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## PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

**Johannes Roessler**

Commonsense epistemology regards perceptual experience as a distinctive source of knowledge of the world around us, unavailable in ‘blindsight’. This is often interpreted in terms of the idea that perceptual experience, through its representational content, provides us with justifying reasons for beliefs about the world around us. I argue that this analysis distorts the explanatory link between perceptual experience and knowledge, as we ordinarily conceive it. I propose an alternative analysis, on which representational content plays no explanatory role: we make perceptual knowledge intelligible by appeal to experienced objects and features. I also present an account of how the commonsense scheme, thus interpreted, is to be defended: not by tracing the role of experience to its contribution in meeting some general condition on propositional knowledge (such as justification); but by subverting the assumption that it has to be possible to make the role of experience intelligible in terms of some such contribution.

It seems clear enough that we ordinarily think of perceptual experience as a source of knowledge of the world around us. ‘He saw them’ seems to most people to provide an illuminating answer to such questions as ‘how did Galileo know about the moons of Jupiter?’ How do such explanations work? What role does perceptual experience play in making propositional knowledge intelligible in this way? Current work in this area is dominated by two kinds of theories. ‘Externalists’ maintain that perceptual experience helps to explain how we know about objects around us insofar as it plays a causal role in the processes or faculties giving rise to (mostly true) perceptual beliefs. ‘Internalists’ think that perceptual experience provides a distinctive source of evidence or reasons; appeal to experience, on their view, explains knowledge by enabling us to see how perceptual beliefs are justified. I will argue that neither of two approaches offers an acceptable analysis of commonsense epistemology. In different ways, they both misrepresent the explanatory link between perceptual experience and knowledge, as we ordinarily conceive it. I will suggest that the commonsense scheme is best analyzed in terms of a primitive connection between perceptual experience of objects and knowledge of experienced objects.

There is a widespread tendency to assume that the disjunction between internalist and externalist accounts of perceptual knowledge is exhaustive. I think this is connected with another widely shared assumption, that an adequate analysis of the explanatory role of experience should be expected to identify the contribution perceptual experience makes to the satisfaction of some completely *general* condition on propositional knowledge (e.g. reliability or justification); that otherwise it will not have succeeded in making the role of experience properly intelligible. If my analysis of the commonsense scheme is right, though, it is hard to see how that expectation can be satisfied. As a consequence, to some philosophers the notion of a primitive link between experience and knowledge will look like a mere prejudice of folk epistemology. In the last section of this paper, I explore a line of response to that challenge. The basic idea is that our commitment to thinking of perceptual experience as a distinctive source of knowledge can be shown to be invulnerable in something like Barry Stroud's sense: it is a commitment that is integral to our conception of ourselves and others as so much as holding perceptual *beliefs*; specifically: perceptual demonstrative beliefs.

I begin with a more detailed analysis of some of the issues raised by the commonsense explanatory scheme. In section 2, I present grounds for scepticism about the idea that experience provides us with epistemic reasons. In the second half of the paper I put forward my alternative analysis (section 3) and defence (section 4) of the commonsense scheme.

## **1. The epistemic role of experience**

Blindseers make reliable guesses about objects around them. While it is the operation of the visual system that enables them to do so, they enjoy no relevant visual experience. This suggests that the notion of visual perception has to be understood as a more inclusive notion than that of visual experience. The latter is the notion of a certain kind of conscious mental state. The former may also be applied to sub-personal processes operating outside conscious awareness. Once we distinguish the two notions, it seems to be a good question why commonsense epistemology places such weight on perceptual experience, and whether it is right to do so. I will not be concerned here with metaphysical worries over mental causation. I assume that there is no reason to deny that perceptual experience may in principle be a relevant factor in explanations of how we know about the world around us. My question is how to understand the commonsense view of the explanatory role of perceptual experience. We can distinguish two sub-questions here. The first question is how, in appealing to experience as a source of knowledge, we conceive of perceptual experience. The second question is why, and how, we take perceptual experience to be explanatory of knowledge. The questions are closely connected: part of the point of asking the first question is to find out what we take to be the explanatorily relevant aspects or features of experience.

We can contrast two views on the first sub-question. One view is that we think of perceptual experience as conscious awareness of perceptually presented *objects*. Importantly, on this view, in explaining perceptual knowledge in terms of experience we do not have to think of experience as a representational state, a state representing the world as being a certain way. Our explanation is in terms of experienced objects, not in terms of representational content. Call this the Experienced Object view, or EO. On the second view, we do think of experiences as representational states; we accord explanatory

relevance to the representational content of experience. Call this Representational Content view. Evidently the debate between EO and RC has an important bearing on a number of issues in the philosophy of mind, but it is important not to saddle the two views with philosophical commitments that are not, or not immediately, entailed by them. For example, EO is not inconsistent with the view that perceptual experiences are in fact representational states. It merely claims that representational content plays no role in making perceptual knowledge intelligible in terms of experience. It is true that if EO is right, this would remove an influential reason for adopting a representationalist view of experience; but it would not refute the representationalist view. Again, EO and RC should not be mistaken for theories of what determines the phenomenal character of perceptual experience<sup>1</sup> — although it is reasonable to assume that they have implications for the latter. In brief, while the dispute between EO and RC is a dispute about the interpretation of commonsense epistemology, not (directly) about the nature of experience, its resolution may be expected to provide important input for our understanding of the latter.

In a suggestive discussion of blindsight, Fred Dretske argues we should think of blindsight primarily as a deficit of *object* perception. Blindseers appear ‘able to get information about nearby objects without experiencing (seeing) the objects.’ (1997, p. 189) Correlatively, the question of what might be the function or explanatory value of perceptual experience, for Dretske, comes down to this: ‘Why are we conscious of the objects we have knowledge about?’ (ibid.) Thus Dretske would seem to endorse EO. On

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<sup>1</sup> Thus EO and RC need to be distinguished from what John Campbell calls the Relational and the Representational Views of the phenomenal character of experience (2002, p. 116). Briefly: EO would arguably be incompatible with the Representational View, but whether EO should be developed along the lines of the Relational View, on which the character of the experience constituted by the character of its objects, is a further question. (Dretske, for one, holds EO but would reject the Relational View.)

the other hand, advocates of RC will argue that the function of experience will remain mysterious until we re-phrase the question, on the following lines: ‘why do we enjoy perceptual experiences representing the facts we have knowledge about?’

An influential line of argument in support of RC turns on a particular answer to my second sub-question, the question of how we take experience to explain knowledge.<sup>2</sup> I want to examine the argument in some detail, as it is central to the dialectic of this paper. I begin by looking at Dretske’s view of the explanatory role of experience. This will set the scene for the representationalist argument.

Dretske subscribes to an ‘externalist’ theory of knowledge. Externalism, as Dretske characterizes the position, claims that ‘knowledge is a matter of getting yourself connected to the facts in the right way (causally, informationally, etc), whether or not you know or understand that you are so connected.’ (1991, p. 82) On this view, experience can be seen to be explanatory of knowledge insofar as it plays a causal role in the process or faculty by which we acquire perceptual beliefs, provided the process or faculty is sufficiently reliable. Importantly, though, from the point of view of an externalist theory of knowledge, there is no reason to think that perceptual experience does in fact play such a role. Of course, the theory is not committed to denying this. It is just that when it comes to explaining how perceptual beliefs qualify as knowledge, what matters is only that they are acquired by reliable processes or faculties, whether or not conscious experience is implicated in these processes or faculties.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I think the argument is influential, though I admit it is not often articulated explicitly. For an exception, see McDowell 2002, esp. p. 279.

<sup>3</sup> For an unusually explicit acknowledgement of this point, see Papineau’s statement of a ‘purely reliabilist’ account of perceptual knowledge: ‘In order for a belief-forming

On this account, then, there is not much of a difference between the way perceptual experience makes knowledge intelligible and the way unconscious perceptual processes may do so. We can of course still call them different sources of knowledge if we wish. But there would be no epistemological rationale for doing so. Now one possible comment on this view is that it falsifies commonsense epistemology. Commonsense explanatory practice, it might be said, assumes that there is a *special, distinctive* explanatory link between perceptual experience and knowledge. Note that the issue here is not whether blindsight could potentially serve as a source of knowledge. The claim is merely that even if blindsight is, or became, a source of knowledge, appeal to it could not make perceptual knowledge intelligible in the same way as appeal to perceptual experience does. I take it this comment has a great deal of initial plausibility. ‘He can blindsee that p’, offered as an account of how someone knows that p, would raise more questions than it would answer. The account would lack the intelligibility distinctive of an explanation in terms of some relevant visual experience.

The argument for RC I want to have before us endorses the thesis of a special explanatory link, and proposes the following gloss on it: perceptual experience plays a distinctive epistemic role in virtue of providing us with epistemic reasons. Perceptual experience is not merely another causal factor that may (or may not) be involved in the perceptual

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process to be reliable, there is no need for its reliability, or even its existence, to be available to consciousness. According to reliabilism, we will know, say, that there is a table in front of us, just in case the unconscious visual processes that give rise to such perceptual beliefs generally deliver true beliefs, whether or not we are aware of this.’ (Papineau 1993:144) Note, though, that in characterizing the visual processes that give rise to perceptual beliefs as ‘unconscious’ Papineau commits himself to an empirical claim not warranted or implied by pure reliabilism, considered merely as a philosophical theory of knowledge.

processes generating beliefs. Rather it can help to make a perceptual belief intelligible in terms of the subject's reason *for* holding it. This view has of course a long and notorious history. Most of its traditional incarnations make perceptual belief about the world around us dependent, perhaps for their existence and certainly for their justification, on inference from beliefs about one's current experience. There are familiar and traditional reasons for skepticism about this project, though this is not the place to review them.<sup>4</sup> In any case, the argument for RC acknowledges that ordinary perceptual beliefs are not based on inference, and is not tempted to appeal to 'implicit' or merely possible inferences. Instead, it claims that non-inferential perceptual beliefs may nevertheless be, and in fact typically are, held for reasons: reasons provided not by beliefs about one's current experience but by perceptual experience itself.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, it is in virtue of its representational content that perceptual experience can be seen to provide us with epistemic reasons. To sum up: the argument claims that insofar as commonsense explanatory practice accords a distinctive epistemic role to perceptual experience it is committed to thinking of experience as a state with representational content. Hence, contra Dretske, the question over the function of experience should be posed like this: 'why do we enjoy perceptual experiences representing the facts we have knowledge about?'

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<sup>4</sup> For a heroic attempt to defend classical internalism about perceptual knowledge against traditional objections, see BonJour's contribution to BonJour and Sosa 2003. As BonJour himself acknowledges, however, his account of the justification of claims about the physical world has no obvious bearing on the justification of ordinary non-inferential perceptual beliefs: 'if this is the best justification available for such claims, it will follow that most ordinary people are not fully and explicitly justified in making them (and so do not possess "knowledge" of such matters, if "knowledge" requires such justification). The most that can be said is that the essential elements for such an argument are at least roughly within their purview, so that the argument is in principle available to them.' (p. 96)

<sup>5</sup> Work in this tradition includes Moser 1989, Peacocke 1992, Martin 1993, McDowell 1994, Brewer 1999.



So far I have focused on how we should *interpret* commonsense epistemology. Consider now the question how the commonsense view of the role of experience is to be defended (or, perhaps, revised). Dretske recommends that his question — ‘Why are we conscious of the objects we have knowledge about?’ — should be treated as a scientific, not a philosophical, question. This reflects his background view that the correct philosophical account of knowledge is silent on this issue. Dretske maintains that recent findings in experimental psychology at least partly corroborate the commonsense view. There is strong evidence, he tells us, that while some sorts of visual information are undoubtedly available to blindseers (e.g. as to *where* X is), other kinds of visual information are not (e.g. as to *what* X is). How reassuring is this? There is no question that Dretske’s account vindicates our pre-theoretical conviction that perceptual experience plays some epistemic role. Moreover, it does so, reassuringly, with the authority of science behind it. Yet in a crucial respect the account may not vindicate but challenge commonsense epistemology. It cannot secure a *distinctive* epistemic role for experience. From the point of view of Dretske’s externalist theory, the idea of special explanatory link between experience and knowledge looks like so much folk epistemology. It is here that defenders of RC will wish to step in. They argue that to vindicate the commonsense view we need to look, not to the cognitive sciences, but to a philosophical theory of knowledge. According to their favoured theory, propositional knowledge is subject to the requirement of epistemic justification, where the justification of a belief needs to be accessible to the subject herself. Then the difference between sight and blindsight is that only the former immediately provides for the satisfaction of that ‘internalist’ requirement. For visual experience gives us epistemic reasons, as the merely ‘implicit’ perceptual processes exploited by blindseers do not. Thus, the special explanatory link between perceptual experience and

knowledge is defensible; and the way to defend it is to defend an internalist theory of knowledge.

It seems to me the internalist argument for RC is right to insist that a ‘scientific’ vindication of the commonsense view in Dretske’s style would not be much of a vindication. But I want to suggest the argument is nevertheless unsuccessful. There seem to me to be grounds for scepticism about the coherence of the idea that perceptual experience provides us with ‘non-inferential’ reasons. (Section 2) Fortunately, this does not mean that the commonsense view is incoherent: it is EO, not RC, that correctly articulates the commonsense epistemology of perceptual knowledge. (Section 3) Now if an internalist defence is unattainable, and a scientific defence insufficient, the obvious conclusion may seem to be that the commonsense view has to be modified or discarded. I want to suggest that this conclusion does not follow. It relies on a substantive and unargued assumption. It assumes that the explanatory link between experience and knowledge has to be intelligible from the point of view of a philosophical theory of the general nature of propositional knowledge; specifically: in terms of the contribution experience makes to the satisfaction of some completely general condition on knowledge. It is this assumption that forces upon us the unhappy alternative between an internalist defence and an externalist revision of the commonsense view. The assumption makes it impossible to countenance the idea that there may be a primitive explanatory link between experience of objects and knowledge of objects. One way to defend this latter idea would be to subject the assumption itself to philosophical scrutiny. (Section 4)

## **2. Perceptual experience and epistemic reasons**

Beliefs provide us with epistemic reasons. They do so in virtue of their representational content. This, surely, is uncontroversial. But suppose perceptual experiences also have representational content. By a natural extension of the uncontroversial starting point we may seem to reach this conclusion: perceptual experience is capable of providing us with epistemic reasons too.

I want to argue that the proposed extension from belief to experience cannot work. I will do so by pressing the question of how the idea that experience ‘provides us with reasons’ is to be understood. As far as I can see, the following three readings exhaust the options open to a non-inferential internalist.

- (a) *Mental states as reasons.* An experience representing *b* as being *F* is a good reason to believe that *b* is *F*, at least in the absence of undermining or conflicting evidence. Perceptual experiences provide us with reasons for beliefs simply through *being* such reasons.
- (b) *Appearances as reasons.* Perceptual experiences provide us with reasons insofar as they make available to us facts concerning the sensory appearance of things, facts that constitute reasons for beliefs about the world around us. For example, a visual experience representing *b* as being *F* makes the fact that *b* looks *F* available to the subject, thus (in a normal case) providing her with a reason to believe that *b* is *F*.
- (c) *Perceived facts as reasons.* Perceptual experiences provide us with reasons insofar as they make available to us perceived facts that constitute reasons to

accept those very facts. For example, if you perceive that *b* is *F* this makes the fact that *b* is *F* available to you as a reason to believe that *b* is *F*.

(a) can easily seem to be the most straightforward account, but I think it is the least promising one. The basic objection to (a) is that it conflates justifying with explanatory reasons. The point is not specific to the case of perceptual experience. It also affects the supposedly uncontroversial assumption, that beliefs provide us with reasons. Now I take it that in one sense, the assumption is rightly uncontroversial. Someone's believing something can be the reason *why* she holds some further belief. Furthermore, the explanation to be given here may be a rationalizing or reason-giving explanation. And as Davidson taught us, there is a — 'somewhat anaemic' — sense 'in which every rationalization justifies.' (1963, pp. 690-1) However, I argue that beliefs can be justifying reasons in this anaemic sense only because they (sometimes) can be seen to *provide us with* justifying reasons in a more full-blooded sense. And 'provide us with', in the latter context, cannot be construed on the lines of (a).

What is wrong with taking the anaemic sense of justifying reasons as primitive? As Barry Stroud remarks: '(i)f I take the fact that it has always rained in Berkeley in January as good reason to believe that it will rain there next January, it is the past rain that I take as the reason for expecting rain, not the fact that I believe it has always rained there in the past. My *believing* that it has always rained does not amount to much of a reason for expecting rain in Berkeley in January'. (Stroud, 2000b) There does seem to be a sense in which false beliefs fail to justify any conclusions one might draw from them. The point is quite basic. If the anaemic sense were the only sense in which we talk about justifying reasons, it is hard to see why pointing out that my belief that it has always rained in

Berkeley in January is *false* would have any tendency to suggest that there is a problem with my believing, on that basis, that it will rain in Berkeley next January. I could simply reply that this latter belief is certainly open to a reason-giving explanation and that hence I am perfectly justified in holding it. One way to see what is going wrong here is to remember Davidson's own gloss on the 'anaemic' sense (in a discussion of practical reasons): 'from the agent's point of view there was, when he acted, something to be said for the action.' (ibid.) Thus the anaemic sense *embeds* a more full-blooded sense: to say that my belief gives me an anaemically justifying reason to think it will rain in Berkeley next January is to say that from my point of view there *appears to be* a properly justifying reason to think it will rain in Berkeley next January. What constitutes this latter reason is the *fact*, not my belief, that it has always rained in Berkeley in January. My beliefs may *provide* me with that reason, in the sense of making it accessible or available to me. If it is not a fact that it has always rained in Berkeley in January, my belief that this is so cannot provide me with a justifying reason in this sense — though of course it may appear to do so, from my perspective.<sup>6</sup>

In brief, while beliefs may be said to *be* justifying reasons in the anaemic sense, this sense does not come for free: it presupposes a properly normative sense of justification. And in the latter sense, it is not mental states but true propositions that constitute justifying reasons. So the more fundamental sense in which beliefs may 'provide us with' reasons is the following: beliefs can make, or appear to make, justifying reasons available to us. As a consequence, if we are to model the explanatory role of perceptual experience on that of belief, it is to (b) or (c) we should look.

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<sup>6</sup> Then why not identify (non-anaemic) justifying reasons with *factive* mental states? The problem with this is that our interest in justifying reasons is not confined to mental states, factive or otherwise: we allow that there is evidence of which we are not aware.

This is in line with McDowell's position. In a well-known passage in *Mind and World*, he appears to endorse (b):

But 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". That is easily recognized as giving a reason for holding the belief. Just because she gives expression to it in discourse, there is no problem about the reason's being a reason for which ... and not just the reason why.... (1994, p. 165)

But I think McDowell's considered view is (c). This is suggested by the following more recent remarks:

When one sees how things are (..) a warrant and cause for one's belief that things are that way is visibly *there* for one in the bit of reality that is within one's view. (2002, p. 280)

I think we need an idea of perception as something in which there is no attitude of acceptance or endorsement at all, but only, as I put it, an invitation to adopt such an attitude, which, in the best cases, consists in a fact's making itself manifest to one. (2002, p. 279)

(b) and (c) disagree on the sorts of facts we need to focus on in explaining how experience provides reasons for non-inferential beliefs. The advantage of (b) is that it is immediately intelligible how facts about the sensory appearance of physical objects offer

grounds for accepting certain propositions about perceived objects. That the object looks square can be an excellent reason for thinking it is square. The problem with (b) is that experience plays at best an indirect role in making such facts available to us.

Connectedly, it is hard to see how beliefs rationally acquired on the basis of such facts can be anything other than inferential. Suppose your statement 'it looks that way' expresses the reason for which you believe the object to be square. On no remotely plausible version of a representational view of perception does your statement articulate the representational content of your experience. Your experience represents the object as being square, not as *looking* square. Thus the reason-constituting fact will not be made available to you by your experience, at least not immediately. It will be made available to you, more immediately, by your *knowledge* or *belief* that the object looks square.

(Experience may of course play a role in grounding the latter, but then it could only 'provide' a reason indirectly, in concert with knowledge or belief.) So (b) really offers no help if we are interested in giving substance to the idea that perceptual beliefs are acquired by non-inferential 'rational transitions' from experience, as opposed to: by inference from propositions known or believed to be true.

The best hope for non-inferential internalism is (c): perceptual experience provides epistemic reasons by making perceived facts available to the subject. How does this account differ from a theory on which perceptual experiences are simply the reliable causes of accurate beliefs about the environment, with their representational contents perhaps figuring as a causally relevant factor? In McDowell's terms, how can experience be seen to be the reason *for which*, rather than merely the reason *why*, the subject acquires a certain belief? The answer (still in McDowell's terms) lies in the explanatory role of 'spontaneity'. Perceptual experience, according to (c), is not a causal mechanism seizing

control of one's beliefs. Experience merely issues an 'invitation' to endorse what it represents as being the case — an 'invitation' the subject may or may not decide to accept in the light of a more comprehensive look at the reasons available to her.<sup>7</sup> In other words, perceptual experience influences the subject's beliefs by *contributing* to what she has reason to believe. Which belief the subject acquires as a result of experience making a certain reason available to her depends not just on the content of that reason but also on the subject's background knowledge and much else besides. If the fact that a certain object is red makes itself manifest to the subject in a perceptual experience, this will typically result in a judgement that the object is red. But if the subject has evidence that it is not red, the experientially manifest fact may actually contribute to her having a reason to *suspend judgement* on the issue of the colour of the object, pending (e.g.) an investigation of prevailing lighting conditions. Correlatively, it may be part of the reason *for which* the subject suspends belief.

This point places a substantive constraint on reasons putatively afforded by experience. It must be possible to incorporate such reasons into a more comprehensive view of the relevant evidence. The trouble is that (c) makes it difficult to see how this constraint is to be met. Consider again the subject wondering whether the object before her is red. If in suspending her judgement she is to be properly responsive to the conflicting reasons available to her, and certainly if she is to stand any chance of resolving the issue, she needs to be able to put all the relevant facts together, to reflect on their significance, and then, in the light of them, to determine what she has most reason to believe. The problem is that reasons afforded by experience, on the model of (c), have a tendency to resist this

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<sup>7</sup> 'How one's experience represents things to be is not under one's control, but it is up to one whether one accepts the appearance or rejects it.' (McDowell 1994, p. 11)



sort of scrutiny. It is not clear how the subject can so much as articulate the reason provided by her experience — the fact that the object is red —, let alone reflect on its significance, without thereby settling the question under consideration. Of course this is unsurprising. If your reason for believing that *p* is the fact that *p*, it would not be sensible to expect you to be able to weigh up the force of your reason. The only conceivable response to such a reason, aside from ignoring it, is to accept what it is a reason for. It is this feature that disables (c)-type reasons from being incorporated into a more comprehensive view of the relevant evidence, and thus from helping to rationalize the suspension of belief or reflective judgements based on conflicting evidence. (c)-type reasons do not satisfy the requirement that we saw would have to be met if they are to figure in reason-giving, rather than ‘merely causal’, explanation.

An all but irresistible reply is that the requirement can be met by stating the relevant reason as follows: the object *looks* red. But this reply is not available to defenders of (c). The reason articulated in this way is not the reason for believing the object to be red that (c) claims is provided by your experience. One might wonder whether non-inferential internalists might not finesse the issue by adopting a hybrid approach: (c) accounts for the case of ordinary, straightforward, non-inferential beliefs; (b) covers situations in which there are grounds for suspicion about the authority of experience. But that would leave us without an answer to the question of how, in the ordinary case, explanation by appeal to experience differs from ‘merely causal’ explanation. The question is how the reasons made available by experience, on the model of (c), leave intelligible room for both accepting and rejecting their ‘invitation’ to adopt some belief. The question is not answered by pointing out that experience also, more indirectly, makes other sorts of

reasons available to us and that these other reasons can rationally be questioned and rejected.

### **3. The simple theory of perception as a simple theory of knowledge**

Independently of the concerns raised in the previous section, the idea that ordinary perceptual beliefs are based on reasons may also be viewed with suspicion on phenomenological grounds. We normally find out about the world around us not by weighing the force of epistemic reasons but by attending to experienced objects.<sup>8</sup>

I want to suggest that this account of the phenomenology dovetails with commonsense explanatory practice. Commonsense epistemology, in line with EO, finds perceptual knowledge intelligible in terms of experienced objects and their features, not in terms of experience conceived as a state with representational content. The intelligibility here is not that of reason-giving explanation. Rather, it turns on our understanding of the enabling conditions of perception. I present the proposal in rough outline, and then develop it in more detail by addressing two objections: one concerning feature perception, the other concerning optical illusions.

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<sup>8</sup> In his (1998) McDowell comes close to accepting this. He writes: ‘Unless there are grounds for suspicion, such as odd lighting conditions, having it look to one as if things are a certain way — ostensibly seeing things to be that way — becomes accepting that things are that way by a sort of default, involving no exercise of the freedom that figures in a Kantian conception of judgement.’ (1998, p. 439) It is not clear, though, whether McDowell would still insist that perceptual beliefs acquired ‘by default’ are open to rational explanation in terms of perceptual experience. It is revealing, incidentally, that McDowell speaks of the transition from experience to belief in impersonal terms here: it seems that for him, it is only by exercising ‘spontaneity’ that subjects actively participate in the acquisition of perceptual knowledge. This seems to me to be a (perhaps authentically Kantian) mistake. Ordinarily, the subject is actively involved by attending to experienced objects.

According to Evans, ‘the very idea of a perceivable, objective, spatial world brings with it the idea of the subject being *in* the world, with the course of his perceptions due to his changing position in the world and to the more or less stable way the world is.’ (1982, p. 222) Evans characterized our commonsensical understanding of the causal enabling conditions of perception as possession of a ‘simple theory of perception’. Evans’s main interest was in the role of the simple theory in providing for the idea of an objective world. I want to suggest that it constitutes the core of the commonsense epistemology of perceptual knowledge.

We can distinguish three elements, or three levels, involved in the simple theory of perception, corresponding to three kinds of things we think of as, in some sense, perceivable: objects, features, and facts. One thing a simple theory of perception enables us to understand is the dependence of which object you see on the respective locations of subject and objects, on lighting conditions, the absence of occluders and so forth. This element of the theory is concerned with the enabling conditions of *object* perception in a given modality. Second, we have a rough grasp of the enabling conditions of perceiving specific *features* of objects or their *types* or their *relations*. For example, lighting conditions sufficient for seeing an object may be insufficient for seeing its colour. Third, a simple theory of perception provides for an understanding of the enabling conditions of *seeing that* something is the case. The first two levels of the theory provide essential materials here. Seeing the lemon and its colour enables you to see, without inference, that the lemon is yellow. The two conditions may not be sufficient, though. To see which colour an object has it may not be enough to see the object and its colour; you may, in addition, need to pay attention to the object. But the two sorts of conditions arguably

provide a substantive explanation of how it is that when you do pay attention, you will be able to see that the lemon is yellow.<sup>9</sup>

If we suppose that propositional perception entails propositional knowledge, we can begin to see how the multi-level simple theory of perception may amount to a simple theory of perceptual knowledge. Now the supposition is controversial. McDowell, for one, does not accept it. He offers an example intended to illustrate that there is a ‘perfectly intelligible notion of seeing that something is the case’ on which you can see that an object is yellow without knowing or believing that it is yellow. (2002, p. 277) Linguistic intuitions seem to be divided on this.<sup>10</sup> In any case, though, the interesting issue is not whether McDowell’s notion of propositional seeing is intelligible but whether we need it in explaining perceptual knowledge. The wider question here is once again the issue between EO and RC. Perhaps the most influential route to RC is the internalist argument, examined and criticized earlier. Here I want to consider two subsidiary arguments for RC. Both claim that EO is insufficient to account for the content of perceptual beliefs. One focuses on feature perception in general; the other, specifically, on optical illusions.

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<sup>9</sup> This analysis of the explanatory role of perceptual experience of objects supports a negative answer to the much-debated question of whether object perception essentially involves fact (or ‘epistemic’) perception. See Dretske 1979 and Smith 2001 for illuminating reviews of, and contributions to, that debate.

<sup>10</sup> Compare Dretske’s stricture that it ‘is (or should be) uncontroversial’ that ‘one cannot see *where* the cat is unless one sees *that* she is (say) under the sofa — without therefore knowing (hence believing) that she is under the sofa.’ (1979, pp. 98-9) Williamson (2000) argues that in one central sort of use, verbs of propositional perception denote ‘specific ways in which one knows’.

Consider the example of the ‘chicken sexers’, subjects who are able to tell whether a chicken is male or female when they see it, but who do not *experience* the chicken as being male or female. If we want to defend the idea that experience plays a distinctive epistemic role, we need to explain how the source of the chicken-sexers’ knowledge differs from that of ordinary non-inferential perceptual knowledge. The multi-level simple theory of perception suggests the following account. The chicken sexers do experience the chickens. But their failure, in doing so, to experience the properties they report the chicks as having (the absence of relevant level 2 perception) disables them from seeing that a chick is male or female (level 3 perception). Now the question is: what does it mean to experience properties? Advocates of RC often take it to be obvious that this is a matter of experience having representational content. They assume that to see the sex of a chicken is a matter of seeing it *as* being (for example) female, where this, in turn, is construed as having an impression with a correctness condition, i.e. with representational content.<sup>11</sup>

In one sense, I think this is quite correct. We often talk about perceiving features in a sense that makes this a level 3 (not a level 2) phenomenon. In asking ‘can you see the colour of the lemon?’ we may be asking whether you can see what colour the lemon has (e.g. whether you can see that it is yellow).<sup>12</sup> Feature perception in this sense is indeed a

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<sup>11</sup> McDowell makes just this assumption: he argues, in effect, that only by adopting RC is it possible to give the experience of features or types a role in explanations of perceptual belief and knowledge. He writes: ‘I think there is no ordinary sense in which they [the chicken sexers] see (or perhaps smell) that a chick is male, though in the Davidson-Stroud sense [in which ‘A sees that p’ implies ‘A believes and knows that p’] they do.’ (2002, p. 279). That the Davidson-Stroud interpretation of propositional seeing has this implication is assumed here without argument.

<sup>12</sup> See Warnock 1965 for an influential account on which feature perception is constitutively linked to attention and recognition. On Warnock’s view, the difference between seeing Lloyd George and seeing the colour of Lloyd George’s tie is that while

matter of representational content, but not in the way advocates of RC take it to be: it is a matter of enjoying *perceptual knowledge* of what the relevant feature is, not of being in a ‘belief-independent’ state with representational content.

Contrary to the assumption made by defenders of RC, however, we are also familiar with a more basic, non-representational sense in which features are experienced. Suppose you pass the following test for colour vision. You are presented with an array of variously coloured dots, arranged in such a way that those with ordinary colour vision will be able to see the number 5 in the array, standing out from the background of dots in virtue of its colour. In this way, colour may function as an object-defining feature. (See Campbell 2002) It seems compelling that if you are able to see the number 5, this provides good evidence of your ability to see colours: the colours of seen objects make an immediate difference to the character of your visual experience. But seeing colours, in this basic sense, is not the same as visually recognizing or identifying colours, or seeing that objects have a certain colour. There is evidence that colour can function as an object-defining feature for subjects who lack the ability visually to recognize colours and indeed for young children who do not yet have colour concepts.<sup>13</sup>

To say that perceptual experience involves the experience of features (in the level 2 sense), then, is consistent with thinking of perceptual experience not as a representational state but as conscious awareness of perceived objects; in Brian O’Shaughnessy’s words, as ‘a blunt and unthinking contact of “Experiential Consciousness’ with mere *things*.’ (2000, p. 411) The fact that someone can see the colour of an object can therefore help to

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the former does not imply noticing or identifying Lloyd George, the latter entails noticing or identifying the colour of his tie.

<sup>13</sup> See Campbell 2002, p. 30.

*explain* her ability to see *that* the object is yellow: the experience of features is an enabling condition of propositional perception. What is peculiar about the case of the chicken sexers is that they make non-inferential judgements about a kind of feature that (we are supposing) makes no difference to the character of their experience. Their judgement that a chick is female is therefore not intelligible in terms of level 2 experience of features. This is why we are reluctant to credit them with the level 3 capacity to observe that a chick is female. Put in more familiar terminology, we cannot make their judgement intelligible in terms of the way the chick looks to them.<sup>14</sup>

The case of colour is admittedly special in an important respect. It may not be true in general that the ability to perceive a certain range of features is independent of the subject's possession of concepts of certain features within that range, or independent of her ability perceptually to notice and recognize such features. It would not be easy to give content to the idea that someone can see, say, the type or species of experienced objects without having concepts of, and recognitional capacities for, the relevant type or species. That a perceived fruit is a lemon, you might argue, would make no immediate difference to the character of my experience if I could not tell a lemon when I see it. So being able to recognize a lemon might be regarded as an enabling condition of level 2 perception of lemons.<sup>15</sup> This is not the place for a detailed discussion of whether a dependence claim of

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<sup>14</sup> This account suggests that internalists' concern with justifying reasons may lead them to distort the point or rationale of ordinary reflection on sensory appearances. Recall McDowell's suggestion that 'it looks that way' is easily recognizable as giving one's reason for thinking that a certain object is square. Of course, this may be the correct gloss in special circumstances (where a belief is inferred from facts concerning the object's appearance). But more commonly, 'it looks that way' may signal the satisfaction of a crucial enabling condition of someone's seeing that a certain object is square.

<sup>15</sup> This might be a way of interpreting Strawson's remark that our sensory experience is infused with or permeated by concepts of the types and features of physical objects (Strawson 1979). In a similar vein, O'Shaughnessy argues that 'we should abandon

this general character can be defended. But suppose some such claim can be defended. For current purposes the interesting question is: would this provide support for a representational account of feature perception? I think it would not. To say that the capacity to experience a certain sort of feature or type depends on the ability to recognize things as having that sort of feature or falling under that sort of type is not to say that experiencing the feature or type *just is* a matter of recognizing it to be exemplified. These are distinct issues. One reason for scepticism about the latter claim would be that appeal to experienced features or types can help to *explain* someone's attention being attracted by the object exemplifying the feature or type, and thus explain her recognizing the object to have the feature or to fall under the type. It seems an intelligible thought that someone's attention was attracted by a certain object because it looked to her like a lemon, and that this *resulted* in her noticing it to be a lemon. There is a basic sense in which an experienced object's being a lemon can make a difference to your experience, whatever the focus of your attention. This is so even if, perhaps, one could not have that sort of experience without the capacity to attend to and recognize lemons.

I now turn to the second subsidiary argument for RC, the argument from optical illusions. The argument proceeds in three steps. First, it is argued that reflection on illusions demonstrates that perceptual experience is a belief-independent representational state. Second, it is argued that in explaining false beliefs based on illusory experience we have to invoke the representational content of the experience. Third, it is argued that the same point applies to beliefs based on veridical experience, given that the correctness or

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forthwith those over-simple theories of visual experience which fail to appreciate the vitally important contribution of the intellect or understanding to the formation of perceptual experience. Perception may not be the same thing as discovery, but no more is it of the ilk of a blow between the eyes!' (2000, p. 323)



otherwise of the perceptual belief cannot affect the form of the explanation. Let me consider these claims in turn.

If you look at a Müller-Lyer diagram and attend to the relative length of the lines, you will see the lines *as being of unequal length*, even though you may not believe that they are unequal. (Evans 1982) This is often taken to show that the content we need to appeal to in characterizing your experience cannot be the content of a belief. Experience must have a belief-independent representational content. This argument is too quick, though. True, noticing the apparent relative length of the lines involves representational content. But it also involves the acquisition of belief: in a naïve subject, the belief that ‘this line *is* longer than that one’, in a more cautious subject merely the belief that ‘this line *looks* longer than that one.’ In both cases, the subject is, in McDowell’s words, ‘saddled with content’. (McDowell 1994) Representationalists assume that naïve and more cautious subjects must be ‘saddled’ with the very same content. But it is not obvious that this is so. Correlatively, it is not clear that the content with which they are ‘saddled’ is anything other than the content of a belief.<sup>16</sup> It seems to me, therefore, that the case for RC really turns on the second step of the argument: on the explanatory role of illusory experiences.

The problem facing EO is that the actual features of, and relations between, the perceived objects seem to be inadequate to the task of explaining the content of the naïve perceiver’s belief. Why should a visual experience of the relative length of two equally long lines give rise to the belief that one is longer than the other? It is here that advocates

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<sup>16</sup> Compare Stroud’s response to McDowell’s account of the passivity of experience: ‘the passivity and absence of choice in perception, which is the mark of receptivity and “external constraint”, cannot be equated with the absence of all judgement or assent. In being “saddled” with content one is “saddled with assent or affirmation of that content, or at least of some content or other.’ (2002, p. 87)

of RC claim the representational content of experience plays an indispensable role. The content of the belief, they argue, is unsurprising, given the content of the subject's experience. But there is an alternative account, congenial to EO. This account gives a central role to the notion of a disabling condition. Suppose we dim the light sufficiently to make the colours of things invisible. Their colours will no longer directly contribute to the character of your visual experience. In these circumstances it is unsurprising that you will not be able to see that a certain object is green. But some disabling conditions have a further effect. They create anomalous experiences. If instead of dimming the light, we change its colour, your experience of the object may be subjectively indiscriminable from the experience of a red object, although that is not what it is. Similarly, the 'wings' attached to the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion not only make the actual relative length of the lines invisible but they make the experience of the lines indiscriminable from a visual experience of two lines of unequal length, although that is not what it is. Now a naïve subject is a subject who enjoys such an anomalous experience without being aware of its anomaly. It is natural, therefore, that she will draw on her experience in finding out about the world around her in the usual way. For example, she will try to ascertain the relative length of the two lines simply by attending to the lines and their relative length. The intelligibility of her resulting belief, that the lines are of unequal length, thus turns on two factors. One is her ignorance of the anomaly of her experience. The other is that, although her experience is not in fact an enabling condition of seeing that the two lines are unequal, it is indiscriminable by reflection from one that is.<sup>17</sup> The first factor makes it unsurprising that the subject will look to see whether the lines are of the same length (as

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<sup>17</sup> See Martin 2006 for illuminating discussion of the notion of being indiscriminable by reflection and its role in formulating a 'disjunctivist' approach to perceptual experience. See also Brewer 2008 for an alternative treatment of optical illusions from the perspective of EO.

opposed to looking to see merely whether they *look* to be of the same length). The second factor makes it unsurprising that this leads her to acquire the belief that they are of unequal length, and to think of her experience as an enabling condition of seeing that they are of unequal length. Importantly, the explanatory link between the anomalous experience and the false belief is parasitic on the explanatory link between a genuine visual experience and propositional seeing. It is because we understand that seeing the unequal length of two lines enables one to *see that* they are unequal that we can make sense of how an experience that is subjectively indiscriminable from one in which one sees the unequal length of two lines gives rise to a false belief that they are unequal. So this account of the way in which commonsense psychology finds the naïve subject's belief intelligible is committed to rejecting the third step of the argument from illusions, according to which the correctness or otherwise of a perceptual belief cannot affect the form of the explanation to be given of the subject's acquisition of the belief. On the alternative account, illusory experiences do not have the normal explanatory role of perceptual experiences: they generate (false) beliefs precisely in virtue of being wrongly taken to have the normal explanatory role of perceptual experiences. So reflection on perceptual illusions yields no argument for RC. There is no reason to think that in explaining perceptual beliefs, veridical or otherwise, we need to appeal to representational content.

#### **4. Perceptual demonstrative beliefs and the examiner's situation**

Suppose, then, that EO is the correct analysis of commonsense explanatory practice. We find our possession of knowledge of a range of facts regarding objects around us intelligible in the light of our perceptual experience of such objects and their features. But commonsense is not immune to philosophical criticism. From the point of view an

externalist theory of knowledge, the commonsense conception of the explanatory role of experience looks like an obsolete, if tenacious, tenet of folk epistemology. RC, in tandem with non-inferential internalism, may seem to hold out the promise of a philosophical vindication of the commonsense view; but it really misinterprets the latter. Here is an alternative response to the externalist challenge. Suppose we insist that the explanatory connection between experience and knowledge is primitive in the following sense. Our concepts of experiencing objects (in the various modalities) are themselves epistemic concepts, capable of providing adequate and irreducible explanations of how you know what you know when you see or hear something. And suppose we gloss ‘irreducible’ by saying that such explanations do not stand in need of validation by a philosophical theory of knowledge. Their adequacy does not depend on an account of how experience of objects helps to meet certain entirely general conditions on knowledge, as identified by a philosophical theory, conditions such as justification or reliability. Note that it would be consistent with this to acknowledge that ‘A knows that  $b$  is  $F$ ’ entails ‘A is epistemically justified in believing that  $b$  is  $F$ ’. (The same goes for some general condition of reliability.) For the entailment is neutral on the *explanatory* issue of how A knows that  $b$  is  $F$ . To say that A’s knowledge requires A’s belief to be epistemically justified is not to say that an *explanation* of how A knows that  $b$  is  $F$  has to be an explanation of what it is in virtue of which A is justified in believing that  $b$  is  $F$ . Perhaps the correct account of how A knows that  $b$  is  $F$  is that A sees  $b$ , in circumstances that allow her to see, and hence know, that  $b$  is  $F$ . That she is justified in believing  $b$  to be  $F$ , on this account, *follows* from the more basic explanation of how she knows that  $b$  is  $F$ .

It has to be admitted, though, that without further explanation and defence this response to the challenge is not satisfactory. Suppose you claim that crystal ball gazing is a source

of knowledge. And suppose that when I ask you how on earth crystal ball gazing might be connected with any general conditions on knowledge, such as truth or justification or reliability, you tell me that I am quite mistaken to assume that it must be possible to identify some such connection. The concept of crystal ball gazing, you blithely point out, is itself an epistemic concept: it is the concept of a source of knowledge, so evidently, it is possible to explain how we know certain things with the help of that concept.

Certainly the two sorts of cases raise significantly different issues. Your theory suffers from the relatively basic defect that crystal ball gazing is not a source of true beliefs; the simple theory of perception raises the much more subtle problem of why conscious experience should play a distinctive role in explaining perceptual knowledge. But the example might be said to illustrate two more general points. The first point is that folk epistemological claims concerning sources of knowledge are not sacrosanct. They can and should be subjected to scrutiny, including philosophical scrutiny. The second point is that the natural way to do so is to consider how a putative source relates to the general conditions that have to be met for a belief to count as knowledge. Such reflection invites the format Bernard Williams has called the 'examiner's situation': the situation where we have identified certain beliefs and are interested in whether these beliefs are 'adequately based' — in particular, whether their basis is sufficiently adequate for them to count as knowledge. (Williams 1972) When subjecting folk or commonsense epistemology to philosophical scrutiny, of course, we are concerned not with any specific belief held by a specific individual. We need to identify in general terms a whole range of beliefs — say, beliefs based on crystal ball gazing, or beliefs directly based on perceptual experience. This is one way in which generality is of the essence when it comes to a philosophical examination of sources of beliefs. Another such sense concerns the epistemic concepts

used in assessing putative sources of knowledge. Given the point of the project — to examine the credentials of folk epistemology — it would be question-begging to use would-be special epistemic concepts such as seeing that *p*, or ‘being clairvoyant that *p*’. The way to assess the credentials of putative sources of knowledge is to investigate their bearing on the general conditions that have to be identified in advance as necessary (and perhaps — though this is not essential — jointly sufficient) for propositional knowledge.

Now if this conception of the dialectical position were correct, I think the prospects for a defence of the commonsense view against the charge of dogmatism or irrationality would be poor. ‘Non-inferential internalism’ seems to be the most promising route to take if we seek to link experience to some supposedly general condition on knowledge; and it does not work. More traditional and familiar forms of foundationalism are even less likely to succeed, given traditional and familiar objections. So I think a good case can be made for the following conditional: *if* the epistemic role of perceptual experience has to be intelligible from the point of view of a philosophical theory of how experience provides for the satisfaction of some completely general conditions on propositional knowledge, then externalist sceptics about the importance of experience will be proved right. I suggest the question defenders of the commonsense view should press is whether the antecedent of the conditional is correct. One way to press it is to investigate the commitments implicit in the ‘examiner’s situation’.

Suppose it turns out that we use a simple theory of perception not only in explaining how we know various sorts of things about the world around us but also in identifying the *contents* of certain kinds of perceptual beliefs, hence in ascribing such beliefs to ourselves and others. And suppose it turns out that the two uses of the simple theory of

perception are inextricably entwined; that you could not coherently use the theory for the purpose of attributing perceptual beliefs to someone without simultaneously taking her to be in a position, thanks to her experience, to acquire propositional knowledge. If this were so, then identifying the to-be-examined set of beliefs would already commit the examiner to a particular answer to the question of whether they are ‘adequately based’. There would then be no real question left to examine, at least not of the completely general kind that would be at issue in a philosophical examination of the basis of perceptual beliefs. Correlatively, there would be no prospect of debunking the simple theory of perception as mere folk epistemology. The examiner, *qua* interpreter or ascriber, would herself be committed to it.

If a ‘transcendental argument’ of this kind could be developed and defended, it would enable us to block objections to the commonsense view of the role of experience without advancing a philosophical account of how perceptual experience provides for the satisfaction of some general conditions for knowledge. The argument would turn on something like the depth of our commitment to the simple theory of perception, its indispensability for the purpose of interpretation. The specific suggestion I want to make is that reflection on what is involved in holding and attributing perceptual demonstrative beliefs yields a way of filling out this form of argument.

Consider what it takes to understand a perceptual demonstrative such as ‘that lemon’. There seems to be a compelling and peculiarly direct link between experience and understanding here. We can imagine a blindseer who has learned to exploit blindsight to verify existentially quantified propositions, such as ‘the object in my blind field is yellow’. But no amount of training will enable her to think of the object as ‘that lemon’.

To identify an object demonstratively, or to share someone else's demonstrative thought, you need to experience the object. (See Campbell 2002) If you ask a blindseer to describe the colour of 'this object' (where the object is in the blind part of her visual field), she will have no idea which object you are talking about. Weiskrantz comments on the 'awkwardness of verbal exchange' in blindsight experiments (1997, p. 66). It is natural to suppose that a major source of this awkwardness is the unavailability to blindseers of perceptual demonstratives. So there is considerable plausibility in the idea that it is perceptual experience of objects that provides us with the ability demonstratively to identify objects, i.e. with knowledge of the reference of perceptual demonstratives.<sup>18</sup>

In attempting the task of examining the epistemic credentials of ordinary non-inferential perceptual beliefs in general, we assume that we know how to identify the sorts of beliefs we are interested in. We assume that we are in a position to think of ourselves and others as holding such beliefs. That assumption is surely right, but may, on closer inspection, turn out to depend on the satisfaction of certain conditions, conditions it is possible to overlook when trying to get on with the task of subjecting the beliefs to epistemological scrutiny. One such condition, in the specific case of non-inferential perceptual beliefs involving perceptual demonstratives, is that the subject of such beliefs has to experience the object. Even as the examiner raises the question of whether and why any of the beliefs

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<sup>18</sup> It might be said that externalist critics of commonsense epistemology are hardly likely to accept this account of the relation between experience and understanding, or indeed the characterization of understanding demonstratives as knowledge of reference. (I'm grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this.) There are two questions here. (a) Does my argument commit a *petitio principii*? (b) Is the argument unsound? Concerning (a), it seems to me the answer is negative, given that scepticism about the role of experience in yielding propositional knowledge and scepticism about its role in yielding understanding are different claims. (b) is of course a more complicated matter. It seems to me that the connection between perceptual experience and understanding demonstratives is something of a datum. But I recognize more would need to be said to articulate and defend that view.



under consideration should qualify as knowledge, she has to acknowledge that perceptual experience provides subjects of such beliefs with knowledge of reference. You can only have a perceptual demonstrative belief about a certain object if the object is *presented* to you in perceptual experience. This is the first step of the argument I wish to sketch. The second step consists in the claim that thinking of experience as a source of knowledge of the reference of perceptual demonstratives commits us to thinking of it as a source of *propositional knowledge*. It is important to be clear on what this amounts to. It does not mean that we have to take it that most, let alone all, non-inferential perceptual demonstrative beliefs constitute knowledge. It does not even mean that grasp of a perceptual demonstrative implies actual possession of some propositional knowledge concerning the object in question. The claim is just that knowledge of the reference of a perceptual demonstrative cannot be wholly divorced from the *ability* to gain propositional knowledge of the object. If correct, this would mean that insofar as we take experience to be a source of knowledge of reference, we are committed to regarding it as a possible source of propositional knowledge.

Whether or not this second step can be made good depends on the philosophical account we should give of perceptual demonstrative identification, where this in turn is informed by first-order intuitions about the enabling conditions of demonstrative identification. Consider the suggestion that it is partly constitutive of the capacity for demonstrative identification to be able to *locate* the object in question on the basis of experience, at least in egocentric terms. (Evans 1982) If this were right, it would make for a tight connection between knowledge of reference and the ability to acquire propositional knowledge of the relevant object. To say that experience provides for knowledge of reference would be to say that it provides for the ability to acquire propositional knowledge of location. The

suggestion is often criticized for being unduly restrictive, though. (See Peacocke 1991, Campbell 2002, Burge 2005) For example, according to Tyler Burge, visual experience may sustain demonstrative identification even in a case where, ‘because of prismatic distortion’, a blue ball behind the subject is perceived as a red block in front of her. (2005, p. 50) But I want to suggest that even the most liberal outlook has to acknowledge a minimal link between knowledge of reference and propositional knowledge.

Discussions of perceptual demonstratives often give a prominent role to the ability to *keep track* of the object referred to.<sup>19</sup> This may seem surprising. On the face of it, ‘keeping track’ matters when there is movement on the part of either subject or object, yet a great deal of perceptual demonstrative thought seems to be conducted in circumstances where both are stationary. The ability to keep track of an object matters, I think, because it brings out a basic constraint on the attribution of perceptual demonstratives. If your experience of some object is to yield knowledge of the reference of a perceptual demonstrative referring to it, it has to *individuate* the object for you. It has to delineate the boundaries of the object, so that there is a non-arbitrary answer to the question of which object you are attending to. Your ability to keep track of the object over time is a *consequence* of the satisfaction of this basic requirement. It may not always be obvious how to apply the requirement in particular cases, especially in unusual cases such as Burge’s example. But I think the constraint itself is sufficient to secure a minimal connection between knowledge of reference and propositional knowledge. If your

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<sup>19</sup> ‘(T)he fundamental basis of a demonstrative Idea of a perceptible thing [= of knowledge of the reference of a perceptual demonstrative] is a capacity to attend selectively to a single thing over a period of time’. (Evans 1982, p. 175) ‘(C)onscious attention to an object, the highlighting of your experience of that thing, affects the functional role of your experience of the object. Having once consciously focused on the object, you are now in a position to keep track of it deliberately (..).’ (Campbell 2002, p. 10)

experience of an object is to yield demonstrative reference, it has to individuate the object for you. Provided the experience continues over a certain period of time, it will enable you to keep track of the object. Minimally, you will be able to perceive *whether* the object is still there. Normally, you will be able to so do in virtue of perceiving many other things: for example, where the object is, whether and how fast it is moving, how big it is, what sort of object it is, and so forth. So perceptual demonstrative thought requires more than the satisfaction of the enabling conditions of *object* perception. Experience of objects must enable you to perceive certain facts concerning the object. Thus it must provide for propositional knowledge as well as knowledge of reference. I think this point informs even a liberal view such as Burge's. The intuitive force of the view, such as it is, arguably turns on the intuition that in his example, the subject's experience individuates the object for her. If the blue ball behind the subject were to move, we feel, she would be able to keep track of it: there is a single object she can be aware of over time. Things would be different if what appeared to her to be a red block in front of her were *two* blue balls behind her.

The argument I have sketched shows the distinctive mix of ambition and moderation that is characteristic of modest transcendental arguments in Barry Stroud's sense.<sup>20</sup> It does not undertake to prove that perceptual experience of objects really is a source of propositional knowledge. The goal of the argument is merely that of showing that ascribing perceptual demonstrative beliefs to oneself and others commits one to thinking of experience as a source of knowledge. If this goal can be reached, the explanatory link between experience and knowledge turns out to be peculiarly primitive. Of course there would still be good

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<sup>20</sup> For Stroud's seminal work on the significance of such arguments, see the papers collected in this 2000a, especially chapters 11 and 13.

philosophical questions to be asked about the link. But the way to pursue these questions would not be to try to adjudicate on the force and legitimacy of explanations of someone's knowledge in terms of her experience in the tribunal of a philosophical theory of knowledge. The problem with the idea of such a tribunal is that it assumes we can identify the relevant class of beliefs in wholly non-epistemic terms, suspending our ordinary practice of finding someone's knowledge of a particular object intelligible in the light of her experience of the object. If this cannot be done — if the practice is internal to the interpretation of ourselves and others as holding perceptual demonstrative beliefs — it would be mere pretence to make our view of the epistemic role of experience depend on the outcome of a philosophical examination of what it is in virtue of which perceptual beliefs acquire epistemic justification, or satisfy some other general condition on knowledge. *Qua* interpreter of perceptual demonstrative beliefs, the philosophical examiner would be committed to thinking of experience of objects as something that provides an adequate explanation of perceptual knowledge.

I want to conclude by emphasizing that the argument is not intended to convince us that experience does in fact play a distinctive epistemic role. If successful, the argument would merely show that you could not challenge that idea consistently with accepting that you and others hold perceptual demonstrative beliefs. But, as Stroud has emphasized, it would be a mistake to conclude that therefore the idea must be correct. The point of the argument is dialectical: it aims to rebut a philosophical challenge to the view that a simple theory of perception is an adequate, if simple-minded, theory of perceptual knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

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