

Essays in Philosophy

Volume 5
Issue 1 *The Philosophy of Perception*

Article 25

1-2004

Perceptual Experience, Conscious Content, and Non-Conceptual Content

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Recommended Citation

Kriegel, Uriah (2004) "Perceptual Experience, Conscious Content, and Non-Conceptual Content," *Essays in Philosophy*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 25.

Essays in Philosophy

A Biannual Journal

Vol. 5 No. 1, January 2004

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Abstract. One of the promising approaches to the problem of perceptual consciousness has been the representational theory, or representationalism. The idea is to reduce the phenomenal character of conscious perceptual experiences to the representational content of those experiences. Most representationalists appeal specifically to non-conceptual content in reducing phenomenal character to representational content. In this paper, I discuss a series of issues involved in this representationalist appeal to non-conceptual content. The overall argument is the following. On the face of it, conscious perceptual experience appears to be experience of a structured world, hence to be at least partly conceptual. To validate the appeal to non-conceptual content, the representationalist must therefore hold that the content of experience is partly conceptual and partly non-conceptual. But how can the conceptual and the non-conceptual combine to form a single content? The only way to make sense of this notion, I argue, leads to a surprising consequence, namely, that the representational approach to perceptual consciousness is a disguised form of functionalism.

1. Representational Theories of Perceptual Experience and Non-Conceptual Content

One of the persistent problems in the philosophy of mind has been the problem of *conscious perceptual experience*. Specifically, the *phenomenal character* of perceptual experience – what it is like to have or undergo it¹ – has struck many as presenting a particularly tough challenge for a naturalist worldview. One of the promising approaches to the problem has been the representational theory of conscious perceptual experience.² The representationalist program is to effect a two-step naturalization of conscious experience: first, reduce its phenomenal character to a certain kind of representational content; then, reduce that representational content to some sort of informational or teleological relationship between brain states and world states.

For reasons that we will now review, most representationalists came to think that the only sort of content that can be used to reduce phenomenal character is non-conceptual content.³ Non-conceptual content is supposed to explain both (i) the difference among phenomenally different experiences, and (ii) the difference between perceptual experiences, on the one hand, and thoughts and the propositional attitudes, on the other. According to the representational theory, the difference between two phenomenally different experiences is that their non-conceptual content is different; and the difference between perceptual experience and the propositional attitudes is that the content of perceptual experience is non-conceptual, whereas the content of propositional attitudes is conceptual.

Is this preference for non-conceptual content a matter of taste? No. There are theoretical pressures to go for non-conceptual content. According to representationalism, phenomenal character *supervenes* on representational content: experiences with different phenomenal characters must have

different contents. An alleged counter-example to such supervenience, due to Peacocke (1983 ch.1), goes a bit like this. You see two trees of the same size and shape, but one nearer than the other. The two trees are represented by your experience as of the same size; but because one is nearer than the other, it occupies ‘more of your visual field’, as Peacocke puts it.⁴ Occupying more of the visual field is a sensational or phenomenal property of the experience. So there is a phenomenal difference in the experience of the two trees without a corresponding representational difference.

The strategy of dealing with this case that emerged from the representationalist literature was simply to fine-grain the individuation of the contents of your experience.⁵ Although your experience represents the two trees as equally sizeable, it *also* represents one of them as being bigger-from-here, where being bigger-from-here involves subtending a larger visual angle.⁶ It thus represents one tree differently than the other. So the phenomenal difference is accompanied by a representational difference after all.

What is important to see is that this strategy – the strategy of fine-graining the representational contents of experiences so as to differentiate experiences representationally wherever they differ phenomenally – works not only for Peacocke’s case. It would work in the same way for any putative counter-example to the representationalist supervenience claim (i.e., the claim that phenomenal character supervenes on representational content). In some of these cases, however, the subject of experience does not possess the differing concepts that would enable her to make the kind of distinctions that the representational theorist makes in differentiating the contents. Thus, as Peacocke himself noted in his original piece, a subject who did not possess the concept of subtending a visual angle could not conceptualize one tree as subtending a larger visual angle than another. Consequently, such a subject could not form a conceptual representation of the difference between the trees. But it is still true of this subject that one tree occupies more of her visual field than the other.⁷ Since the representationalist cannot ascribe to the subject a conceptual representation of the difference between the two trees, she must ascribe to her a *non-conceptual* representation of the difference.⁸ And more generally, for the fine-graining strategy to give the representationalist the principled immunity to counter-examples of this sort, the representationalist must appeal to non-conceptual content in reducing the phenomenal character of experience.

The representationalist appeal to non-conceptual content is therefore anything but a matter of taste. For the program to have any kind of plausibility, it *must* attempt to reduce the phenomenal character of perceptual experience specifically to non-conceptual content. But this can be done, it would seem, only if perceptual experience *has* non-conceptual content. It is the burden of §§3-4 to suggest that this is far from being obvious. But before we can make any progress in discussing these issues, the first order of business is to frame a ‘working distinction’ between non-conceptual and conceptual content.

2. Conceptual and Non-Conceptual Content for Californians

When we ask whether a type of content is conceptual or not, what exactly is at stake? What exactly are we asking? Within a Fregean framework, the distinction is relatively easy to draw. Conceptual representation is mediated by Fregean *senses* – or rather, psychological acts of *sense-grasping* – which provide *modes of presentation* of the worldly objects they represent. These are abstract entities, which somehow assist a mental state in hooking up to the right worldly objects. Within this

framework, non-conceptual representation can be characterized as representation which is not mediated in this way, one which hooks up to its object by virtue of some external causal relationship linking them up.⁹

But this way of drawing the line between conceptual and non-conceptual content will not extend to a non-Fregean, ‘Californian’ framework, where no appeal is made to the notions of sense-grasping and mode of presentation. This is important, since most of the representationalist effort is conducted from this Californian perspective.¹⁰ For a Californian, mental representation is a structure involving, on the one hand, a vehicle in the form of a brain state, and on the other hand, a content in the form of an external object or state of affairs – and nothing else. And it is unclear in what sense either a brain state or an external object can be said to be ‘conceptual’. Since the content is given by the external environment itself, the content is not in the ordinary case made out of *concepts*. And since the vehicle is a brain state, it, too, is not made out of concepts, but out of neurons. So what does it mean to say that a given content is conceptual (or not) in this Californian framework?

Here is one way the distinction can be drawn. To represent something *conceptually* is to bring a concept to bear in representing that thing. This can be characterized, perhaps, as the exercise of certain abilities, the sort of abilities involved in *possessing* the concept.¹¹ If, for instance, possession of the concept of table involves the ability to *recognize* tables in different contexts and at different times, then for some table-representation to be conceptual is for it to put to work the subject’s recognitional ability.¹² These abilities will show up in the *functional role* of the cerebral vehicle. The brain state representing the table is the occupant of a certain functional role in the mental economy of the subject, and this functional role will be modulated by the acquisition of a capacity to recognize tables over time and in differing contexts. A subject possessing the concept of table will be able to form certain table-beliefs, on the basis of her table-perceptions, which a subject who lacks the concept will be unable to form. Inferences from one table-belief to another which the one will be able to make, the other will not be able to make.

For a Californian, then, a given content is conceptual when it is carried by a vehicle with a certain distinctive functional role.¹³ The notion of ‘conceptual content’ may therefore be to some extent misleading, inasmuch as it suggests that conceptuality is primarily an attribute of contents, when in reality, it is primarily an attribute of vehicles. This misleading suggestion, and its undoing, will turn out to play an important role in the argument of this paper.

The Californian distinction I offered between conceptual and non-conceptual content is this: a content *C* is conceptual iff the state carrying *C* plays a functional role (in the subject’s cognitive life) which involves the mobilization of certain recognitional and other abilities; *C* is non-conceptual iff its vehicle has a functional role which does *not* involve the mobilization of these abilities. With this distinction at our disposal, we can turn to the main topic of this paper.

3. Perceptual Experience and the Structuredness of the Experienced World

When you take a stroll around your block, you have a vivid conscious perceptual experience of the scenery around you. You see the buildings towering above, see and hear the cars driving by, see people crossing your path, etc. On the face of it, your experience of the surroundings is an

experience of a *structured* reality. Your perceptual experience does not consist in a meaningless dance of colors and shapes. Rather, it is experience of objects and of events, of recurrent features and relationships, exhibiting recognizable patterns, etc. That is, what is consciously experienced is experienced as *organized*. The world of experience is a richly and sophisticatedly structured world. As Van Gulick puts it, “Phenomenal experience is not merely a succession of qualitatively distinguished sensory ideas, but rather the organized cognitive experience of a world of objects and of ourselves as subjects within that world.”¹⁴

What does this *structure*, or *organization*, that the experienced world exhibits consist in? What does it mean for a given object or state of affairs to be experienced as part of a structured world? Perhaps simply, that it is experienced conceptually, that is, through the lenses of a conceptual grid. But even if being experienced as part of a structured world does not just *mean* being experienced conceptually, it does seem to *entail* being experienced conceptually. For a structured world is primarily a world that exhibits some forms of *invariance*. Thus, when you look at the table in front of you, it presents itself to you *as* a table – it does not normally present itself as a rectangular segment of your visual field. If you do not possess the concept of table, you may experience it as a strange and unknown object, but again, not as a mere shape. Now, to represent something as a table (or as an object at all) involves, at the very least, an ability to represent *other things* as also being tables. (The tableness is what remains invariant here across your different experiences of tables.) And for a subject to have this recognitional ability is for her to possess at least a rudimentary concept of table. By exercising the ability in representing the table in front of you as a table, you are putting to work your concept of table.

Perceptual experience represents the world as structured, then, and this seems to imply that it represents it conceptually. All this will hardly come as a big surprise to anyone who followed the philosophy and psychology of the past century. But it does bring out an important point, namely, that the debate over the existence of non-conceptual content may be irrelevant to the debate over the nature of perceptual experience. For our discussion of conscious experience indicates that, whether or not non-conceptual content ‘exists’, it is not *the sort of content conscious perceptual experiences normally carry*. Thus, this was never really in dispute in the debate between McDowell and Evans.¹⁵ Evans is explicit on the fact that what he calls ‘the informational system’, whose states have non-conceptual content, is sub-personal; meaning, presumably, that mental states with non-conceptual content are not *conscious* states.

This, one would think, would present a serious difficulty for the representationalist program. The program was to reduce the phenomenal character of experience to representational content. Since conceptual content was deemed inappropriate for such reduction, representationalists claimed that the phenomenal character of experiences reduced to their non-conceptual content. But that could be so only if experiences *have* non-conceptual content. The above phenomenological observation (that the experienced world is experienced as structured) suggests, rather forcefully, that they do not.

4. Conscious Experience, Layered Representation, and Conscious Content

Let us now consider a representationalist attempt to accommodate our observation that conscious perceptual experience appears to be conceptual. According to Lycan and Tye, perceptual experiences vehicle more than one content at a time.¹⁶ Tye calls this *the layering thesis*. The

layering thesis claims that conscious perceptual experience is a many-layered representation of the world. So beside the layer of conceptual content discussed above, there are also other, non-conceptual layers of content. In particular, the layer of content which determines phenomenal character, says Tye, is the layer of ‘the grouped array’.¹⁷ At this layer, content is non-conceptual. It is in virtue of carrying this type of content that an experience has specifically the phenomenal character it has. This means that the phenomenal character of perceptual experience is determined by its non-conceptual content after all.

One may worry about the psychological plausibility, or even meaningfulness, of the idea of layered representation. What sort of empirical discovery could lead us to postulate several contents vehicled by a single state, as opposed to several states each with its own content? But even more deeply, I want to argue that the appeal to layered representation cannot help the representationalist reestablish the relevance of non-conceptual content to perceptual consciousness. I will argue that even if conscious experience carries a non-conceptual content beside its more standard conceptual content, that non-conceptual content is not conscious content. It is, in itself, a non-conscious phenomenon, and thus cannot shed any light on the phenomenon of perceptual consciousness.

Before constructing the argument, I would like to introduce the notion of *conscious content*. We ordinarily speak of *experiences*, not of their contents, as being conscious. But as we will see momentarily, it will be useful to have an independent notion of conscious content. The content of an experience is given by some environmental setting. For instance, my current visual experience is directed at an environmental setting featuring a brown table with a laptop and an ashtray on it. Those aspects of the setting I am conscious of comprise the *conscious content* of my experience. By restricting the relevant aspects of the setting to those I am *conscious of*, we intend to exclude those aspects of the setting that generate such phenomena as subliminal perception, that is, those aspects which pass unnoticed by the subject.¹⁸ For instance, when I was having the table-experience I mentioned just now, the far end of the electric cord of my laptop showed up at the extreme periphery of my visual field. That it was there I might be able to recall under torture, as we reportedly can. But at the time I was having the experience I was not conscious of the electric cord. We may want to say that the electric cord figured in the *overall* content of my experience, but not in the *conscious* content of my experience. With this notion of conscious content at hand, we can start with the promised argument.

Let us start by formulating a principle of *the Unity of Conscious Content*. The principle says that conscious content is unified and cohesive. The notion of ‘unity and cohesion’ of conscious content can be cashed out in terms of the phenomenon cognitive scientists try to explain under the heading of *the binding problem*. This is the problem of understanding how our perceptual experiences represent the various environmental features and elements we are conscious of at any single time as bound together in a single cohesive, integrated setting.¹⁹

Now, the principle of the Unity of Conscious Content entails that there can be only one conscious content at a time; call this principle *the Singularity of Conscious Content*. According to this principle, we are conscious of only one unified and cohesive environmental setting at a time. The Singularity of Conscious Content follows from the Unity of Conscious Content, because if we could be conscious of two dissociated settings at some time t , this would introduce a *disunity* in our conscious content at t . The Singularity of Conscious Content, in turn, entails that the conceptual

content by which we experience the world as structured, and the non-conceptual content of the grouped array, cannot be both conscious. Therefore, since the conceptual content is conscious, the non-conceptual content must be non-conscious. If it is a non-conscious phenomenon – if it is a mere accompaniment to the conscious goings-on in the subject – it cannot possibly be used to account for perceptual consciousness.

5. A Non-Conceptual Element in Conscious Content?

Recapitulation. We claimed, on phenomenological grounds, that the content of conscious experience is normally conceptual, and that this should bedevil the representationalist program. We then considered a representationalist attempt to accommodate our observation. Beside conceptual experience, the claim goes, there is *also* a level of non-conceptual content. Our objection was that such non-conceptual content would normally be non-conscious, since there can be only one conscious content at a time.

So can the notion of non-conceptual content really help us understand better the phenomenon of consciousness? To defend non-conceptual content, the representationalist must insist that some *conscious* content is non-conceptual after all. Here is one way to do that. When I am looking at the tree outside my window, the conscious content of my visual experience is so rich I could not describe it fully – even in hours of straight talking. Clearly, a propositional content such as "this is a tree" or "there is a tree outside my window" does not scratch the representational surface. It does not convey the great majority of the information carried by my experience. This way in which conscious content outruns so dramatically any verbalization would suggest to many that it is non-conceptual.

This evidence, however, is indecisive. Whether the fact that an experience cannot be readily described in public language entails the non-conceptuality of its content is debatable. That is, the case we just considered assumes a sort of ‘verbalizability’ criterion for concept possession, which criterion may not be accepted by all. The abilities involved in concept possession may not necessarily include an ability for compact wording, even if such an ability normally accompanies it. This definitely does not appear to be a minimal ability without which no concept possession can be envisaged, in the way the ability of recognition across time, for instance, seems to be. Thus, some lower animals may possess a crude concept of, say, food, without having any linguistic abilities whatever.

What *are* the minimal abilities for concept possession, then? We cited recognitional ability as one of the obvious candidates. So is there a case of conscious content outstripping recognitional abilities, for instance? I think there is. When you look at the table before you, you do not experience it as being brown, period. You experience it as being a specific shade of brown, say brown₂₃. It may be that if you were to be shown tomorrow two very similar samples of brown – say, one brown₂₃ and the other brown₂₄ – you would be unable to tell which one is the same color as the table from yesterday. You would be unable, that is, to recognize brown₂₃ as being the same color again. So you do not possess the concept of brown₂₃.²⁰ At the same time, you *are* capable of telling apart brown₂₃ and brown₂₄ when they are shown to you simultaneously – so the difference between them does not outstrip your discriminatory sensitivities. If you looked at a pair of tables at the same time, one brown₂₃ and the other brown₂₄, your experiences of the two table would be phenomenally

different. Yet you are unable to recognize which of them is the same color as the table from yesterday. So even though your conscious experience represents the table as being a table *conceptually*, it also represents it as being brown₂₃ *non-conceptually* – even by a strict standard of conceptuality.

This, I suggest, is real evidence that *parts*, or *aspects*, of the content of perceptual experience are often non-conceptual. But this raises a serious quandary: how can the conceptual and the non-conceptual cohabit in the same content? How can my experience of the table be partly conceptual and partly non-conceptual? How can the conceptual and the non-conceptual combine to form a unified and cohesive conscious content?

6. Conscious Content, Recognitional Abilities, and Discriminatory abilities

In this penultimate section, I would like to sketch an answer to the quandary we raised at the end of the previous section. The key to my answer is to remember the Californian distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual content, drawn in §2. Conceptual content, we said, is content carried by a vehicle whose functional role involves the mobilization of recognitional abilities, as well as other abilities involved in concept possession. Non-conceptual content is content carried by a vehicle whose functional role does not involve the mobilization of such abilities. So conceptuality and non-conceptuality are primarily attributes of vehicles rather than contents. Ultimately, I will argue that the reason the conceptual and the non-conceptual can combine to form a single conscious content is that a single vehicle can play a functional role which combines mobilization of certain present abilities with *no* mobilization of other, absent abilities.

Your conscious perceptual experience of the table represents the table as a table and as brown₂₃. We can say that the experience represents a brown₂₃ table. The problem is that the brown₂₃ is represented non-conceptually, while the table is represented conceptually. But what does it mean for your experience to represent the table conceptually? It means that the functional role of your experience involves, among other things, the mobilization of a capacity for table recognition. It can lead, for instance, to the formation of a belief that the table you saw last year in the very same room was nicer. And what does it mean for your experience to represent brown₂₃ non-conceptually? It means that its functional role does not involve the mobilization of a capacity for brown₂₃ recognition. Your experience *cannot* lead, for instance, to the formation of a belief that the brown₂₃ chair you saw last year in the same room was more useful. This means that your experience has a certain distinctive functional role, which involves the mobilization of a capacity for table recognition but does not involve the mobilization of a capacity for brown₂₃ recognition.

Note, however, that the representation of the brown₂₃ by your experience does require certain abilities. It requires, more precisely, *discriminatory* abilities. By ‘discriminatory abilities’ I mean abilities of the sort that are brought to bear when you tell apart the brown₂₃ table from the brown₂₄ table when they are presented to you simultaneously. With regards to brown₂₃, you possess discriminatory abilities but no recognitional abilities. The fact that you *can* make the discrimination on the spot, as it were, is not insignificant to the phenomenal character of your experience. For the individuation of phenomenal characters is sensitive to the discriminatory abilities of the subject. The fact that you can discriminate brown₂₃ from brown₂₄ shows that the phenomenal character of your experiences of a brown table and a brown table is different. If it is different when you look at

the two tables simultaneously, then it should remain different when you look at one a day after you look at the other. Consider, by contrast, a subject who not only cannot recognize brown₂₃ over time, but also cannot tell apart brown₂₃ from brown₂₄ ‘on the spot’. Her experience when looking at a brown₂₄ table is phenomenally indistinguishable from her experience when looking at the brown₂₃ table. Indeed, her two experiences are the same in every way. The discriminatory abilities mobilized in the functional roles of conscious experiences thus affect the individuation of phenomenal characters.

Your experience of a brown₂₃ table has a functional role, then, which involves the mobilization of a capacity for table recognition and the mobilization of a capacity for brown₂₃ discrimination, but does not involve the mobilization of a capacity for brown₂₃ recognition. It also involves the mobilization of a myriad of other capacities and does not involve the mobilization of yet others. That there should be experiences with a functional role of this specific profile is nothing mysterious in itself. No experience can lead to the formation of any and every belief. Every experience has a functional role which assumes certain capacities and does not assume others. The fact that the conscious content of your experience is partly conceptual and partly non-conceptual comes down to this, then, that the functional role your experience plays in your mental life involves the mobilization of a mixture of capacities, some of which are recognitional and some merely discriminatory.

The difficulty we originally had, to conceive of content which is partly conceptual and partly non-conceptual, was founded on a certain imagistic way of thinking about concepts (and, by consequence, conceptual content), namely, as some sort of reified senses. The metaphor, by which we take concepts to be the ‘building blocks’ of our cognitive life, easily leads us to think of concepts as isolated ingredients that somehow come together like Lego pieces when we form a complete thought. It then strikes us as impossible for these Lego pieces to stick together with the flotsam and jetsam of non-conceptual jello. But once we stop conceiving of the conceptual in terms of reified senses, and instead treat it as basically a functional property of experiences, we can come to see how it can cohabit unproblematically with the non-conceptual, that is to say, with another functional property of experiences.

7. Representationalism and Non-Conceptual Content: The Good News and the Bad News

Recapitulation Two. In the first half of this paper, we raised a doubt concerning the attempt to reduce the phenomenal character of experience to non-conceptual content. Since conscious perceptual experience is experience of a structured world, we claimed, conscious content must be conceptual. The possibility that we did not take into account is that the experienced world is structured because our experience of it is *in large part*, but *not entirely*, conceptual. We did not take this possibility into account because we were working with the hidden assumption that a type of content cannot be just *partly* conceptual; that content is either entirely conceptual or entirely non-conceptual. This assumption, we argued in the second half of the paper, is unfounded. It is founded on a false dichotomy between the conceptual and the non-conceptual, a dichotomy originating from an outmoded conception of concepts and the conceptual as attributes of the *contents* of mental states. When understood properly, in terms of functional properties of *vehicles*, rather than contents, the conceptual and the non-conceptual are seen to be perfectly compatible and

cohabitable.

If conceptuality was an attribute of contents, the possibility of content which is partly conceptual and partly not *would* be unintelligible, and the representationalist reduction of phenomenal character *would* be blocked by the phenomenological observation that conscious perceptual experience is experience of a structured world. But conceptuality is *not* an attribute of contents, so the representationalist reduction goes through. This is the good news for the representationalist.

The bad news is that the envisaged reduction is now, in an important sense, no longer representationalist. The original representationalist program was to distinguish perceptual experience from the propositional attitudes in terms of the sort of representational content experiences carry; and to distinguish phenomenally different experiences in terms of difference in their representational content. Now it seems that representational content, in itself, has little to do with the properties that can effect these distinctions. If what distinguishes perceptual experience from the propositional attitudes is their non-conceptual content, this only means that what makes a given mental state an experience rather than a propositional attitude is that it plays a certain relevantly impoverished functional role, i.e., functional role which involves the mobilization of only discriminatory, and not recognitional, abilities. Similarly, if what distinguishes two phenomenally different experiences are differences in the non-conceptual parts of their contents, this only means that their functional roles involve the mobilization of different sub-conceptual abilities. It is therefore the functional roles of experiences that account (i) for their being experiences at all, and (ii) for their being specifically the phenomenal experiences they are. This means that the so-called representational theory of conscious experience is just a disguised version of functionalism.

The functionalist approach to phenomenal experience has been largely abandoned due to its difficulties with *absent and inverted qualia*.²¹

Representationalism was supposed to be an improvement on functionalism, the right sort of improvement to accommodate these cases. But if the argument of this paper has been on the right track, the problems of absent and inverted qualia could be transposed into the representationalist framework. Thus, it appears that a subject can have a full set of discriminatory and recognitional abilities without the qualitative phenomenal experience that normally goes with it (absent qualia); likewise, the discriminatory and recognitional abilities of two subjects can be identical and yet the qualitative spaces of their phenomenal experiences be inverted relative to each other (inverted qualia). The representationalist can reply that absent and inverted qualia are metaphysically impossible, but of course this move was available to the functionalist all along. In any event, it would seem that representationalism cannot be an improvement on functionalism, since it is functionalism.

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Endnotes

1. To use Nagel's (1974) ever so apt phrase.

2. See Harman (1990), Dretske (1995, 1996), Tye (1992, 1995, 2000), Kirk (1994), Lycan (1996b), Shoemaker (1994), Davies (1996), Byrne and Hilbert (1997), Byrne (2001), and Kriegel (2002).

3. Tye (1995, 2000) made it a cornerstone of his representationalist theory. But even representationalists who did not appeal to non-conceptual content explicitly, appealed to very similar notions. Thus, Dretske appealed at one time to the notion of analog content (Dretske 1981 ch.5) and later to the notion of systemic content (Dretske 1995 ch.1). While the differences between these notions may be of great significance, even to the argument of this paper, I am going to focus on non-conceptual content, since it is the clearest and most straightforward of these notions, and it plays a central role in other, related but different, discussions in the philosophy of mind. It seems to me that if there is a crucial difference between the notion of, say, analog content and the notion of non-conceptual content – such that the plausibility of representationalism is greatly affected by a transition from the latter to the former – the burden of proof to show that this is so would fall on the proponent of analog content. For a useful discussion of these issues, see Carruthers 2000 ch.5.

4. "Your experience represents these objects as being of the same height... yet there is also some sense in which the nearer tree occupies more of your visual field than the other tree" (1983: 345).

5. For representationalist discussions of this case, see DeBellis (1991), Tye (1992, 1996, 2000 ch.4), and Lycan (1996a, 1996b ch.7); also some remarks in Harman (1990, specifically circa 1990: 667).

6. Peacocke, it will be noted, has anticipated this sort of representationalist response. He writes: “[One] strategy in defense of [representationism] would be to expand the range of representational contents... There would be no difficulty [in the first example, of the two trees], it may be said, if for instance we included in representational content the angle subtended by an object...” (1983: 348) And though his rejoinder is not irrelevant to the issues we are going to discuss, there is no need to go into it here.

7. He writes: “It is a conceptual truth that no one can have an experience with a given representational content unless he possesses the concepts from which that content is built up: an experience cannot represent the world to the subject of experience as being a certain way if he is not capable of grasping what that way is... [But] for an unsophisticated perceiver who does not have the concept of subtended angle it is nevertheless true that one object takes up more of his visual field than another. (Peacocke 1983: 349)

8. This reply is developed explicitly in Tye (2000: 78; *Italics original*): “The nearer tree (or its facing surface) is represented as being larger from here... What exactly is involved in one of two items being larger from here? The obvious answer is that the one item subtends a larger visual angle... It is important to realize that the representation of the relational feature of being larger from here is nonconceptual... The person does not need to have any cognitive grasp of subtended angles.”

9. This, in broad strokes, is the distinction Evans is developing in Evans 1982 ch.5. It is also the sort of view inherent in Peacocke’s (1992 ch.3) account of non-conceptual content as ‘positioned scenario’, as well as Bermudez’s (1998) account in terms of ‘bounded segments of the perceived array’. Alternatively, the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual content can be characterized, within the Fregean framework, in terms of the type of mode of presentation deployed in the linking up of the state and its worldly object.

10. The Californian perspective is also central to the naturalist direction of the representationalists. There is something at least initially mysterious about the notion of a mode of presentation, unlike the notions of a brain state which is doing the representing and a worldly object which is being represented.

11. So the possession of a concept involves having the abilities in question, whereas the application of the concept involves exercising these abilities.

12. Other abilities that will be relevant to concept possession will be, for instance, those that sustain such features as the systematicity and productivity of language (see Fodor 1975).

13. On this approach, the possession of a concept emerges from the acquisition of a stable capacity to perform certain mental acts, acts which we call conceptualizations. The approach is to reverse the natural order of explanation, then: instead of starting with the notion of a concept, and interpret conceptualization as the deployment of concepts, we start with conceptualization acts, building up

the notion of a concept from these.

14. Van Gulick 1993: 559. A similar point is made by Carruthers (2000: 130, *Italics original*): "... phenomenologically, perception just does not appear to be like that [i.e., non-conceptual]. I appear to see tables and chairs; not just filled spaces which I come to believe are tables and chairs. Perception itself seems to be imbued with concepts."

15. McDowell (1994 ch.3) takes up Evans' claims about non-conceptual content, arguing in effect that there is no such thing.

16. Lycan (1996a) claims that there are specifically two layers of perceptual representation; Lycan (1996b) is an extended version of this. In a commentary on that Lycan 1996a, Tye (1996) argued that there are many more than two layers in perceptual representation. The layering thesis is then developed more thoroughly in Tye 2000 ch.4.

17. Tye makes distinctions among types of contents that we need not go into here. Nor is it very important what the grouped array is, beyond the fact that it is non-conceptual. For detail, see Tye 2000, circa p. 71.

18. We may speculate that, empirically, which aspects of the setting enter the conscious content of the experience is determined by selective attention mechanisms.

19. This is problematic mainly because the information received from the different features and elements in the environment is processed by different neural mechanisms. For discussion, see, e.g., Crick and Koch 1990.

20. Tye effectively employs this observation to motivate the idea that the content of conscious experience is non-conceptual (e.g., in Tye 2000 ch.3).

21. For absent qualia, see Block and Fodor 1972 and Block 1980. For inverted qualia, see Shoemaker 1981 (as well as Block 1990). For a systematic survey and discussion, see White 1986.