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Ratio (new series) XXIV 3 September 2011 0034–0006

1 DOES PERCEPTION OUTSTRIP OUR CONCEPTS IN
2 FINENESS OF GRAIN?

3
4 *Kevin Connolly*

5
6 *Abstract*

7 We seem perfectly able to perceive fine-grained shades of colour
8 even without possessing precise concepts for them. The same
9 might be said of shapes. I argue that this is in fact not the case. A
10 subject can perceive a colour or shape only if she possesses a
11 concept of that type of colour or shape. I provide new justification
12 for this thesis, and do not rely on demonstrative concepts such as
13 THIS SHADE or THAT SHAPE, a move first suggested by John
14 McDowell, but rejected by Christopher Peacocke and Richard
15 Heck among others.¹

16
17 **1. Introduction**

18
19 My claim is that a subject can have a perception of a colour or
20 shape only if she possesses a concept of that type of colour or
21 shape. This thesis, which I call *Colour and Shape Conceptualism*,
22 may seem counter-intuitive. It seems that we can perceive some
23 colours and shapes perfectly well even though we lack precise
24 concepts for them. It seems that in such cases our perceptions
25 outstrip our concepts in terms of their fineness of grain. I think
26 that this is incorrect, and I try to show how we possess precise
27 colour and shape concepts for every shade and shape that we
28 can perceive. I do so without appealing to demonstrative con-
29 cepts such as THIS SHADE or THAT SHAPE, a solution first
30 suggested by John McDowell,² but rejected by Christopher

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33 ¹ Special thanks to Paul Franks, Diana Raffman, and especially Mohan Matthen out of
34 whose 2005 book and article many of the views in this paper are developed. I am also
35 thankful to audiences at the 2010 American Philosophical Association Eastern Division
36 Meeting, Brown University, Northwestern University, and the University of Toronto, and
37 especially to Matthew Fulkerson, Aaron Griffith, Eric Liu, Franklin Scott, Jeff Snapper, and
38 Steven Yamamoto.

² John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

1 Peacocke,³ Richard Heck,⁴ Jerome Dokic and Elizabeth Pach-
2 erie,⁵ and Sean Kelly.⁶

3 I call *Nonconceptualism* the view that a subject can have a per-
4 ception of some property even if she lacks a concept of that
5 type of property. This version of Nonconceptualism is a kind of
6 'State Nonconceptualism,' a view recently endorsed and
7 defended by Tim Crane.⁷ On this view, for instance, one can
8 have a perception that the ball is shiny even if one lacks the
9 concept SHINY.

10 I call *Conceptualism* the view that a subject can have a perception
11 of some property only if she possesses a concept of that type of
12 property. In order to have a perception that the ball is shiny, for
13 example, one has to have the concept SHINY.

14 Conceptualism entails Colour and Shape Conceptualism: if a
15 perception of some property requires the possession of a concept
16 of that property, then, since colours and shapes are properties, a
17 perception of a colour and shape requires the possession of a
18 concept of that type of colour and shape.

19 Very plausibly,⁸ one can have a *belief* that the ball is shiny only if
20 one possesses the concept SHINY. Conceptualism is the view that
21 one can have a *perception* that the ball is shiny only if one possesses
22 the concept SHINY. According to Conceptualism, perceptions
23 and beliefs have the same structure. Both are concept-dependent,
24 and this fact creates an easy transition between them. It simplifies
25 the justificatory process.

26

27 ³ Christopher Peacocke, 'Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?', *Journal of*
28 *Philosophy* 98 (5) (2001), 239–64; 'Nonconceptual Content Defended', *Philosophy and Phe-*
29 *nomenological Research* 58 (1998), 381–8; 'Phenomenology and Nonconceptual Content',
30 *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (2001), 609–17.

31 ⁴ R. G. Heck, 'Nonconceptual Content and the "Space of Reasons"', *The Philosophical*
32 *Review* 109 (4) (Oct. 2000), 483–523.

33 ⁵ Jerome Dokic and Elizabeth Pacherie, 'Shades and Concepts', *Analysis* 61 (2001),
34 193–202.

35 ⁶ S. D. Kelly, 'Demonstrative Concepts and Experience', *The Philosophical Review* 110 (3)
36 (2001), 397–420; 'The Nonconceptual Content of Perceptual Experience: Situation
37 Dependence and Fineness of Grain', in *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*, York Gunther,
38 (ed.), (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

39 ⁷ Tim Crane, 'Is Perception a Propositional Attitude?', *Philosophical Quarterly* 59 (236)
40 (2009), 452–69.

41 ⁸ But see Robert Stalnaker, 'What Might Nonconceptual Content Be?', in *Essays on*
42 *Nonconceptual Content*.

2. Preliminaries

2.1 *The Argument from Fineness of Grain*

The argument from fineness of grain⁹ is one motivation for Non-conceptualism.¹⁰ It runs as follows. We possess general colour concepts such as BROWN and LIGHT BLUE. However, there are much finer-grained shades, which we seem perfectly able to perceive even if we do not possess general colour concepts for them.¹¹ For example, it seems that we can perceive sepia things even without the concept SEPIA. Nonconceptualists argue that in such cases we do not need to possess a colour concept of a shade in order to experience that shade. The same line of reasoning holds *mutatis mutandis* for shapes.

Nonconceptualists can grant that there are non-specific ways of articulating one's perception, but deny that such articulations are sufficient. A lazy or inarticulate speaker, for instance, might say while looking at his messy desk that he perceives *that there are lots of things*. Nonconceptualists can argue that such an articulation is insufficient given that it does not adequately reflect the detail of what he experiences. Similarly, they can argue that it is unacceptable to say that one has a perception *that the ball is red* when one has a perception of a maroon ball. Such a general description does not adequately reflect the detail that one perceives.

2.2 *Concepts Defined*

According to the thesis I am arguing for, a subject can have a perception of a colour or shape only if she *possesses a concept* of that type of colour or shape. What is a concept, and what does it mean to possess one? Starting with the former question, are concepts abstract objects or mental objects? For this paper, my assumption will be that concepts can be treated like numbers in the following

⁹ See Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, John McDowell, (ed.), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 229. See also Heck, 'Nonconceptual Content and the "Space of Reasons"', pp. 489–90.

¹⁰ Jeff Speaks concludes that the argument from fineness of grain does not entail state nonconceptualism ('Is There a Problem About Nonconceptual Content?', *Philosophical Review* 114 (2005), pp. 379–82), but his argument relies on McDowell's demonstrative solution. In section 4.2, I argue we have good reason to reject the demonstrative solution.

¹¹ Diana Raffman, 'On the Persistence of Phenomenology', in *Conscious Experience*, Thomas Metzinger, (ed.), (Paderborn: Schöningh Verlag, 1995), pp. 294–7.

1 respect. We can answer most questions about numbers without
2 having to answer whether they are abstract objects or not. An
3 engineer can use numbers to construct a bridge without ever
4 having to worry about their ontological status. In what follows, I
5 assume that concepts can be treated similarly (with an important
6 modification shortly). I acknowledge that these ontological ques-
7 tions are important, but the main question that I am concerned
8 with is what it means to possess a concept. My assumption is that
9 I can answer this question without delving into the ontological
10 ones.

11 I will argue that there are several ways to possess a concept, but
12 that they have a common core. Simply put, to possess the concept
13 of a *B* is to have the ability to consistently type-identify *B*s in ideal
14 contexts. What does it mean to type-identify a *B*? It means to
15 classify, or categorize that *B* as a *B*. To possess the concept of an
16 ostrich, for example, is to have the ability to consistently type-
17 identify ostriches in ideal contexts, that is, to be able to consis-
18 tently classify a given ostrich as an ostrich. I will say much more
19 throughout the paper about how exactly this type-identification
20 occurs. Later in the paper, I also give an argument for why we
21 should hold this notion of concept possession.

22 Even though I hope to remain neutral on whether concepts are
23 abstract or mental objects, let me note an argument in support
24 of holding that concepts are abstract objects. Concept possession
25 is the ability to consistently type-identify *B*s. However, some
26 machines have such an ability. They can classify square things as
27 square or red things as red. So, by my definition, machines can
28 possess concepts.

29 I admit that it is counter-intuitive to think that machines have
30 concepts. However, I think that the counter-intuitiveness is due to
31 thinking about concepts in one particular way, which we can
32 avoid. If we assume that concepts are mental objects, then it seems
33 absurd that robots have concepts, since machines do not have
34 mental representations. Still, there is another sense of concepts in
35 which concepts seem to exist even if there is no one around to
36 have mental representations. The idea is that even if everything
37 capable of a mental representation were to die, concepts would
38 still exist. On this view, concepts are abstract objects, not mental
39 representations. Since the case of classifying-machines gives us
40 pause to hold that concepts are mental representations, we there-
41 fore have one reason to hold that concepts are abstract objects
42 instead.

2.3 *Possession Conditions for Concepts Defined*

1 My concern in this paper is not so much with concepts themselves,
2 but with what it means to possess a concept. Christopher Peacocke
3 holds that possession conditions for concepts 'state what is
4 required for *full mastery* of a particular concept.'¹² I think this
5 misstates the role of possession conditions. For one, it makes the
6 notion of a concept inconsistent with how we ordinarily talk about
7 concepts. We attribute concepts for much less than full mastery,
8 and Peacocke admits as much. But what he fails to admit is that
9 when we attribute a concept, it is because we take the subject to
10 possess that concept. This is not to say we think she has full
11 mastery of that concept. It is rather that we think that the right
12 kind of partial mastery is sufficient for concept possession.¹³ Of
13 course, we might sometimes wrongly attribute a concept to
14 someone who lacks even partial mastery. But if Peacocke is right,
15 then our attributions are systematically wrong. We are wrong every
16 single time we attribute a concept to someone who falls short of
17 full mastery. We are wrong because we are attributing to them a
18 concept that, according to Peacocke, they do not in fact possess.

19 Suppose a subject is unable to reliably discriminate green
20 things from orange things. Yet, suppose she can reliably discrimi-
21 nate green things from things of other colours. Furthermore, by
22 reading books and asking others, she knows which things are
23 typically green, and she is able to make inferences about green
24 things. Now, presumably she lacks full mastery of the concept
25 GREEN. People with full mastery are able to reliably discriminate
26 green things from orange things, and she cannot. Yet, if we were
27 to witness the subject's near perfect competence, we would likely
28 attribute to her the concept GREEN, and I take it that Peacocke
29 would agree. When we attribute a concept to her, though, we are
30 not attributing to her a concept that she lacks. Sure she lacks full
31 mastery. She cannot discriminate green and orange. Still, she can
32 see green, and she knows which things are actually green, and she
33 can use the concept in inferences. We would attribute to her the
34 concept GREEN because she has the right kind of partial mastery,
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38 ¹² Christopher Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 29.
39 My emphasis.

40 ¹³ Compare George Bealer, 'Modal Epistemology and the Rationalist Renaissance', in
41 *Conceivability and Possibility*, Gendler and Hawthorne, (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University
42 Press, 2002), p. 102.

1 and the right kind of partial mastery is sufficient for concept
2 possession. Full mastery is not required.

3 4 **3. The Argument for Colour and Shape Conceptualism**

5 *3.1 The Argument for Pre-Conscious Classification*

6
7
8 We often classify the objects that we perceive according to the
9 colours and shapes under which we perceive them. We say or
10 think that a house is cape cod blue, or that a particular soccer ball
11 is strangely ellipsoidal. In this section, I offer evidence that this is
12 simply the end stage of the classificatory process. Consider the fact
13 that the image on your retina is in two dimensions and upside
14 down. That information gets identified and reconstructed as your
15 visual image. Subpersonal classification is taking place, that is,
16 classification done by your sensory system prior to when you get
17 that perceptual image.

18 My claim is that prior to consciousness (not just conscious
19 awareness, but also conscious accessibility) the sensory system has
20 already classified something as red. Traditionally, it was held that
21 something appears to be red and then gets classified as red, by the
22 subject. The argument in this section is that something appears
23 to be red only *after* it has been classified as red by the sensory
24 system.¹⁴

25 One piece of evidence for pre-conscious classification is the
26 case of hemifield neglect. Patients with hemifield neglect have
27 brain damage in the right side of their brain, causing them to
28 neglect the left side of their visual field. In one case, a patient was
29 presented with green line drawings of two houses, identical in all
30 respects, except that one was on fire and the other was not. The
31 bright red flames of the fire were placed in the blind portion of
32 the subject's visual field. The subject claimed that the houses were
33 the same, yet when asked which one she would like to live in, she
34 reliably chose the one not on fire.¹⁵

35 In this case of hemifield neglect, the subject could deploy
36 information received through the blind portion of her visual field.

37
38 ¹⁴ See Mohan Matthen, *Seeing, Doing, Knowing: A Philosophical Theory of Sense Perception*,
39 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 30.

40 ¹⁵ J. Marshall and P. Halligan, 'Blindsight and Insight in Visuo-Spatial Neglect', *Nature*
41 336 (1993), p. 766.

1 Although the image of the flames never makes it into her con-
2 scious appearance, she is able to use that information when asked
3 which house she would like to live in. One explanation for this is
4 that the information is being classified prior to that information
5 making it into her conscious appearance.

6 A second piece of evidence for pre-conscious classification is
7 the case of blind sight. Blindsighted patients have a neurological
8 condition such that they are blind in part of their visual field.
9 Yet, they are able to use information received through that blind
10 portion. Lawrence Weiskrantz, one of the original researchers
11 into blindsight, describes one case where a subject was presented
12 with a black and white striped circle.¹⁶ The circle was placed in
13 his blind field. Sometimes the stripes were oriented horizontally,
14 and other times they were not. The subject was then asked to
15 guess whether the circle in his blind field was oriented horizon-
16 tally or not. He guessed correctly at well above chance, and for
17 some cases, he guessed nearly perfectly. He was nearly perfect at
18 determining that the horizontally-oriented circle was horizontal,
19 and was also nearly perfect at determining that an obviously
20 non-horizontally-oriented circle was non-horizontal. A second
21 study conducted by Weiskrantz tested shape identification. A
22 blindsighted subject was asked to guess whether the stimulus
23 placed in the blind portion of his visual field was an 'X' or 'O.'
24 As in the orientation case, the subject guessed at well above
25 chance levels.¹⁷

26 The blindsight studies I have described so far were originally
27 conducted by Weiskrantz in the 1970's. They were designed to
28 make broad determinations (for instance, about whether blind-
29 sighted patients detected orientation and shape). Since Weisk-
30 rantz's pioneering work, however, other cases of blindsight have
31 provided evidence that the processing occurs at a fine-grained
32 level and includes information about shape, size, and orientation,
33 as well as letters and words,¹⁸ and also colour.¹⁹

34
35 ¹⁶ Lawrence Weiskrantz, *Consciousness Lost and Found* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
36 1997), p. 18.

37 ¹⁷ Lawrence Weiskrantz, *Blindsight: a Case Study Spanning 35 Years and New Developments*
38 (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 91.

39 ¹⁸ Anthony J. Marcel, 'Blindsight and Shape Perception: Deficit of Visual Consciousness
40 or of Visual Function?' *Brain*, 121 (1998), 1565–88.

41 ¹⁹ J. Danckert, P. Maruff, G. Kinsella, S. de Graaff and J. Currie, 'Investigating Form and
42 Colour Perception in Blindsight Using an Interference Task,' *Neuroreport* 14 (1998), pp.
43 2919–25.

1 Let me be clear that I am pushing a certain interpretation of
2 blindsight. My claim is that although blindsight is a cognitive
3 deficit, it is indicative not only of visual processing in blindsight
4 cases, but also of visual processing in normal sighted patients.
5 There is evidence for this claim. For one, blindsight can be
6 induced in normal sighted patients. A 2005 study used magnetic
7 stimulation to induce temporary blindsight in normal sighted
8 patients.²⁰ In one trial, subjects were presented with bars oriented
9 in a certain way. In a second trial, they were presented with
10 patches of a certain colour. Even when the subjects said that they
11 had seen nothing, when asked to guess the orientation or the
12 colour, they guessed correctly at a rate better than chance.²¹

13 In blindsight, colour and shape information is classified, even
14 without it appearing to the subject. So blindsight is one piece of
15 evidence that pre-conscious classification occurs, but there is
16 other evidence as well.²²

17 In studies of *metacontrast*, a target stimulus is presented very
18 briefly, followed by a brief masking stimulus.²³ The masking stimu-
19 lus surrounds, but does not overlap spatially with the target. For
20 example, if the target is a disc, then the masking stimulus is a
21 non-overlapping ring surrounding the disc. The fascinating thing
22 about metacontrast is that subjects are unable to report properties
23 of the target because the mask blocks their recall of it. If the target
24 is a disc, then the surrounding ring blocks their recall of the disc.
25 Yet studies have repeatedly shown that information about the
26 target influences the subject's cognitive processes.²⁴ In cases of
27 metacontrast, information from the target seems to be classified,
28 even though it is unavailable to the conscious subject.

30 3.2 *Subpersonal Possession of a Concept Defined*

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32 The cases of hemifield neglect, blindsight, and metacontrast
33 provide evidence for a distinction between classification and con-
34

35 ²⁰ Jennifer L. Boyer, Stephenie Harrison, and Tony Ro, 'Unconscious Processing of
36 Orientation and Color Without Primary Visual Cortex', *Proceedings of the National Academy*
37 *of Sciences U.S.A.* 102 (2005), 16875–79.

38 ²¹ For a summary, see Victor A. F. Lamme, 'Zap! Magnetic Tricks on Conscious and
39 Unconscious Vision', *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 10 (2006), 193–95.

40 ²² See Matthen, *Seeing, Doing, Knowing: A Philosophical Theory of Sense Perception*, pp. 25–6.
41 ²³ Bruno Breitmeyer and Haluk Ögmen, *Visual Masking* (Oxford: Oxford University
42 Press, 2006), p. 5.

43 ²⁴ Breitmeyer and Ögmen, *Visual Masking*, p. 37.

1 sciousness. They show us that information is classified even if the
2 subject is not conscious of that information. This motivates the
3 view that classification occurs prior to consciousness.

4 Suppose we hold that to possess the concept of a *B* is to have the
5 ability to consistently categorize *B*s as *B*s, that is, to be able to
6 type-identify them. This is precisely what is occurring prior to
7 when you entertain a visual image. Classification occurs subper-
8 sonally, and given that subpersonal classification occurs, consider
9 the following possession condition for a concept:

10
11 **Subpersonal Possession of a Concept:** An organism subperson-
12 ally possesses a concept *C* of a colour or shape *F* if and only
13 if the organism is able to type-identify *F*-things prior to
14 consciousness.

15
16 According to this condition, if an organism is able to categorize
17 decagonal things as such prior to consciousness, then the organ-
18 ism possesses a concept of a decagon in the subpersonal sense.
19 The same holds true about colours. If the organism is able to
20 categorize sepia things as such prior to consciousness, then the
21 organism possesses the concept of sepia in the subpersonal sense.

22 23 *3.3 The Core Argument for Colour and Shape Conceptualism*

24
25 If we take the blindsight and metacontrast studies as indicative of
26 sensory processing, then for every colour or shape in visual con-
27 sciousness, one has subpersonal possession of a concept of that
28 colour and shape.²⁵ The fact that these colours and shapes are in
29 consciousness in the first place shows that one already possesses a
30 concept for these colours and shapes. It's just that one possesses
31 them in the subpersonal sense. Subpersonal possession is defined
32 as being able to type-identify *F*-things subpersonally. For every
33 colour or shape *F* in one's consciousness, one *is* able to type-
34 identify *F*-things subpersonally. A colour or shape cannot make it
35 into consciousness without first being categorized as that type of
36 colour or shape.

37
38 ²⁵ Following McDowell and Brewer, I hold that given a colour sample *x*, a colour falls
39 under the concept SHADE *X* if and only if it is indiscriminable from *x*. The same holds,
40 *mutatis mutandis*, for shapes. To see how this formulation avoids problems with the intransi-
41 tivity of perceptual indiscriminability, see McDowell (1994, 170–1) and Brewer (1999,
42 174–5).

1 Recall my thesis: a subject can have a perception of a colour or
2 shape only if she possesses a concept of that type of colour or
3 shape. If possession means subpersonal possession, then this
4 thesis is true. A subject can have a perception of a colour or shape
5 only if she possesses a concept of that type of colour or shape in
6 the subpersonal sense, that is, only if she can type-identify that
7 colour or shape prior to consciousness.

8
9 *3.4 A Reply to the Objection of Triviality*

10 There are *high* theories of concept possession and *low* theories
11 of concept possession.²⁶ A high theory holds a high threshold
12 for concept possession, while a low theory holds a low threshold.
13 Suppose a theory holds that possessing a word for *sepia* is a nec-
14 cessary condition for possessing the concept SEPIA. That would be
15 a high theory. Suppose a theory holds that the mere ability to
16 discriminate sepia things from non-sepia things is sufficient for
17 possessing the concept SEPIA. That would be a low theory.

18
19 Subpersonal concept possession certainly falls somewhere on
20 the low end of the spectrum. However, the debate between con-
21 ceptualists and nonconceptualists assumes a high theory of
22 concept possession.²⁷ The worry is that by assuming a low theory of
23 concept possession, Conceptualism will be true by stipulation. By
24 holding such a low bar for what counts as a concept, perception
25 will qualify as conceptual too easily. I will have rendered the
26 debate trivial.²⁸

27 Michael Ayers, Hannah Ginsborg, A. D. Smith and Josefa
28 Toribio all object to the same low theory of concept possession,
29 the view that concept possession is a mere discriminative ability.
30 But I agree with them on this. If concept possession is just the
31 ability to discriminate *F*s from non-*F*s, then the debate would be
32 trivial. On my view, though, to possess the concept of an *F* is more
33 than this. It is to have the ability to type-identify *F*-things, that is, to

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35 ²⁶ See A. D. Smith, *The Problem of Perception* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,
36 2002), p. 110.

37 ²⁷ But see Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

38 ²⁸ See Michael Ayers, *Locke* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 176–9. See Hannah
39 Ginsborg, 'Empirical Concepts and the Content of Experience', *European Journal of Phi-*
40 *losophy* 14 (3) (Dec. 2006), p. 359. See Adina L. Roskies, 'A New Argument for Noncon-
41 *ceptual Content*', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76 (3) (May 2008), p. 649. See
42 Smith, *The Problem of Perception*, pp. 110–1. See Josefa Toribio, 'State Versus Content: The
43 Unfair Trial of Perceptual Nonconceptualism', *Erkenntnis*, 69 (3) (2008), p. 353.

1 categorize that thing as *F*. This definition meets Smith's criterion
2 for making the debate between conceptualists and nonconceptu-
3 alists interesting. According to his criterion, to make the debate
4 interesting, one needs to hold that 'to possess a concept is to be in
5 a position to *classify* objects,'²⁹ and I am proposing exactly that sort
6 of notion.

7 There is a clear difference between discrimination and type-
8 identification. One might be able to discriminate a colour or
9 shape from others, yet not be able to identify it.³⁰ For instance,
10 one might be able to discriminate a sepia shade from non-sepia
11 shades, yet not be able to identify the shade as sepia when pre-
12 sented with that shade by itself. Type-identification is a higher
13 standard than mere discrimination, since classifying something as
14 sepia requires more than just a discriminative ability.

15 I want to be clear about what I mean by 'type-identification,'
16 and what I do not mean. Suppose that you take all of the objects
17 on your desk and sort them into piles. This might not qualify as
18 type-identification. To type-identify one of those objects is to cat-
19 egorize it according to some criterion. To type-identify an ostrich,
20 for instance, is to categorize it as an ostrich. Yet, just because you
21 sort the objects on your desk into piles, it does not follow that they
22 are categorized according to some criterion. There may be no
23 criterion that you are employing when you are sorting those
24 objects. In other words, you may be sorting *F*s, but it does not
25 follow that you are categorizing *F*s as *F*s.

26 Suppose that you are discriminating colour *x* from colour *y*.
27 What kind of categorizing is occurring? If discriminating two
28 colours is categorizing at all, at best it is categorizing colour *x* as
29 different from colour *y*. But this is not to say that you are class-
30 ifying either of those colours as the type of colour that it is.
31 Analogously, I might be able to discriminate ostriches from a
32 background. But if this act involves categorization at all, it does
33 not involve categorizing ostriches as ostriches. You can discrimi-
34 nate two colours without categorizing them as the type of colour
35 that they are. So from your mere discriminative ability alone, it
36 does not follow that you have a concept of that type of colour.

37 The concern of this section is that by holding such a low bar for
38 concept possession, perception will easily qualify as conceptual. I
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40 ²⁹ Smith, *The Problem of Perception*, p. 111. But cf. Roskies, 'A New Argument for Non-
41 conceptual Content', p. 649.

42 ³⁰ See Raffman, 'On the Persistence of Phenomenology', pp. 294–5.

1 admit that I hold a low bar for concept possession, and also that
2 other participants in the debate (with the exception of Noë) hold
3 a high bar. However, I do not hold the particular low theory to
4 which these high theorists object. My theory holds higher stan-
5 dards. It may not be a high theory, and I acknowledge that.
6 However, high theories can be problematic as well. As I will argue
7 shortly, we have reason to reject at least one popular high theory
8 of concept possession.

3.5 *Personal Possession of a Concept Defined*

11 When we credit someone with the possession of a concept, it is
12 likely that they are able to do much more than just subpersonal
13 type-identification. If someone possesses a concept of sepia, for
14 instance, they are probably able to make logical inferences about
15 sepia. Possession conditions (*pace* Peacocke) are not necessary
16 conditions for concept possession. They do not state what is
17 required for *full* mastery. So we need not conclude that the sub-
18 personal possession condition is insufficient for concept posses-
19 sion. We can conclude instead that there is a personal-level
20 possession condition in addition to a subpersonal one:
21

22
23 **Personal Possession of a Concept:** An organism personally
24 possesses a concept *C* of a colour or shape *F* if and only if
25 the organism is able to type-identify *F*-things *posterior* to
26 consciousness.
27

28 According to this condition, if an organism is able to type-identify
29 decagons posterior to consciousness, then the organism possesses
30 the concept of a decagon in the personal sense. The same holds
31 true *mutatis mutandis* for shades of colour.

33 4. Replies to Some Objections

34 4.1 *A Reply to the Epistemic Argument*

35 Consider the *Epistemic Argument*, a traditional motivation for Con-
36 ceptualism.³¹ The argument runs as follows. There is a causal
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38

39
40 ³¹ See McDowell, *Mind and World*, pp. 7–13. See also Bill Brewer, *Perception and Reason*
41 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), Ch. 2 and 3.

1 relationship between perception and belief, but the relationship
2 between the two is not solely causal. We are not simply forced into
3 our perceptual beliefs by causal laws. Rather, a perception is also
4 *rationally* related to a belief. We can reflect on whether a particular
5 perception provides a good reason for a belief. We believe that the
6 ball is shiny *because* we see that the ball is shiny, where 'because'
7 means 'for the *reason* that' not just 'in virtue of the cause that.'
8 Perceptions provide reasons for beliefs.

9 We could always give an external account of why the subject
10 believes what she does, the argument continues. Perhaps we could
11 give a scientific account of her brain processes, or maybe we could
12 just justify her beliefs through reasons that we know, but that she
13 does not. In any case, these external reasons would not be the
14 subject's rational grounds for her beliefs. They would not be her
15 own reasons. If the reasons that perceptions provide are to be a
16 subject's rational grounds for her beliefs, grounds that she can
17 entertain, and not merely external causal grounds, then they need
18 to be the subject's own reasons. She needs to be able to entertain
19 the reason provided to her by her perception, namely, *that the ball*
20 *is shiny*. This is the reason for her belief that the ball is shiny.

21 If the reasons that perceptions provide are to be the subject's
22 own reasons, reasons that she can entertain, then she can articu-
23 late them. Unlike the scientific reasons based on her brain pro-
24 cesses, she can say what her own reasons are. If she can articulate
25 them, then they are composed of concepts that she possesses. So,
26 for instance, she can have a perception that the ball is shiny only
27 if she possesses the concept SHINY. But articulability means more
28 than this. It also implies that she must have words for the con-
29 cepts. Call this *The Articulation Constraint*.

30
31 **The Articulation Constraint:** *S* possesses a concept of *x* only if
32 she possesses an expression for *x*.

33
34 The articulation constraint creates a high standard for concept
35 possession. But the constraint itself is problematic.

36 Imagine two children, one sitting in a classroom learning new
37 words, the other a feral child, who can hunt, fish, and interact
38 with the world in very complex ways, but who has no language.
39 Suppose the first child learns the word 'fish,' but is not very good
40 at applying it correctly. She applies it correctly sometimes and
41 incorrectly other times. Suppose the feral child is competent at
42 identifying fish, although he cannot learn the word 'fish.' In

1 addition, due to his practice hunting fish, the feral child can
2 identify which fish taste good and which fish do not, which fish are
3 sensitive to his slight movements in the water, and which fish are
4 not sensitive, which fish swim in shallow water and which fish do
5 not. Many non-human animals can do just this. Why deny that a
6 feral child can?

7 The feral child's competence in identifying fish is far superior
8 to the schoolchild's, even though she possesses the word 'fish.' We
9 should credit him with the concept FISH, even though he lacks a
10 word for it. Yet, if this is right, the articulation constraint is false.
11 S can possess a concept of x even without possessing a word for x .
12 Possessing a word for a concept is not a necessary condition for
13 possessing that concept, and since a popular high theory of
14 concept possession says otherwise, that theory is false.

15 We now have a further argument for holding that type-
16 identification is the mark of concept possession. Recall that a high
17 theory of concept possession holds a high bar for what it takes to
18 possess a concept, and a low theory holds a low bar for what it
19 takes to possess a concept. The predominant high theory in this
20 debate is problematic. You do not need a word for a concept. The
21 feral child case shows this. But low theories of concept possession
22 are problematic too. A mere discriminative ability does not suffice
23 for concept possession. After all, you might be able discriminate
24 one shade of colour from another, yet not be able to identify it.
25 The fineness of grain argument has this right. There are lots of
26 shades of colour and shapes, which we can discriminate perfectly
27 well, but for which we seem to lack concepts. Discrimination alone
28 does not suffice for concept possession.

29 The type-identification view of concept possession falls in the
30 middle between two extremes. The predominant high theory of
31 concept possession holds that possessing a word is necessary for
32 concept possession. I argued against this. The predominant low
33 theory of concept possession holds that a mere discriminative
34 ability is sufficient for concept possession. I argued against this.
35 We are left with a middle position, one that denies the necessity of
36 word possession as well as the sufficiency of a mere discriminative
37 ability. The type-identification view meets these criteria.

38 39 4.2 *A Reply to the Argument from Fineness of Grain*

40 Recall the argument from fineness of grain. We possess general
41 colour concepts such as BROWN and LIGHT BLUE. However, we
42

1 can perceive much finer-grained shades, even though we do not
2 possess colour concepts for them.³² In such cases we do not need
3 to possess a colour concept of a shade in order to experience that
4 shade.³³

5 In *Mind and World*, John McDowell concedes that we do not
6 have as many general *expressions* for colour concepts as shades of
7 colour that we can sensibly discriminate (p. 57).³⁴ But, he argues,
8 even though we lack general colour expressions like *red* or *kelly*
9 *green*, demonstrative expressions such as ‘this shade,’ ‘that shade,’
10 or ‘coloured thusly’ can express concepts for which we possess no
11 general colour expressions.³⁵ If we lack the concept SEPIA, we can
12 say in the presence of a sepia ball, ‘The ball is that shade’ even if
13 we cannot say, ‘The ball is sepia.’

14 McDowell’s demonstrative solution has come under pressure
15 from Peacocke,³⁶ Heck,³⁷ Dokic and Pacherie,³⁸ and Kelly.³⁹
16 McDowell,⁴⁰ Brewer,⁴¹ Sedivy,⁴² and Chuard⁴³ have attempted to
17 respond to these criticisms. What I hope to show is that the force
18 of the fineness of grain argument has been diminished once we
19 consider the argument for Colour and Shape Conceptualism.
20 McDowell’s reply to the fineness of grain argument then becomes
21 unnecessary.

22 Evans is mistaken that we lack precise colour concepts for each
23 and every fine-grained shade. For every colour *F* in one’s con-
24 sciousness, one has a concept of that colour. Concept possession
25 is the ability to type-identify *F*-things. It’s just that this classification

26
27 ³² Raffman, ‘On the Persistence of Phenomenology’, pp. 294–7.

28 ³³ Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, p. 229.

29 ³⁴ McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 57.

30 ³⁵ McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 57.

31 ³⁶ Peacocke, ‘Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?’; ‘Nonconceptual
32 Content Defended’; ‘Phenomenology and Nonconceptual Content’.

33 ³⁷ Heck, ‘Nonconceptual Content and the “Space of Reasons”’.

34 ³⁸ Dokic and Pacherie, ‘Shades and Concepts’.

35 ³⁹ Kelly, ‘Demonstrative Concepts and Experience’; ‘The Nonconceptual Content of
36 Perceptual Experience: Situation Dependence and Fineness of Grain’.

37 ⁴⁰ McDowell, *Mind and World*, Appendix III; ‘Reply to Commentators’, *Philosophy and
38 Phenomenological Research*, 58 (1998), 414–9.

39 ⁴¹ Brewer, *Perception and Reason*; ‘Perceptual Experience has Conceptual Content’, in
40 *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, Sosa and Steup, (eds.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

41 ⁴² Sonia Sedivy, ‘Nonconceptual Epicycles’, *European Review of Philosophy* 6 (2006), pp.
42 31–64.

43 ⁴³ Phillippe Chuard, ‘Demonstrative Concepts Without Re-Identification,’ *Philosophical
44 Studies*, 130 (2006), pp. 153–201; ‘Indiscriminable Shades and Demonstrative Concepts,’
45 *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 85 (2) (2007), pp. 277–306.

1 occurs at the subpersonal level. The fact that one is able to type-
2 identify *F*-things is demonstrated by the fact that those colours are
3 already in one's consciousness.

4 McDowell is responding to cases of colour perception where
5 a subject purportedly lacks an expression to associate with a
6 concept. His demonstrative solution is intended to show that we
7 do not lack expressions for fine-grained colour concepts. We have
8 them in the form of demonstrative expressions such as 'that
9 shade.' My reply is that even if we do lack expressions to associate
10 with concepts, we can possess concepts in other ways. This is what
11 the feral child case shows. The fact that we lack an expression for
12 a concept does not imply that we lack the concept itself.

13
14 *Department of Philosophy*
15 *University of Toronto*
16 *170 St. George St.*
17 *Toronto, ON, M5R 2M8, Canada*
18 *kevin.connolly@utoronto.ca*

Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited	
Journal Code: RATI	Proofreader: Elsie
Article No: 498	Delivery date: 25 May 2011
Page Extent: 16	