception that I am advocating is a version of Strong Perceptual Pluralism; and the view of emotion that I take to be required by a serious defense of the Perceptual Analogy involves the same kind of pluralism. However, I shall not be arguing for a yet stronger claim, which one might call ‘Ultra-Strong Perceptual Pluralism’: the view that every perceptual state must have all the different kinds

of content which I distinguish. While this view may be true, I do not think that someone who thinks there are analogies between emotional and perceptual content need accept it; and there may be good reasons for denying it.

It is worth addressing one objection to Strong Perceptual Pluralism (and also to its Ultra-Strong cousin) straight away. Someone might suppose that Strong Perceptual Pluralism cannot be true on the grounds that a single perceptual state must involve a single representation, and that a given representation can only have one form of content. However, even if we grant the representationalist presuppositions of this objection, the objection itself does not seem to be obviously correct.⁵ In order for it to go through we would need to suppose both that there is a way of individuating 'states' on which a single state can only involve a single kind of representation; and that no other way of individuating states is legitimate. It may well be that if we grant the representationalist presuppositions of the objection (as I have suggested we should), there is no space for objecting to the first of these presuppositions. Nevertheless, the second seems highly questionable. There may be all sorts of reasons, from the point of view of both science and common sense, why we may want to individuate perceptual (and emotional) states in a more coarse-grained way, and in particular one which allows for the possibility of a single state having more than one kind of content.

2. Clarificatory and Strategic Remarks

First, some preliminary remarks. I start by emphasizing that the question I am most interested in for the purposes of this paper is a conditional one. In other words, I am interested in knowing what kinds of view of perceptual and emotional content we would be committed to if the analogy between perceptual and emotional content held good. I am also interested in knowing whether the views of content that we would be committed to are sustainable.

These questions matter for two reasons. The idea that there is an analogy between emotional and perceptual content of the sort that I am interested in seems a reasonable bet, in the light of the other kinds of analogies between the two sorts of state which I shall discuss in section 3. But we might wonder whether there is any reason for thinking that exploration of this analogy is likely to be fruitful: in other words, whether it is likely to point us in the direction of facts about emotion and perception that we would have been less likely to discover without exploring the analogy. If there was a close relationship between the kinds of content which emotions and perceptual states can have, this would be a good reason for thinking the analogy likely to be fruitful.

Moreover, whether or not the analogy turns out to be a fruitful source of ideas about the emotions we shall see that exploring the analogy points us towards a view of perceptual content whose possibility we might otherwise overlook: This is the 'Pluralist View', which I introduce in section 5 below. While I shall not try to provide a full-scale defense of this view in this paper, I taking that drawing attention to the possibility of a view of this sort and articulating it in some detail is nonetheless a worthwhile achievement.

In what follows I shall attempt to achieve the following goals. First, to give a clear articulation of the kind of view of perceptual content to which someone who was committed to the analogy between emotion and perception would need to accept. Secondly, to say something substantive about what might motivate a view of this sort. Thirdly to show that the kind of pluralism about perceptual content required is a viable theoretical option, and in particular it is not ruled out by arguments which have already been advanced in the philosophy of perception literature.

It is worth noticing that achieving the first of these goals would be significant even if it turned out that the sort of pluralism about perceptual content that the analogy calls for can be shown to be untenable. For this would tell us either that the perceptual analogy was not viable, or that it was less illuminating than one might initially hope. And that might, perhaps suggest that the perceptual analogy might need to be supplemented by alternative approaches. While they may seem modest, these goals are not negligible

3. Perceptual Views of Emotion

Several authors have explored the idea that there are significant analogies between emotions and perceptual states.⁶ Andrea Scarantino has recently argued that it is perhaps the most plausible formulation of the underlying insight of a whole family of views which label themselves ‘cognitivist.’⁷ With that in mind, let us review some of the more striking considerations in its favour.⁸

As we have already noted, emotions are typically taken to have both intentional and phenomenological properties. Some views, often characterized as ‘add-on’ views, account for emotions’ possession of these two kinds of property by assigning these properties to different components (for example, to a belief and an associated non-intentional sensation or feeling).⁹ Thus for example, grief might be characterized as involving a belief that one has suffered a great loss accompanied by sensations of either mental or physical disturbance; anger as involving a belief that one has been insulted, together with a set of sensations characteristic of anger, and so on.¹⁰ Views of this sort are widely thought to be unsatisfactory.¹¹ One reason for this, stressed by Robert Roberts, is that such accounts seem not to do justice to the ways in which emotions present themselves to those who experience them as unitary states.¹²

An alternative might be to regard emotions as being a particular species of desire.¹³ Thus, for example, anger might be conceived of as a desire for retaliation; grief as a desire for something that is known to be lost and so on. It speaks in favour of this view that desires are unitary states which seem to have both a phenomenological and intentional properties. Nevertheless, this account is less appealing than it might at first seem. Notice that we can distinguish between a purely motivational conception of desire, and a conception of desires which is phenomenologically rich. The phenomenologically rich conception is the one which we need to appeal to in this context. However, in the absence of a clear and independently-motivated account of how desires come to have phenomenological properties, one might suspect that phenomenologically rich desires acquire their phenomenological richness

only via their association with emotions. If so, then drawing an analogy between emotions and desires seems unlikely to be illuminating.¹⁴

Perceptual accounts of emotion provide an attractive alternative to views of both sorts. For perceptual states provide a good model of a kind of state which has both intentional and phenomenological properties and in which the state's possession of the two kinds of properties is not normally thought of as being best accounted for by decomposing the state into separate components, one bearing one kind of property and another bearing the other.

Perceptual views of emotion also seem to do justice to our apparent passivity with respect to emotional states. This passivity is reflected in the historical use of the term 'passions' to refer to emotions; and also in some of the language that we find it natural to use about emotions. We speak of being 'overcome', 'overwhelmed' or even 'swept away' by strong emotions, and rarely think of them as being themselves the result of deliberation.¹⁵ It is natural to think of perception as passive: we can choose what we see only insofar as we can choose what we look at.¹⁶ Perception contrasts with some other kinds of mental state here. We can shape our beliefs and at least some of our desires, not only by our choice of what to think about, but also via deliberative decision-making.¹⁷ For example, we can weigh up the evidence which bears on a particular question with a view to deciding which answer to it is correct. We can also survey a variety of different possible goals, and decide which of them we wish to make our own. Explaining how this is possible is philosophically challenging. Nevertheless the phenomenon seems real enough. At any rate, we rarely speak of ourselves as being overcome by a belief.¹⁸

4. Emotions and Their Propositional Contents

The case that I shall be making for thinking that an advocate of the perceptual analogy should adopt a pluralistic view of perceptual content will depend heavily on the idea that we should think of emotions as having propositional contents. If the case for this depended on a prior commitment to the perceptual analogy there would be a risk of circularity here.

However, there are reasons for holding that emotions have propositional contents which do not depend on the perceptual analogy. For example, it seems plausible to regard at least some emotions as responses to situations or states of affairs, and that these responses can be either warranted or unwarranted. If I am scared by the large furry dog that comes bounding towards me as I am out for a walk in the evening, this maybe appropriate, if the dog is in some way a danger to me. Equally, if the dog is in no way dangerous, but simply wants to play, then my fear may be inappropriate. So it may well seem plausible to think of my fear as being a state which represents the world as being a certain way: in particular as being a way which would make the emotion which I am feeling appropriate. So one might see the fear here as having as its content that the dog in front of me is dangerous, or liable to harm me.¹⁹

On a view like this, the propositional content of an emotion is to be identified with the state of affairs which makes, or would make, the emotion appropriate.

On this account of propositional content, there is no straightforward inference to be made from the fact that someone is experiencing an emotion with a particular content to their being able to articulate that content. It is possible to be afraid of dogs without being able to talk about dogs or about danger, or about harm.

Considerations of this sort have sometimes led philosophers to identify emotions with beliefs or judgments.²⁰ This identification is implausible. My fear of a dog can last long past the point at which I am convinced that it poses no danger to me. Such fear may be ill-founded; but it is not imaginary, and it can persist, in a way that beliefs typically do not, even in the face of a directly countervailing belief. Furthermore, I can recognize that someone else has emotions which are at odds with their beliefs without this threatening the coherence of the rest of the propositional attitudes which I ascribe to them; whereas this seems more difficult when circumstances lead me to attribute two directly contradictory beliefs.²¹

Although it is implausible that emotions are beliefs we should not abandon the idea that emotions have propositional contents. There are kinds of mental state other than beliefs that can have propositional contents. On many accounts of perception, perceptual states also have propositional contents.²² Furthermore, on at least some of those accounts the propositional content of a perceptual state is given by its accuracy conditions, in a way which is analogous to the way in which the propositional content of an emotion can be given by its appropriateness conditions.²³

Nor should we abandon the view that emotions have propositional contents simply because there are emotions such as love and hate for which it is harder to find propositional contents than it is for fear. One possibility to consider is that different kinds of emotions have different kinds of content. On this view, some kinds of emotions would have persons or other kinds of objects as their focus while others would have situations. This would require us to take a pluralist view of the contents of emotion. The kind of pluralism that would be required here would be analogous to what I have called ‘Weak Perceptual Pluralism’. But a view analogous to Strong Perceptual Pluralism would also be consistent with the phenomena. This is fortunate since, as we shall see in what follows, there is a reasonably good case to be made for Strong Perceptual Pluralism.

5. Perceptual Content—Propositional, Object and Pluralist Views

Advocates of the perceptual analogy who hold that (some) emotions have propositional contents face a problem, unless they can defend the view that perceptual states have such contents. However, this view, which I shall call ‘Propositional View of Perceptual Content’ or ‘The Propositional View’ is extremely controversial.²⁴ Prominent opponents of the Propositional View include Charles Travis,²⁵ Anil Gupta,²⁶ John Campbell,²⁷ and Bill Brewer.²⁸ Many, though not all of these authors accept as an alternative to The Propositional View what one might call ‘The Object View of Perceptual Content’ or ‘The Object View’. According to the Object View we must make room for the idea that perceptual states have particular objects—items which do not have a propositional structure—as their contents.²⁹ We must also

accommodate the idea that they do so in a way which we might call ‘underivative’: that is to say, on the Object View, it is not the case that objects are contents of perception in virtue of their featuring in propositions which are the content of perception.³⁰

The Propositional View and the Object View are often regarded as being mutually exclusive. However, on the characterizations which I have given of them, there is no reason why they must be.³¹ In the absence of further argument, there is no immediate reason to rule out the possibility that perceptual states might have more than one kind of content, and in particular that they might have both propositional and (non-derivatively) objectual contents. Call views of this sort ‘Pluralist Object Views’.

The Pluralist Object View is one possible position in logical space. It is natural to wonder whether there might be any positive reason for it. If not, then considerations of parsimony might rule it out. Here are two reasons for taking it seriously.

The first is phenomenological. The Object View is sometimes thought to be lent plausibility by the fact that in perception we are presented with objects directly. However, it seems equally plausible to say that in perception we are presented, not simply with objects, but with objects as being a certain way and standing in certain relationships to one another and to us—in other words, with states of affairs, or judgeable contents in which objects figure. Furthermore, one might go on to say that which of these phenomenological facts seems most salient to us may well depend on the particular kind of perceptual experience we choose to focus on. It seems particularly plausible to think of perception as presenting us with objects directly when we are thinking of the role which perception plays in engaged action. Here, plausibly, perception puts me in direct contact with particular objects. But when I am simply surveying the scene in front of me in a disengaged way—as it might be from the philosopher’s arm-chair—then things are different. Or so one might think.³²

Considerations from the psychology of perception might also be taken to count in favour of the Pluralist Object View—or at least to undermine the force of considerations of parsimony. On one well-supported view, vision involves two separate streams of information, one dorsal and one ventral. On accounts of this sort, the ventral stream is involved in perception for action and the dorsal stream supports the inputs of vision to speech-processing and memory.³³ The distinctness of these channels of visual processing can be taken to be demonstrated by a variety of phenomena. One of the more striking is the existence of illusions of size in which individuals who are asked to make comparative verbal judgments of the comparative size of a set of circles give incorrect responses, but have no difficulty at all in adjusting their hand to the appropriate size in order to grasp the circles.³⁴

Any plausible account of what is going on in subjects of this sort is likely to need to postulate the existence of distinct visual representations, one serving as an input into speech and the other into grasp. It does not follow, of course, that these representations must take different forms. But given that they perform different roles and appear to encode different kinds of information it is far from clear why we should expect them to be representations of the same kind. At very least this

seems to count against the idea that considerations of parsimony tell us that there is likely to be only one form of visual representation. They appear to establish a case for taking seriously the possibility that there might be perceptual contents of different kinds.

It is worth noticing that the view I have outlined is compatible with a fairly common argumentative strategy which is employed by advocates of the Object View. This is to argue that the fact that perception is directed at particular objects plays an ineliminable role in vindicating a certain intuition or explaining a certain phenomenon.³⁵

6. Arguments Against Propositional Views (1): Anil Gupta

Arguments which are aimed at showing that perceptual states *cannot* have propositional contents present more of a challenge for Pluralist Object Views. Anil Gupta and Charles Travis have both put forward arguments of this sort.³⁶

Call the claim that perceptual states have propositional contents the ‘Propositional View’. Gupta holds that the Propositional View, taken together with two further claims, which he calls the ‘Equivalence Constraint’ and the ‘Reliability Constraint’, leads to skepticism and that this constitutes a reason for rejecting the Propositional View.³⁷ Gupta formulates the Equivalence Constraint and the Reliability Constraint as follows:

Equivalence Constraint: ‘The given in subjectively identical experiences is the same’

Reliability Constraint: ‘The given in an experience never contains a false judgment—i.e. a false proposition.’^{38,39}

For the purposes of this paper, I shall assume that Gupta is right to think that the Propositional View taken together with these two constraints entails a skeptical conclusion, and also that if a combination of views entails a skeptical conclusion that gives us a reason to reject at least one of them. Even if we concede this we do not yet have a compelling reason for rejecting the Propositional View. We might choose to reject either the Equivalence Constraint or the Reliability Constraint instead. I shall argue that we have at least as much reason to reject the Reliability Constraint as the Propositional View.⁴⁰

Two points Gupta makes which might be thought to support the Reliability Constraint should be discounted in this context. First, Gupta argues that the Reliability Constraint is consistent with the claim that our everyday judgments of perception, judgments such as ‘there is now a table in front of me’, are sometimes false.⁴¹ Gupta thinks this is true because he thinks that such judgments are not part of what he is calling ‘the given’. This is because, on his view, the given does not include judgments. But whether or not this is true is precisely what is at issue between those who agree and those who do not agree with the Propositional View. If the Reliability Constraint is taken to figure in the case against the Propositional View, the falsity of the Propositional View cannot be presupposed as part of an argument for the Reliability Constraint.

Gupta's claim that 'from the phenomenological point of view, judgments are not the given in experience' should also not be counted as part of the best case for the Reliability Constraint.⁴² I have already argued in section 6 that the account of perceptual phenomenology that Gupta is appealing to here is at best controversially one-sided. If one considers the variety of possible perceptual experiences, both engaged and contemplative, one will find some perceptual experiences in which perceptual judgments do seem to be part of what is given in perception and others in which they do not.

Gupta's most significant argument in favor of 'Reliability' is based on two claims. The first is that 'experience is passive'. The second is that 'it is always a good policy not to assign fault to the passive.'⁴³ Gupta's remark that this is a matter of 'good policy' seems hard to parse. What is at issue here is not 'what is good policy?' but 'what is true?'; or at least 'what is conceptually coherent and metaphysically possible?' Suppose, however, we agree both that we are passive in experience,⁴⁴ and also that it is a mistake of some sort to assign fault to the passive. These claims on their own are not enough to establish that the Reliability Constraint is true.

In order to have an argument for the Reliability Constraint, we need some way of getting from the claim that experience involves no fault to the claim that it cannot involve a false judgment. One way of doing so would be if we thought that false judgment does have to involve fault. If we do think so, then in the light of his claim that 'it is . . . a good policy not to assign fault to the passive' we are presumably committed to the view that false judgment is not passive (or, perhaps, not *purely* passive.)

If these exegetical suggestions are correct, then Gupta's argument for the Reliability Constraint might be formulated as follows: False judgment involves fault; fault only makes sense when we are not purely passive; we are purely passive in experience; therefore experience cannot involve false judgment.

This argument seems to presuppose, without argument, that experience cannot have the same sort of content as judgment without being a judgment. As I have already noted, this point is controversial.⁴⁵ However, let us put this to one side.

If we can say that any mental process where we are not purely passive involves an active capacity, it follows from the first two premises of this argument that false judgment always involves an active capacity.⁴⁶ There are only two ways in which this could be true. One would be if judgment itself always involved an active capacity. The second would be if judgment did not always involve such a capacity, but false judgment did. However, it is difficult to make sense of the second of these possibilities. The possibility of falsity in a judgment seems to depend on the relationship between judgment and a mind-independent world, not between judgment and the will. So we are left with the first possibility: judgment always involves an active capacity.

We might think that if Gupta is committed to the view that judgment always involves an active capacity this commits him to a controversial form of doxastic voluntarism.⁴⁷ However, he could conceivably be committed to a weaker view—namely that when we are making a judgment we need to decide whether or not to accept a given contentful item.⁴⁸ Even this seems somewhat implausible. There are

at least some occasions on which we seem to make judgments involuntarily. When I walk into the kitchen, see some unwashed dishes and say to myself ‘There’s a terrible mess in here’, the judgment itself seems to be wrung from me by the situation itself, and not something which presents itself as a possible judgment calling for either endorsement or rejection. This point does not seem to be undermined in any way by the further observation that a moments reflection might lead to a calmer, more relaxed judgment in which the content ‘a terrible mess’ did not occur at all.

In any case there is a more serious problem with Gupta’s case for the Reliability Constraint. If my reconstruction of his position is correct, Gupta’s case depends on the premise that false judgments always involve some kind of fault. Gupta gives no arguments for this premise. However, it is by no means obvious that it is true. Pre-theoretically, one might well think that there can be faultless errors and that some errors in perceptual judgment, such as mistaking a person for their twin sibling, would provide us with examples of precisely such faultless errors.

Here is an argument for the claim that there can, in fact, be faultless false judgments. Consider the case of inferential judgments. We sometimes make false judgments as a result of making inferential mistakes. But not all such mistakes need involve fault. Consider, for example a case where I need to perform a complex arithmetical operation in a situation where I have limited memory resources. It might be impossible for me to avoid making a mistake. But I can’t be at fault for doing something it is impossible for me to avoid. (If it is a bad idea to blame the passive, then it is surely also a bad idea to require the impossible.) If this is true there can be faultless inferential errors. We would not regard this as reason for thinking that a belief which was formed as a result of such an error did not have a propositional content.

Gupta might retort that I have not come up with an uncontroversial case of a false *perceptual* judgment that does not involve fault. That is true. Given what is at issue, it is highly unlikely that it will be possible to come up with any such cases which are uncontroversial. Instead, I have argued that Gupta is wrong to think that false judgment must always involve fault. Since Gupta appears to derive his conclusions about perceptual judgments from considerations about judgment in general, it follows that if there is no reason to think that false judgment must involve fault in the general case, we have not been given a good reason for taking it to be true in the particular case of *perceptual* judgments. This undermines Gupta’s case for the Reliability Constraint, and hence his case against the Propositional View.

7. Arguments Against Propositional Views (2): Charles Travis

Charles Travis has also argued that perceptual states cannot have propositional contents.⁴⁹ He does so by considering a number of possible examples of statements which might be candidates for expressing the content of a particular state, and arguing that none of these statements can do so. In particular he argues that if

perceptual states have propositional contents, the content of those states must be expressible as a statement about how things look.⁵⁰

Travis then argues that such 'looks' statements can be interpreted in one of two ways, which I shall call the 'inferential disposition' and 'looking like' interpretations.⁵¹ The first of these interpretations has two slightly different uses. It can be used to report a disposition to draw a certain inference on the part of a particular person. When I say that Sid looks to me, or to his partner, as though he is drunk, I am reporting that I, or Sid's partner is inclined to conclude that Sid is drunk on the basis of visual evidence. It can also be used to make a 'depersonalized' version of the same kind of claim. Travis suggests that claims of this sort collapse into claims about a particular state's being (merely) information-bearing and that claims of this sort are not fully representational.⁵² That is to say, on this interpretation, there is no room for *misrepresentation*—if Sid is not drunk then it is a mistake to say that he looks as though he is.

On an alternative way of construing them, the statements about how things look will be what one might call 'looking-like statements'. Travis suggests that such statements will not serve the purposes of an advocate of the Content View, because they cannot uniquely specify the content of the state in question.⁵³ This is because any *statement* about how things look is capable of being true even when things are not actually the way they look. So, for example, if the shirt in front of me looks blue, it may in fact not be a single-hued blue, but a pointilliste mélange that gives the impression of being blue, or a white shirt dipped in quick-fading dye (the examples are Travis's).⁵⁴ Furthermore says Travis, if the way things look is compatible with their being some other way, then they also look to be either the way they were initially specified as looking or the way they are.⁵⁵ So for example, if the shirt in front of me looks blue, but it is compatible with the way it looks that it has been dipped in quick-fading dye, then it looks to be either blue or recently dipped in rapidly-fading ink.

Travis suggests that advocates of the view that perceptual states have propositional content should prefer the first of these ways of expressing the content of a 'looks' statement to the second. However, it is not clear that he is right about this. It is worth noticing that his argument against the second way of interpreting 'looks' statements seems far from conclusive. Even if we grant Travis that a white shirt which has been dipped in rapidly-fading dye is not a blue shirt, it is not entirely obvious that we should also grant him that it follows from the fact that the shirt in front of me looks blue is compatible with its having been dyed in rapidly-fading ink in front of me, the shirt looks (to have been) dipped in rapidly fading blue ink.⁵⁶ One might think that the shirt would have to look very different to look that way.⁵⁷

However, there is a more serious problem with Travis' argument here. His argument seems to depend on the assumption that if perceptual states have propositional contents, those contents must be verbally specifiable in ways which pick them out uniquely. Call this the 'Expressibility Constraint'.

EC: If a state has propositional content then there is some form of words which can be used to specify that content uniquely.

The Expressibility Constraint is more controversial than one might suppose. On some accounts of perception, perceptual states can have a content which is propositional but non-conceptual.⁵⁸ As I shall argue in section 8, someone who accepts an account of perception of this sort has no reason to accept the Expressibility Constraint.⁵⁹

One might resist this line of argument by suggesting that the Expressibility Constraint was true by definition. On an account of this sort, a state would have propositional content if and only if there was some form of words which could be used to specify its content.

There are two points to make about this suggestion. First, we should notice that this is not the only way in which we might understand the notion of the propositional content of a perceptual state. When I introduced the notion of a perceptual states having propositional content I did so by talking of the state's accuracy conditions. It is not obvious that it follows from a state's having accuracy conditions that there must be some form of words which could be used to state those conditions. Furthermore, if Travis' arguments show that perceptual states cannot have propositional contents when the notion of propositional content is understood in such a way as to make the Expressibility Constraint definitive of what it is for a state to have propositional content, but do not show that perceptual states cannot have propositional contents when the notion of propositional content is understood along the lines of the accuracy view, then his arguments cannot constitute an objection to the pluralistic account of perceptual content which I am advocating here.

8. Rejecting Expressibility

The idea that perception might have a non-conceptual content has been extensively discussed over the past two decades.⁶⁰ The view is controversial, and I shall not try to address all the objections which have been made to it. For my purposes, what matters is that the view is still a live theoretical option.

I start by making a number of points that are, by now, quite well-known. The first is that to attribute to a subject a perceptual state which has a certain propositional content is not obviously and immediately to attribute to her or him the conceptual capacities that we use in picking out that state. In other words it seems at least imaginable someone could be in a perceptual state whose content *we* would most naturally characterize using certain concepts while themselves lacking those concepts. States which have contents of which it is true that the occurrence of a concept in their characterization does not entail that the individual who is in that state has the concept in question are states with non-conceptual contents.⁶¹

There are a number of different reasons why the idea that perceptual states have non-conceptual content has seemed appealing.⁶² One, stressed in a number of early papers on the non-conceptual content of perception by Christopher Peacocke is the thought that the content of perception sometimes has a property which we might call 'Inexpressibility'. The content of a perceptual state is inexpressible when it outruns any concepts which we have. Consider, for example, the experience of

looking at a particular serrated autumn leaf. In many cases such a leaf will both have, and appear to have, a shape which is, when considered in detail, distinct from the shape of other serrated leaves.⁶³

On Peacocke's view the content of perception will have as a part that the leaf has the particular shape which it does have. Part of the reason for taking the content of this state to be non-conceptual is precisely that in many cases we will not have a word, or a set of words, with which we can express the exact shape of the leaf. Furthermore, the content has accuracy conditions: the leaf may turn out to have a very different serrated shape from the shape I took it to have—for example, if I have mistakenly taken it to have an edge somewhere where it is merely occluded by another leaf. So even where content is non-conceptual, it can still be propositional in the sense which I have used that term.⁶⁴

Elsewhere, Peacocke has suggested that it is helpful to distinguish between two kinds of non-conceptual content, which he refers to as 'scenario content' and 'proto-propositional content.'⁶⁵ Protopositional contents are contents whose individuation conditions are, in Michael Tye's word, fine-grained.⁶⁶ In other words, the contents of such states may be distinct, even when they have the same correctness conditions. In arguing for this possibility Peacocke invites us to consider two possible perceptual experiences: one of a square with two of its sides parallel to the ground, and one of a square standing on its corner. One might describe these experiences as being the experiences of having a square in front of one and that of having a diamond in front of one. The contents of such experiences are, as Peacocke suggests distinct. Nevertheless, it is arguable that they have the same correctness conditions, since there is a square in front of one if and only if there is a regular diamond in front of one.⁶⁷

If this is right, then the individuation conditions of non-conceptual perceptual states must be more fine-grained than that of correctness conditions. Michael Tye has argued that it is not correct. Tye finds it puzzling how states which are non-conceptual could nevertheless have the same fineness of grain as conceptual states; and he thinks that it must be possible to account for the differences in experience between perceiving a square and perceiving a diamond by appealing to possibilities such as seeing the diamond as a square which is tilted and the square as a square which is not tilted.⁶⁸ However, what is important for my purposes is what Tye and Peacocke agree about here—namely that the content of these experiences must be one which has correctness conditions—and not what they disagree about. What they are in agreement about is the existence of (what I am calling) propositional non-conceptual contents.

The upshot of this discussion is that someone who thinks that perceptual content can be non-conceptual will not take it as read that if perceptions have contents those contents must be expressible by us. However, we need to be careful what this argument does and does not seek to establish and how it does so. One point to note is that Peacocke does not take the fact that we do not have a word for a particular shape to be constitutive of our not having a concept of that shape. Concepts, for Peacocke, are to be identified with patterns of inferential dispositions. The point about language is simply to make it seem plausible that, in the case of this particular

shape we do not have a pattern of inferential dispositions which would constitute having the concept of this shape. (If the argument is successful the most it can do is to make this plausible: it seems that it would be possible to have a stable pattern of dispositions constitutive of the concept ‘oval’, say, without having any word synonymous with the word oval in one’s vocabulary.)⁶⁹

Furthermore, saying that a particular individual does not have words which would enable her or him to express the content of a particular state is not to say that that state fails to meet the Expressibility Constraint. For it is perfectly possible that some other individual might possess a vocabulary which is sufficiently rich to enable them to articulate the content of the experience I am having when I see the serrated leaf, even though I do not.

Nevertheless, the fact that an individual can be in a perceptual state which they do not have the vocabulary to articulate does raise a problem for Travis. Travis needs to hold that in such cases, the content of my perceptual state is one which someone else might be able to state. But in cases where the perceiver is not able to express the content of their perceptual state, what reason is there for thinking that some other speaker might be able to? There seems to be very little, other than blind faith, that such a conviction could rest on. And a convincing argument against the view that perceptual contents can have propositional contents must rest on something more than blind faith.⁷⁰

9. Non-Conceptual Content in Emotion

Even if the claim that perceptual states can have propositional contents can be saved from Travis’ objections provided we accept the existence of non-conceptual propositional contents, this will only seem helpful to an advocate of the Perceptual Analogy to the extent that she or he finds it plausible that emotional states are also capable of having non-conceptual content. Someone who does not is unlikely to find themselves able to sustain the view that perceptual contents are interestingly analogous to emotional ones. For the analogy to hold up, the contents of emotions will need to be at least partly non-conceptual as well.

Fortunately, a number of authors, have recently defended the view that emotional states are analogous to perceptual states insofar as they too have non-conceptual contents.⁷¹ One reason for holding this view takes off from an interesting parallel between emotions and visual perception. As Tim Crane has pointed out, the fact that certain illusions, such as the Muller-Lyer illusion, can persist even when we know that they present the world to us in a misleading way, suggests that such states are ones whose content is presented to us in ways that do not engage the inferential capacities which would be involved in the attribution of a belief with the same content.⁷² When in the Muller-Lyer illusion, we have a perceptual experience of one line as being longer than another, we are not prevented from doing so by our belief that the lines are of the same length (as we would if we formed a belief with the same content). Crane further suggests that this is because these perceptual experiences do not involve inferential capacities at all. Given a view on which

concepts simply are inferential capacities, it follows that the content of such states is itself non-conceptual.

Christine Tappolet and Sabine Döring have both suggested independently, that the phenomenon of persistent illusions in the perceptual case is paralleled by a familiar phenomenon in our emotional lives—that of emotional recalcitrance.⁷³ Emotional recalcitrance occurs in cases where we have emotions which appear to be inappropriate, given the beliefs we have. An easily-evoked example is that of fear of a situation which we know not to be dangerous—for example; fear of falling in a situation in which we know ourselves to be well-supported. Tappolet and Döring suggest that the parallel between these cases and the case of persistent illusions give us reasons to think that the content of illusions can be non-conceptual.

Other arguments for thinking that the content of perception can be non-conceptual can be paralleled in the case of emotions. For example, it is sometimes held that animals and very young children do not have the inferential capacities which are—on this view—constitutive of concepts. If it makes sense to think of them as nonetheless perceiving the world, then the contents of their perceptual states must be non-conceptual contents. Similar considerations about the emotions and inferential capacities of young children and animals might lead one to a similar conclusion about their emotions.

Arguably, all of these reasons for taking emotions to have non-conceptual contents rely on the idea that concepts are to be identified with certain kinds of inferential capacity. This view of the nature of concepts is extremely controversial. Jerry Fodor has criticized it trenchantly.⁷⁴ Although I am not persuaded by Fodor's arguments, here are two points which might be worth addressing to those who are. One purely *ad hominem* response to this is that even Fodor has recently been prepared to concede that some instances of visual perception may involve non-conceptual content.⁷⁵

A further response is that there is at least one line of argument for thinking that emotions have non-conceptual contents which does not seem to rely on taking concepts to be inferential capacities. David Pugmire has recently suggested that considerations about the ineffability of emotional content might also lead one to suppose that emotions also have non-conceptual contents.⁷⁶ He argues that our difficulties in finding verbal expressions which are adequate to the contents of our emotions might best be explained by taking them to have unconceptualised contents. This argument, which parallels Peacocke's argument from the richness of perceptual content to the existence of non-conceptual perceptual contents, does not appear to presuppose an inferentialist view of concepts.

Are the points which I am making here are in tension with the reasons that I gave in section 4 for thinking that emotions have propositional content? Those arguments depended on the idea that emotions are rationally assessable. The idea that non-conceptual content can be rationally assessable is controversial. So one might think that arguments for the view that emotions have non-conceptual content undermine the case for thinking that they have propositional contents.

However, this objection ignores one of the key features of my account: namely that it is a pluralist account. As I emphasized in section 2, I understand this to mean

that states which we intuitively characterize as a single emotional or perceptual state can involve more than one representation, and that the representations which they involve can be of more than one kind.

So the account leaves room for the possibility that a given emotional state might include both a conceptual representation (in virtue of which it is rationally assessable) and a non-conceptual one. (Thus, for example, my being afraid of a dog on a particular occasion may involve my having several representations of different sorts, some of which will be conceptual and some non-conceptual).

However, we should also notice that the objection can also be answered without appealing to this feature of my account. To see why, it is helpful to recall a distinction which Jeff Speaks has made between ‘relatively’ and ‘absolutely’ non-conceptual content.⁷⁷ Speaks’ distinction is between a kind of content which does not even have the right kind of form to be brought under concepts—this is absolutely non-conceptual content; and content which is conceptualisable but so far unconceptualised. The account which I have been arguing for has been one on which emotions (and perceptual states) need to have contents which are relatively non-conceptual, but still propositional. Such states have contents which are relatively, but not absolutely non-conceptual. On such an account emotions can be regarded as rationally assessable, in virtue of their propositional content. (They may still not be subject to rational control).

10. Conclusion

I have argued that, despite recent developments in the philosophy of perception, the view that emotions are analogous to perceptual states is one that is still available to those who think that emotions have propositional content. But it is not one which is available for free. Advocates of the perceptual view need to take on a number of other, potentially controversial commitments. They need to be open to the possibility of a pluralist account of the contents of perception, on which perceptual states can have contents which are both object-like and proposition-like. And they also need to accept that the proposition-like contents of emotions can be non-conceptual.

The idea that emotions have a non-conceptual content is, as I have already noted, not a new one. However, the role that it plays in my argument is new. To the best of my knowledge, few advocates of the perceptual analogy have confronted their views on emotion with objections to the idea that perceptions have propositional content. So the idea that acknowledging emotions to have non-conceptual content might play an important role in resisting these objections is not a familiar idea. Indeed one might regard it as a new and further reason for taking emotions to have non-conceptual content.

The idea that an advocate of the perceptual view of emotion should accept a pluralist view of the contents of both perception and emotion is less familiar. It may, for that reason, seem harder to accept, particularly where the contents of perception are concerned. Nevertheless it may be worth noting one very obvious advantage of the view. It is that someone who accepts the perceptual view and

who thinks that emotions can have propositional contents is no longer in the awkward position of having either to ignore emotions such as love and hate which seem to be directed at objects or to force them into an unacceptable theoretical strait-jacket.

This, by itself, strikes me as one very good reason for an advocate of the perceptual view to accept the view I have been arguing for here. But whether it will seem so to others—and whether it will enable them to say everything that an advocate of the perceptual view might want to say is beyond my power to determine.

Notes

¹ For examples of views which agree on this basic point but develop it in a number of different ways see De Sousa 1987, 2011 Roberts 1988, 2000, Nussbaum 1990, Prinz 2004 and Deonna 2006. My own view differs from each of these in various respects.

² Solomon 1973, de Sousa 1987, Nussbaum 1990, Nussbaum 1994, 2001.

³ Those who I discuss in this paper include Campbell 2002, Travis 2004, Gupta 2006, and Brewer 2006.

⁴ I don't wish to deny that emotions could have various features in common with perceptual states (including, perhaps, the features I draw attention to in section 3) without having the same kind of content. I do want to suggest that it would be surprising if the analogy turned out to be *fruitful*—i.e. that it might extend our knowledge of either emotional states or perceptual states in directions that we would not necessarily have suspected without noticing the analogy. (I thank an anonymous referee for *Nous* for encouraging me to clarify this point.)

⁵ It is not clear that either an advocate of the view that perception must have a proposition-like content or the view that it must have an object-like content need be committed to representationalism. As far as the first is concerned: McDowell 1994 is a non-representationalist who thinks perceptual states have propositional content. As for the second: many object-based content theorists are motivated, precisely by a rejection of representationalism. Given these facts, there seems to be no reason why a proponent of a pluralist view should be committed to representationalism either.

⁶ See footnote 1.

⁷ Scarantino 2010.

⁸ For further discussion see Deonna 2006.

⁹ The terminology derives from Goldie 2000. Interestingly, Goldie does not identify any particular author as holding a view of the sort he attacks. However, plausible candidates include Lyons 1980 and Farrell (1980), as well as those mentioned in footnote 10.

¹⁰ Views which fit this characterization vary in a number of respects. For example, one might hold that not all emotions, but only paradigmatic instances of the class need to include an element of sensation or feeling (as in Pitcher 1965); one might widen the class of cognitive states involved to include not only beliefs, but other truth evaluable states such as thoughts or states of knowledge, with knowledge conceived of as not involving belief. (Pitcher uses the notion of 'apprehension' in this context); one might (Leighton 1984) or might not (Farrell 1980) take the sensation involved in an emotion to play an important role in individuating which emotion is being undergone; one might have various views about the causal relationship which typically holds between sensation and cognitive state (for some suggestions see Gordon 1987 pp86–108). For my purposes the differences between these views are less significant than their similarities.

¹¹ Goldie 2000 is a prominent critic of add-on views, though he does not put forward a perceptual view in response.

¹² Roberts 1988. A further line of criticism, developed at length by Peter Goldie (Goldie 2000) focusses on the fact that such accounts provide an impoverished account of the way in which emotions can explain actions. While Goldie's discussion of this issue is illuminating and sensitive, it raises issues which go beyond the scope of this paper.

¹³ It is fairly difficult to find any author in the recent literature in analytic philosophy who defends a view of this sort about emotions in general (although the view has been urged on me by several anonymous readers). The idea of appealing to desire in an account of emotion as a way of accounting for both the intentional and phenomenological aspects of emotion can be found in Marks 1981; but Marks argues not that emotions are kinds of desires, but that they involve sets of beliefs and desires marked by strong desires (Marks 1981 p227). His view therefore seems just as vulnerable to the considerations about the experienced unity of emotions mentioned in the previous paragraph as views that make emotions into complexes of emotions and sensations.

¹⁴ de Sousa (1987, 2011) appears to suggest that desire is a species of emotion rather than vice versa. If this is right, then there is a further reason for thinking that appeal to the notion of desire to illuminate that of emotion will be unhelpful.

¹⁵ One exception to this consensus is Solomon 1973. For a convincing response see Gordon 1986.

¹⁶ Prinz 2006 speaks of 'stimulus dependence' in this context.

¹⁷ It is not clear how we can best to make sense of the view that we are active with respect to our beliefs. That this is difficult does not undermine the point that I am trying to make here. Where the emotions are concerned there is no analogous datum to account for.

¹⁸ One might object that we can speak of someone being overcome by a conviction and compelled to a conclusion. Since I take conviction to be an emotionally tinged state, I don't regard the first of these idioms as presenting a challenge to my view. The second idiom seems slightly more problematic. However, when we talk of someone being compelled to a belief, we are normally talking somewhat elliptically: we tend to have in mind what we might call 'rational compulsion'. To say that I am rationally compelled to have a certain belief (given, say, certain evidence, or a certain argument), we simply mean that I would be irrational if, in the light of the evidence or argument in question, I failed to have the relevant belief. But of course, people often are irrational: I could fail to have a belief even though the evidence for it is rationally compelling. A comparison with the notion of moral compulsion is instructive here: to say that I find a particular course of action morally compelling does not mean that I am somehow deprived of agency with respect to it: it simply means that there is only one morally acceptable way of exercising my agency in a particular situation. (One anonymous reader asks what it would be to be 'overcome' by a belief in the way we are overcome by an emotion and how this differs from rational compulsion. Since we are not passive with respect to our beliefs in the way we are passive with respect to our emotions, it is not clear to me what someone would mean by describing themselves as being overcome by a belief: something we were passive with respect to in this way would not be a belief. So it is not clear how to make sense of the proposed comparison. However, what I can do, and hopefully have done is to explain why we are not passive when we are compelled to a conclusion.)

¹⁹ It seems that the notion of propositional content that we need here will need to individuate propositions at least as finely as neo-Fregean thoughts, since I may represent the dog in front of me as being liable to harm me without representing Fido as being liable to harm me even when Fido is the dog in front of me.

²⁰ For examples see Solomon 1973, Nussbaum 1994, 2001.

²¹ My aim here is simply to establish that considerations which count in favour of the view that emotions have propositional contents need not be taken to entail a commitment to the view that emotions are belief-like states. A detailed treatment of the view that emotions are belief-like states would need to engage in more detail with the question of whether belief-like states can have the kind of phenomenology which we take to be characteristic of emotions. Many authors seem to assume they cannot. But Nussbaum 2001 disagrees. For further discussion, see Ben-Ze'ev 2004.

²² For examples see Harman 1990, McDowell 1994, Siegel 2010, 2011.

²³ Siegel 2011.

²⁴ Advocates of the Propositional View include Byrne 2001, 2009, McDowell 1994, 1998, Peacocke 1983 Tye 1995, Harman 1990, Siegel 2010, Siegel 2011. The view is also sometimes known as the 'content' view. I find this an unhelpful piece of terminology; leading as it does to formulations in which one contrasts the 'Content View of Perceptual Content' with the 'Object View of Perceptual Content'.

²⁵ Travis 2004.

²⁶ Gupta 2006.

²⁷ Brewer 2006.

²⁸ Brewer 2006.

²⁹ There might be a use of the term 'object' in which propositions counted as a kind of object. However, none of the authors who I identify as advocates of the 'Object View' hold that the contents of perceptual states are entities with a propositional structure. I thank an anonymous referee for *Nous* for encouraging me to clarify this point.

³⁰ This is obviously true for authors like Gupta and Travis who hold that perceptual states *cannot* have propositional contents. However, it also seems to be true for both Brewer and Campbell. In Campbell's case we can infer this from the fact that he characterises his view as standing in opposition to propositional views. Brewer is more explicit: he insists that the fact that perception puts into direct contact with objects is what is fundamental to perception. (See in particular Brewer 2011.)

³¹ Nor are they collectively exhaustive. Anil Gupta has recently argued for what he calls a 'Hypothetical' conception of the contents of perceptual experience, on which (as he puts it) 'the character of the given in experience is in some respects parallel to that of an argument form' (Gupta 2006 p191) For further discussion of Gupta's arguments against the propositional view see below section 6.

³² How persuasive phenomenological considerations are will vary from philosopher to philosopher. The only point that I want to insist on at this point is that if phenomenological considerations are taken to have any weight at all, they should not be regarded as counting unambiguously in favour of an the Exclusionist version of the Object View.

³³ Milner and Goodale 1995.

³⁴ Aglioti, Milner and de Souza 1995.

³⁵ The strategy in question is pursued both by John Campbell (Campbell 2002 chs 6–7), who has argued that the Object View is forced on us by considerations about the role which conscious experience of object plays in enabling us to refer to objects, and by Bill Brewer Brewer 2006, who argues that the Content View is incompatible with the intuition that in experience we find ourselves presented directly with objects. Since the existence of objectual contents which play these roles is compatible with the existence of other kinds of content which play other kinds of theoretical role, these points can be accommodated by advocates of Pluralist Object Views.

³⁶ Travis 2004, Gupta 2006.

³⁷ Gupta 2006 p183.

³⁸ Gupta 2006 pp187–8. It is worth noticing that Gupta appears to identify the claim that experience has a propositional content with the claim that it contains a judgment. If we understand by this the content of a judgment, then there is nothing particularly problematic about this identification. If on the other hand, we identify a judgment with an act of judging—in other words with the sort of thing with respect to which the claim that judgment is active would not involve some kind of category error, the identification appears to beg the question against the sort of theory of perception advanced by McDowell 1994, who appears to deny that perceptions are judgments, on the grounds that perception involves a kind of passive actualization of the same capacities as are actualized actively in judgment. If my reconstruction of Gupta's argument for the Reliability constraint is correct, this point is of non-negligible significance, since that argument does turn on the idea that if perception involves propositional contents it involves judgment in this latter sense.

³⁹ It's not clear to me what notion of proposition Gupta is deploying here. However, as far as I can tell, nothing that Gupta wants to say, and none of the points I make against him in this section depend on answering this question.

⁴⁰ I focus on the Reliability Constraint for reasons of space. The fact that I do so should not be regarded as an endorsement of the Equivalence Constraint.

⁴¹ Gupta 2006 p185.

⁴² It is not clear either how much weight Gupta wishes to place on phenomenological considerations in this context, nor how much weight he is entitled to place on them, since the extremely subtle and interesting 'hypothetical conception' of the given which he proposes does not seem to correspond in any obvious way to what is phenomenologically apparent and Gupta makes no attempt to argue that it does (Gupta 2006 pp191–4). Furthermore, any such argument would be vulnerable to the objection that if the hypothetical conception of the given was phenomenologically plausible, it would be surprising that the seventeenth and eighteenth century empiricist philosophers who Gupta admires so much should not at

least have considered the view (Gupta 2006 p187). If this point does not count against Gupta's account of the given in perception, it is not obvious why it should count against the view that the given element in perception includes perceptual judgments.

⁴³ Gupta 2006 p185. We might be puzzled—as one referee was—as to what sort of account Gupta could give of hallucinations. For hallucinations seem to be states in which we are both passive and at fault. Gupta would presumably respond that we are only at fault insofar as we make some kind of judgment on the basis of our hallucinatory experience; and he would resist characterising the content of that experience in propositional terms, preferring instead, to try to do so in terms of his 'hypothetical' account of the given. For reasons of space I am unable to discuss how plausible an account of this sort might be.

⁴⁴ It is arguable that we should not concede even this much to Gupta. Advocates of enactivist accounts of perception, such as Noe 2004 would certainly not be prepared to. However, one might think there is some tension between the sort of enactivist approach to perception expounded by Noe, and the apparent representationalist commitments of someone committed to the idea that perception can have propositional contents. (Although, as the example of McDowell 1994 shows, not all of those who see perceptual states as having propositional contents would take themselves to be committed to a representationalist conception of perception. (I am grateful to Hilmi Demir for raising this point in discussion.))

⁴⁵ See footnote 33.

⁴⁶ If talk of 'active' and 'passive' capacities makes your hair stand on end, treat this as a stipulative definition.

⁴⁷ See Chrisman 2008 for a helpful recent discussion of doxastic voluntarism.

⁴⁸ In particular one might think that he is committed to the view that perceptual judgment involves deciding whether or not to accept a perceptually presented content (as one reader suggested). However, this can't in fact be Gupta's view, since the main aim of his 2006 paper is to argue against the view that perception presents us with contents of the same sort that judgment has.

⁴⁹ Travis 2004.

⁵⁰ Travis 2004 p69.

⁵¹ Travis 2006 p69.

⁵² Travis 2004 pp75–9.

⁵³ Travis 2004 pp72–3.

⁵⁴ Travis 2004 p74.

⁵⁵ As the example is intended to make clear, we should take the whole of the sentence after 'either' to be a clause falling within the scope of 'looks like'.

⁵⁶ The syntactic awkwardness of the formulation which the attempt to walk through the argument in this particular case ought, I think, to give Travis pause. Let that go.

⁵⁷ For example, the ink would have to look liable to fade quickly and the ink's actually being liable to fade may be compatible with its not *looking like* it is liable to fade. Consider also the following dialogue: A: 'I'm not going out with you looking like that'; B 'Why not?' A: 'Because your shirt looks as though it has been dipped in rapidly fading blue ink'. B: 'No it doesn't: it just looks like a perfectly normal blue shirt'; A: 'All right, I suppose it does'. If A has conceded something to B, then there appears to be a distinction between the two looks in question. (I would like to thank Sandrine Berges for a number of discussions of men's tailoring which brought home this point to me with considerable force.)

⁵⁸ The notion of non-conceptual content in the first paragraph is explained in section 8 below. See also Peacocke 1986, 1992.

⁵⁹ One person who Travis seems to have in his sights when arguing against the possibility of propositional perceptual contents is John McDowell. (Travis 2004 pp79ff) Appeal to the Expressibility Constraint in that dialectical context might be appropriate, given the extent to which McDowell's 1998 view of perception is influenced by Sellars' suggestion that we should see our conception of visual experiences as being formed by analogy with overt linguistic performances.

⁶⁰ My discussion draws especially on Peacocke 1986, 1992, 2001. But see also Crane 1992, Doherty 2001, Speaks 2005 for further discussion.

⁶¹ Speaks 2005 distinguishes between two senses in which concept might be non-conceptual, which he names 'absolute' and 'relative' non-conceptuality. Here, I am interested in content which is, in Speaks' terms 'relatively non-conceptual'.

⁶² See Fodor 2008 for one which does not presuppose a Peacockean view of concepts.

⁶³ Peacocke 1986.

⁶⁴ John McDowell has, famously, denied that we can infer from a perceptual state's having an inexpressible content to its having a non-conceptual content (McDowell 1994), suggesting that we might make use of indexical concepts such as 'that shade' and 'that shape' in this context. However, as Dokic (2001) points out, there are empirical reasons for supposing that this will not work—at least if we suppose, as McDowell seems likely to, that a genuine concept, even an indexical one, must be one that we are capable of using on more than one occasion. For it seems as though our memory for shades and colors is not sufficiently good for inner ostensions of this sort to determinately pick out a particular shade or shape. (We might also wonder whether the sortals 'shade' and 'shape' have sufficiently precise identity conditions to do the job). But in any case, the McDowell point seems to be dialectically ineffective here: how could an argument to the effect that even inexpressible contents might be non-conceptual be deployed to shore up an argument that presupposes that there cannot be inexpressible contents?

⁶⁵ Peacocke 1992 pp77–82.

⁶⁶ Tye 2006.

⁶⁷ Peacocke 1992 *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Tye 2006.

⁶⁹ I have stressed the role that taking concepts to be inferential capacities plays in some arguments for thinking that perceptual states can have non-conceptual contents. So it is worth noticing that it is not an essential part of all such arguments. For example it does not seem to play an important role in the argument from ineffability. Furthermore, it is also worth noticing that at least some philosophers, such as Jerry Fodor, who would firmly reject the view that concepts are inferential capacities still think there are reasons for believing that some perceptual states may have non-conceptual contents.

⁷⁰ It's worth noticing that what is at issue here is not whether there might be a speaker of some purely hypothetical language who might be able to express the content of a perceptual state like this; in arguing against the possibility of perceptual states having propositional contents Travis restricts himself to considering the resources that an actual language—namely English—gives us.

⁷¹ Tappolet 2000 Döring 2007, 2009 Gunter 2003, Scarantino and Griffiths 2005.

⁷² Crane 1992.

⁷³ Tappolet 2000 Döring 2007.

⁷⁴ Fodor 2008.

⁷⁵ Fodor 2008.

⁷⁶ Pugmire 2009.

⁷⁷ Speaks 2005. It would be nice to be able to illustrate this distinction by giving examples of both kinds of content. But Speaks pp365–73 argues—convincingly, in my view—that there is little reason to suppose that there is any content of the latter sort. I have given examples of relatively non-conceptual content in the course of sections 8 and 9 of this paper.

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