



Non-Conceptualism and the Problem of Perceptual Self-Knowledge

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Abstract: In this paper we (i) identify the notion of ‘essentially non-conceptual content’ by critically analyzing the recent and contemporary debate about non-conceptual content, (ii) work out the basics of broadly Kantian theory of essentially non-conceptual content in relation to a corresponding theory of conceptual content, and then (iii) demonstrate one effective application of the Kantian theory of essentially non-conceptual content by using this theory to provide a ‘minimalist’ solution to the problem of perceptual self-knowledge which is raised by Strong Externalism.

Appearances could after all be so constituted that the understanding would not find them in accord with the conditions of its unity ... Appearances would nonetheless offer objects to our intuition, for intuition by no means requires the functions of thinking. (Kant 1997: A90/B123)¹

Perceptual knowledge involves sensibility: that is, a capacity for differential responsiveness to features of the environment, made possible by properly functioning sensory systems. But sensibility does not belong to reason. We share it with non-rational animals. According to Sellars’s dictum, the rational faculty that distinguishes us from non-rational animals must also be operative in our being perceptually given things to know. This brings into view a way to fall into the Myth of the Given. Sellars’s dictum implies that it is a form of the Myth to think sensibility by itself, without any involvement of capacities that belong to our rationality, can make things available for our cognition. That coincides with a basic doctrine of Kant The Myth, in the version I have introduced, is the idea that sensibility by itself could make things available for the sort of cognition that draws on the subject’s rational powers. (McDowell 2008: 1–2)

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance? (Yeats 1973: verse viii, 245)

1. Introduction

This essay has three goals. The first is to provide a critical survey of the recent and contemporary debate about non-conceptual content, and to identify the

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notion of what we call 'essentially non-conceptual content' (section 2). The second goal is to work out the basics of a broadly Kantian theory of the semantic structure and psychological function of essentially non-conceptual content, and then relate these explicitly to a corresponding theory of the semantic structure and psychological function of conceptual content (sections 3 and 4). And the third goal is to demonstrate one effective application of the Kantian theory of essentially non-conceptual content by using this theory to provide what we call a 'minimalist' solution to the problem of perceptual self-knowledge which is raised by Strong Externalism (section 5).

2. Non-Conceptualism, Conceptualism, and Kant

Minds like ours include a capacity to produce mental representations of objects (whether actual or merely possible, existing or non-existing), locations, events, actions, other minds, and ourselves. This is the same as to say that minds like ours include a capacity to be *directed to* targets of all kinds, also known as 'intentionality'. Mental representations have *mental content*, a.k.a. 'intentional content', where mental or intentional content is the cognitive or practical information that is internally carried by or contained in a mental representation. This cognitive or practical information is intersubjectively shareable across minds like ours, but also directly accessed on particular occasions and in particular contexts by individual minds like ours. So mental contents are *mental representation types*. Correspondingly, the psychological function of mental content, as 'tokened in'—i.e. directly accessed by—individual minds like ours, is inherently to guide cognition and practical action and to mediate its directedness to its intentional targets.

The thesis of *Non-Conceptualism* about mental content says that representational content is neither solely nor wholly determined by a conscious animal's conceptual capacities, and that at least some contents are both solely and wholly determined by its non-conceptual capacities.² Non-Conceptualism is sometimes, but not always, combined with the further thesis that non-conceptual capacities and contents can be shared by rational human animals, non-rational human animals (and in particular, infants), and non-human animals alike. But in any case, Non-Conceptualism is directly opposed to the thesis of *Conceptualism* about mental content, which says that representational content is solely or wholly determined by a conscious animal's conceptual capacities.³ Conceptualism is also sometimes, but not always, combined with the further thesis that the psychological acts or states of infants and non-human animals lack mental content.

In a nutshell then, Non-Conceptualism says that our cognitive access to the targets of intentionality is not necessarily mediated by concepts and in fact sometimes wholly unmediated by concepts, and Conceptualism says that our cognitive access to the targets of intentionality is necessarily mediated by concepts. So here is the big philosophical issue: Can we and do we cognitively encounter things directly and pre-rationally (Non-Conceptualism), or must we always cognitively encounter them only within the framework of discursive rationality (Conceptualism)?

1 Non-Conceptualism undeservedly suffers from bad press. This is because it is
 2 often confused with adherence to what Wilfrid Sellars aptly called ‘the Myth of
 3 the Given’, whereby non-conceptual content is nothing the unstructured causal-
 4 sensory ‘given’ input to the cognitive faculties, passively waiting to be carved up
 5 by concepts, propositions, and theories.⁴ But this ‘sensationalist’ conception of
 6 non-conceptual content is not in fact a thesis about *representational* content at all,
 7 but rather only a generally discredited thesis about how *phenomenal* content
 8 relates to conceptual content. Non-Conceptualism is a thesis about representa-
 9 tional content and *not* about phenomenal content—even if Non-Conceptualism
 10 does indeed have some non-trivial implications for the nature of phenomenal
 11 content. Even more importantly, as we understand it, Non-Conceptualism is a
 12 thesis about *the proto-rational cognitive foundations of rationality* and *not* a thesis—to
 13 use McDowell’s words—about ‘the idea that sensibility by itself could make
 14 things available for the sort of cognition that draws on the subject’s rational
 15 powers’. More precisely, Non-Conceptualism says that the *pre-rational* cognitive
 16 encounters guided by non-conceptual content are emphatically not *non-rational*
 17 encounters—on the contrary, it is non-conceptual content, and non-conceptual
 18 content alone, that makes cognitive and practical rationality *really possible* from
 19 the bottom up. In other words, it is nothing but a philosophical illusion to think
 20 that the Myth of the Given actually applies to Non-Conceptualism. This illusion
 21 can therefore be aptly dubbed *the Myth of the Myth of the Given*.

22 There are two importantly different kinds of Non-Conceptualism.⁵ What is
 23 nowadays called ‘state’ Non-Conceptualism says that the representational
 24 content of a given mental act or state is non-conceptual if and only if the subject
 25 of that act or state does not possess concepts for the specification of that act or
 26 state. So state Non-Conceptualism is based on theories of conceptual possession-
 27 conditions. By contrast, ‘content’ Non-Conceptualism says that the content of a
 28 given mental act or state is non-conceptual if and only if the content of that act or
 29 state is of a different *kind* from the conceptual content of any mental act or state.
 30 So content Non-Conceptualism is based on theories of the *composition*,
 31 *compositional stuff*, or *formal constitution* of mental content, since these seem to
 32 be the three basic ways in which contents could differ in kind.

33 If content Non-Conceptualism is true, then we think the prospects for a *bottom-*
 34 *up* theory of human rationality look quite good too. According to this bottom-up
 35 theory, our conceptual and other intellectual capacities, and the full range of
 36 types of mental content—including those associated with cognitive agency,
 37 perceptual knowledge, perceptual self-knowledge, and logical reasoning, and
 38 also those associated with practical agency, right action, and practical reason-
 39 ing—are all able to be explained in terms of the more basic and more primitive
 40 essentially non-conceptual psychological capacities shared with infants and non-
 41 human animals, or what we will call collectively *the proto-rational capacities*.
 42 Furthermore, this bottom-up explanation entails no deflation, narrowing, or
 43 reduction *whatsoever* in the epistemic scope, modal character, or normative force
 44 of human rationality as classically conceived by, e.g. Kant. We will further
 45 unpack and justify these claims in sections 3 to 5 below.

In the recent and contemporary literature on mental content, one can identify at least seven different arguments for Non-Conceptualism:⁶

- (I) *From phenomenological richness*: Our normal human perceptual experience is so replete with phenomenal characters and qualities that we could not possibly possess a conceptual repertoire extensive enough to capture them. Therefore normal human perceptual experience is always to some extent non-conceptual and has non-conceptual content.
- (II) *From perceptual discrimination*: It is possible for normal human cognizers to be capable of perceptual discriminations without also being capable of re-identifying the objects discriminated. But re-identification is a necessary condition of concept-possession. Therefore normal human cognizers are capable of non-conceptual cognitions with non-conceptual content.
- (III) *From infant and non-human animal cognition*: Normal human infants and some non-human animals are capable of perceptual cognition, but lack possession of concepts. Therefore normal human infants and some non-humans are capable of non-conceptual cognition with non-conceptual content.
- (IV) *From the distinction between perception (or experience) and judgment (or thought)*: It is possible for normal human cognizers to perceive something without also making a judgment about it. But non-judgmental cognition is non-conceptual. Therefore normal human cognizers are capable of non-conceptual perceptions with non-conceptual content.
- (V) *From the knowing-how versus knowing-that (or knowing-what) distinction*: It is possible for normal human subjects to know *how* to do something without being able to know *that* one is doing it and also without knowing precisely *what* it is one is doing. But cognition which lacks knowing-that and knowing-what is non-conceptual. Therefore normal human subjects are capable of non-conceptual knowledge-how with non-conceptual content.
- (VI) *From the theory of concept-acquisition*: The best overall theory of concept-acquisition includes the thesis that simple concepts are acquired by normal human cognizers on the basis of non-conceptual perceptions of the objects falling under these concepts. Therefore normal human cognizers are capable of non-conceptual perception with non-conceptual content.
- (VII) *From the theory of demonstratives*: The best overall theory of the demonstratives 'this' and 'that' includes the thesis that demonstrative reference is fixed perceptually, essentially indexically, and therefore non-descriptively by normal human speakers.⁷ But essentially indexical, non-descriptive perception is non-conceptual. Therefore normal human speakers are capable of non-conceptual perception with non-conceptual content.

1 But in his recent paper, 'Is There a Problem about Nonconceptual Content?', Jeff
 2 Speaks argues that there is in fact *no* problem about non-conceptual content
 3 because:

- 4
 5 (i) non-conceptualists have not established that the arguments they
 6 offer for the existence of non-conceptual content are not perfectly
 7 consistent with suitably refined versions of Conceptualism,

8
 9 and,

- 10
 11 (ii) non-conceptualists have not established that perceptual acts or
 12 states have representational content whose semantic structure and
 13 psychological function are distinct from the semantic structure and
 14 psychological function of conceptual content (Speaks 2005).

15
 16 We both agree and disagree with Speaks's challenging claims. On the one
 17 hand, and on the side of agreement with his claim (i), we would want to make
 18 two even stronger claims, to the effect that:

- 19
 20 (i*) defenders of *state* Non-Conceptualism in fact *cannot* establish that
 21 the arguments they offer for the existence of non-conceptual content
 22 are not perfectly consistent with suitably refined versions of
 23 Conceptualism,

24
 25 and,

- 26
 27 (ii*) many defenders of *content* Non-Conceptualism also *cannot* estab-
 28 lish that perceptual acts or states have representational content
 29 whose structure and function are any more than just *accidentally* or
 30 *contingently* distinct from the structure and function of conceptual
 31 content.

32
 33 But on the other hand, we disagree with Speaks that as a consequence there is *no*
 34 problem for conceptualists about non-conceptual content.

35 This is because we believe that there are in fact perceptual acts or states whose
 36 representational content cannot—even in principle—be conceptual. If that is
 37 correct, then at least some perceptual acts or states have representational content
 38 whose semantic structure and psychological function are *necessarily distinct* from
 39 the structure and function of conceptual content. This is what we call *essentialist*
 40 *content Non-Conceptualism*.

41 Furthermore, we also believe that the special semantic and psychological
 42 character of these essentially non-conceptually contentful perceptual acts or
 43 states entails that *all* perceptual acts or states contain non-conceptual content in
 44 this essentially distinct sense—although, to be sure, the presence of this

essentially non-conceptual content does not necessarily exhaust the total content of such acts or states. The thesis of the ubiquity of essentially non-conceptual content is consistent with the thesis that essentially non-conceptual content is *combinable* with conceptual content. Indeed, we believe that essentially non-conceptual content not only *can* be combined with conceptual content, but also *must* be so combined if perceptual judgments, perceptual knowledge, and perceptual self-knowledge, and also logical and practical reasoning about the perceivable natural world more generally, are to be possible. This is the proto-rationality of essentially non-conceptual content. So the essentially non-conceptual content of an act or state is necessarily *underdetermined* by the conceptual content of that act or state (= the necessary distinctness of essentially non-conceptual content), and this modal fact is about essentially non-conceptual content is perfectly consistent with the further modal fact that in certain mental acts and states essentially non-conceptual content must be *presupposed* by conceptual content and also *complementary* with conceptual content (= the proto-rationality of essentially non-conceptual content). But in any case the nature of the uncombined or combined essentially non-conceptual content of these perceptual acts or states needs to be explained.

Our argument also has another important strand. Because the theory we offer for explaining essentially non-conceptual content has a distinctively Kantian provenance, a second conclusion of it will be that contemporary defenders of content Non-Conceptualism must in effect go 'back to Kant' if they are to respond adequately to Speaks's important challenge, by adopting a Kantian version of essentialist content Non-Conceptualism. Defenders of state Non-Conceptualism, in turn, must either just concede defeat to Conceptualism, or else become defenders of Kantian essentialist content Non-Conceptualism—henceforth, for terminological convenience, *Kantian Non-Conceptualism*. In other words, we are saying that all rationally acceptable roads within Non-Conceptualism lead ultimately to Kantian Non-Conceptualism.

If we are correct about this, then it is also a deliciously historically ironic fact, because Kant is almost universally regarded as the *founding father* of Conceptualism and the *nemesis* of Non-Conceptualism. York Gunther articulates this view perfectly:

In his slogan, 'Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind', Kant sums up the doctrine of conceptualism. (Gunther 2003b: 1)

Nevertheless, as one of us has argued in an earlier essay, not only does this famous slogan *not* mean what conceptualists think it means. *On the contrary*, Kant is most accurately regarded as not only the founder of Conceptualism but also and perhaps even more importantly as the founder of *Non-Conceptualism*, and indeed, as the founder of *content* Non-Conceptualism and also *essentialist* content Non-Conceptualism alike (Hanna 2005). In addition to the first epigraph of this

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essay, here are three other Kant-texts that also more or less strongly confirm these claims:

Objects can indeed appear to us without necessarily having to be related to the functions of the understanding. (Kant 1997: A89/B122)

That representation which can be given prior to all thinking is called **intuition**. (Kant 1997: B132)

Concept differs from intuition by virtue of the fact that all intuition is singular. He who sees his first tree does not know what it is that he sees. (Kant 1992: Ak 24: 905)⁸

In our opinion, what Kant's famous slogan about blind intuitions and empty thoughts actually means is that intuitions and concepts must always be combined together *for the special purpose of making objectively valid judgments*. But *outside* that context it is also perfectly possible for there to be directly referential intuitions without concepts ('blind intuitions', e.g. someone's first cognitive encounter with a tree), and also to have thinkable concepts without intuitions ('empty concepts', e.g. concepts of things-in-themselves). Indeed, it is precisely the fact of blind intuitions, whose semantic structure and psychological function are necessarily distinct from the semantic structure and psychological function of concepts, that drives Kant's need to argue in the B edition Transcendental Deduction that all and only the objects of possible human experience are necessarily conceptualizable under the pure concepts of the understanding or categories, and necessarily constrained by the transcendental laws of a pure science of nature. Otherwise blind intuitions might pick out objects of human experience that are contingently or necessarily unconceptualizable, and nomologically intractable—causal deviants, and rude violators of the general causal laws of nature. In this way, Kant's theory of concepts and judgment in the *Transcendental Analytic* provides foundations for Conceptualism. But equally and oppositely, Kant's theory of intuition in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* also provides foundations for Kantian Non-Conceptualism.

We will not re-argue those historical claims here. Instead, we want to use several Kantian ideas in order to engage directly with contemporary work in the theory of mental content and the philosophy of perception. In order to do this, we will first need to take a critical look at the dialectical structure of the contemporary debate about non-conceptual content, and critically consider some different types of Non-Conceptualism.

Most or least a great many contemporary non-conceptualists define the thesis of Non-Conceptualism in the following way:

The central idea behind the theory of nonconceptual mental content is that some mental states can represent the world even though the bearer of those states does not possess the concepts required to specify their content. (Bermúdez 2003a: 1)

This is a paradigmatic statement of *state* Non-Conceptualism. Corresponding to state Non-Conceptualism, Conceptualism then says that no mental acts or states can represent the world unless the bearers of those acts or states—which are sometimes, but not always, taken by Conceptualists to be rational and/or human cognizers exclusively (e.g. McDowell, following Donald Davidson and Sellars, takes this view)—possess the concepts required to specify their content.

The argument against Conceptualism most favored by contemporary state Non-Conceptualists is the Fineness of Grain Argument, or FoGA:⁹

- (1) Perceptual content is so replete with content (say, color-content or shape-content) that there cannot possibly be enough concepts in our existing conceptual repertoire to capture all the different sorts.
- (2) But we nevertheless frequently make effective fine-grained discriminations between the different sorts of perceptual content, even in the absence of possessing concepts for those sorts of content.
- (3) Conceptualism is committed to the thesis that for every genuine discriminable difference in perceptual content, we must possess concepts that pick out the relevantly different kinds.
- (4) Therefore Conceptualism is false, and state Non-Conceptualism is true.

Conceptualists, led by McDowell, have replied to the FoGA by using what is now called the Demonstrative Strategy, or DS.¹⁰ The DS directly addresses step (2) and says that for every case of effective fine-grained discrimination in which corresponding concepts are apparently lacking, it is possible to construct a demonstrative concept of the form 'THIS SHADE', 'THAT SHAPE', etc., that correctly picks out the relevant determinates under some determinable concept already possessed by the cognizer. If so, then step (2) is false and the FoGA is unsound. In reply to that reply, state Non-Conceptualists have argued as follows:

- (1) The possession of demonstrative concepts, in addition to satisfying both of what Gareth Evans (1982: 44 and 74) called Russell's Principle (i.e. there is no singular thought about an object without the subject's possession of an identifying conception of it) and the Generality Constraint (i.e. there is no singular thought about an object without the subject's possession of the conceptual resources sufficient for entertaining many different possible thoughts about the same object) (Evans 1982: 100–5), *also* requires the ability to re-identify instances of those concepts.
- (2) But we frequently make fine-grained demonstrative perceptual discriminations between different sorts of perceptual content without any further ability to re-identify them.
- (3) Therefore the Demonstrative Strategy fails, Conceptualism is false, and state Non-Conceptualism is true.¹¹

1 But in criticism of that counter-reply, it has been recently argued by Philippe
 2 Chuard that demonstrative *concepts* can be applied in fine-grained demonstrative
 3 perceptual discriminations without any further ability to re-identify instances of
 4 those concepts.¹² So concept-possession does *not* require the ability for re-
 5 identification, the DS remains sound, the non-conceptualists are back at square
 6 one, and Great Confusion results.

7 In light of that greatly confusing and equally disappointing result, we want to
 8 suggest the following critical diagnosis. We think that it is a big mistake to define
 9 Non-Conceptualism in terms of failures of concept-possession, and therefore a
 10 great mistake to defend state Non-Conceptualism. Instead, Non-Conceptualism
 11 should be defined as the thesis that there exist perceptual mental contents, had by
 12 human and non-human animal cognizers alike, whose semantic structure and
 13 psychological function are distinct from the structure and function of conceptual
 14 content—or equivalently, that there exist what Speaks has aptly dubbed *absolutely*
 15 *non-conceptual* contents:

16 A mental state has *absolutely nonconceptual content* iff that mental state has a
 17 different kind of content than do beliefs, thoughts, etc. (Speaks 2005: 360)

18 This is a paradigm statement of *content* Non-Conceptualism.

19 It is extremely important to note, however, that there are at least three logically
 20 distinct versions of content Non-Conceptualism. Generally speaking, and *prima*
 21 *facie*, it seems clear that content Non-Conceptualism could variously be based on
 22 theories of:
 23

- 24 (i) the *composition*, or construction, of mental content,
- 25 (ii) the *compositional matter*, or stuff, of mental content,

26 or,

- 27 (iii) the *formal constitution*, or structure, of mental content.

28 In this way, then, according to one content Non-Conceptualist theory of the
 29 composition or construction of mental content, the non-conceptual content of a
 30 mental act or state must fail some basic compositionality principle for
 31 propositional contents, such as Evans's Generality Constraint.¹³ By contrast,
 32 according to a second content Non-Conceptualist theory of the compositional
 33 matter or stuff of mental content, the non-conceptual content of a mental act or
 34 state must contain only rough-grained non-Fregean propositional contents (i.e.
 35 objects, properties, and relations).¹⁴ And by another contrast, according to a third
 36 content Non-Conceptualist theory of the formal constitution or structure of mental
 37 content, the non-conceptual content of a mental act or state must be formally
 38 constituted by egocentrically-centered intrinsic spatiotemporal structure¹⁵—or to
 39 use Jenann Ismael's apt term, content is inherently *situated* (Ismael 2007).

40 What we want to argue in the rest of this section and the next is, first, that only
 41 the *third* version of content Non-Conceptualism has all the decisive dialectical

virtues, and thereby satisfies all the basic requirements, of essentialist content Non-Conceptualism, which as we will remember, says this—

At least some perceptual acts or states have representational content whose semantic structure and psychological function are *necessarily distinct* from the structure and function of conceptual content, and the content of such perceptual acts or states is *essentially non-conceptual content*,

—and, second, that this third version of content Non-Conceptualism is distinctively Kantian in its provenance. But before we can do that, we want to show that neither the composition-based version nor the compositional matter-based version of content Non-Conceptualism is in fact capable of showing that Conceptualism is false.

First, consider the composition-based version of content Non-Conceptualism defended by Richard Heck, which says that mental content is non-conceptual if (and perhaps also only if) it fails Evans's Generality Constraint. Now the Generality Constraint, as we mentioned in passing earlier, says that there can be no singular thought about an object without the subject's possession of the conceptual resources sufficient for entertaining many different possible thoughts about the same object. Or in other words, the Generality Constraint is saying that in order to be sufficient for singular thought about an object, a mental content must be composed according to a rule for the construction of *singular categorical*—or singular subject/monadic predicate—propositions, such as 'Kant is a bachelor'. So, correspondingly, Heck's version of content Non-Conceptualism is saying that a mental content is non-conceptual if (and perhaps also only if) it is not (or need not) be composed according to a rule for the construction of singular categorical propositions.

But suppose that a given mental content fails the Generality Constraint precisely because it is not (and thus, obviously, also need not be) composed according to a rule for the construction of singular categorical propositions. *Nevertheless that mental content could still be fully conceptual.* Take, e.g. a mental state whose content is the concept BACHELOR, and nothing else. Assuming that BACHELOR is a determinate concept of the determinable concept UNMARRIED, then UNMARRIED is *intensionally contained* with respect to BACHELOR, both:

- (i) in the sense that the concept UNMARRIED is contained *within* the intensional microstructure of the complex concept BACHELOR,

and also,

- (ii) in the sense that the cross-possible-worlds extension of the concept BACHELOR is set-theoretically contained *under* the cross-possible-worlds extension of the concept UNMARRIED,

and correspondingly this two-part intensional containment relationship fully supports an a priori analytic inference from BACHELOR to UNMARRIED. But even if one does not favor the broadly *Kantian* notion of intensional containment we have just quickly sketched,¹⁶ it nevertheless remains the case, as Stephen

Yablo has pointed out, that the property UNMARRIEDNESS logically strongly supervenes on the property BACHELORHOOD, since determinable properties always logically strongly supervene on their determinate properties, and again this fully supports an analytic a priori inference from the concept BACHELOR to the concept UNMARRIED.¹⁷ So, clearly, BACHELOR can be the conceptual content of a mental state of some possible analytic reasoner *R*.

But there is no reason whatsoever to think that the content of *R*'s mental state must also satisfy the Generality Constraint. For suppose that *R* is simply *incapable* of recognizing singular thoughts or singular categorical propositions, precisely because, although she is perfectly capable of making analytic inferences, for whatever reasons—reasons which can be wholly contingent, and either just the result of evolutionarily random distributions of cognitive abilities and talents, or even the result of some unfortunate cognitive pathology or agnosia—she just *lacks* a cognitive capacity for recognizing direct singular reference. What she has, in effect, is *direct reference blindness*. She can *rationally see* pure conceptual generality, including being able to see conceptual specificity down to *any* lower degree of conceptual determination, but at the same time she is also *rationally blind* to all concrete individuality and particularity. Otherwise put, for whatever reasons, *R* is exclusively an a priori conceptual reasoner—and she may even be *proud of it*. *R* and her cognitive situation seem entirely conceivable and therefore really possible. Therefore, even if the content of a given mental act or state fails the Generality Constraint, it can still be fully conceptual. Hence failing the Generality Constraint is not a sufficient condition of non-conceptual content.

Second, consider the compositional stuff-based version of content Non-Conceptualism defended by Michael Tye, which asserts the existence of what Tye calls *robustly non-conceptual content*. According to Tye,

- (i) a contentful nonconceptual state is a contentful state the tokening of which does not involve the exercise of concepts,

and,

- (ii) experiences [with non-conceptual content] are nonconceptual states having coarse-grained contents (*robustly nonconceptual contents*, as I shall call them) (Tye 2006: 507–8).

In other words, the robustly non-conceptual content of a perceptual act or state is the content of a *Russellian* proposition, and not the content of a *Fregean* proposition. Or in still other words, the robustly non-conceptual contents of perceptual state are just the worldly objects, properties, and relations represented by that act or state.

The obvious problem with Tye's robustly non-conceptual content is that although the elements of this content are not specified by concepts in the actual perceptual acts or states in which they occur, there is no in-principle reason why they could not be conceptually specified in acts or states *other* than those actual

perceptual acts or states. In other words, robustly non-conceptual content is at most *accidentally* or *contingently* non-conceptual, and not *essentially* non-conceptual. Now Tye frankly admits as much in a very revealing footnote in the middle of a critical discussion of the FoGA and the DS:

I want to stress that the above discussion of demonstratives does *not* undercut the view that fineness of grain in visual experiences can be presented conceptually in *demonstrative judgments or thoughts* made on the basis of experience. What I have argued is that the *visual experiences themselves* do not represent details *via* demonstrative concepts. (Tye 2006: 525)

But this gives the game away for the compositional stuff-based version of content Non-Conceptualism. For Tye has thereby explicitly admitted that his robustly non-conceptual content could still be *conceptually presented*. This means that any robustly non-conceptual content could *also* be a proper part of the content of a whole mental act or state that *also* contain a set of corresponding Fregean senses for specifying just those Russellian contents. Here we need only posit a mental state containing a set of what McDowell (following Evans) has called '*de re* senses',¹⁸ which have the special semantic feature that they descriptively and rigidly pick out Russellian contents, but without also uniquely determining them in the modally super-powered Leibnizian sense of providing their complete individual concepts. So robustly non-conceptual content is ultimately just more grist for the conceptualist's mill, in that a given content could be robustly non-conceptual and *also* Fregean or sense-theoretic, and *also* satisfy the Generality Constraint, and therefore *also* be conceptual.

What the essentialist content non-conceptualist is saying, by sharp contrast to both the composition-based and compositional stuff-based versions of content Non-Conceptualism, is that there are perceptual contents that *cannot* be conceptually presented because they are *inherently* non-conceptual in formal constitution or structure. Contents that fail the Generality Constraint, or contents that are rough-grained or Russellian, or even both of them together, just will not do. It has to be *impossible* to give an adequately individuating conceptual specification of an essentially non-conceptual content.

Now Speaks also very usefully distinguishes between absolutely non-conceptual content and *relatively* non-conceptual content:

A mental state of an agent *A* (at time *t*) has *relatively nonconceptual content* iff the content of that mind includes contents not grasped (possessed) by *A* at *t*. (Speaks 2005: 360)

In other words, perceptual content that is relatively non-conceptual differs from conceptual content only in that an agent does not at that time meet the conceptual grasping-conditions or possession-conditions for that content. So relatively non-conceptual content satisfies the conditions for state Non-Conceptualism. But the crucial point is that relatively non-conceptual perceptual content might still be conceptual content in a merely or at least partially ungrasped or unpossessed

form. And this is equally true of both the composition-based version of content Non-Conceptualism defended by Heck and also the compositional stuff-based version of content Non-Conceptualism defended by Tye.

Learning from Heck's and Tye's (differently committed but still) shared error, we can now see that it was a big mistake for Non-Conceptualists to have deployed the Fineness of Grain Argument or FoGA against conceptualism. This is because the FoGA mistakenly sidetracks the debate into a discussion about perceptual experiences involving failures of concept-possession, which not only deflects attention away from the real issue about non-conceptual content—the existence or non-existence of essentially non-conceptual content—towards state Non-Conceptualism, but also is a discussion that the suitably sophisticated conceptualist can *always* win, just by pointing out that a cognitive *act or state* that involves a failure of concept-possession might still have *content* that is conceptual, and by strategically weakening and re-formulating the possession-based version of the conceptualist thesis as follows:

No mental states can represent the world without *some possible* (i.e. not necessarily any contemporary or conspecific actual) cognizer's *dispositional* (i.e. not necessarily manifest or occurrent) possession of the concepts required to *minimally* (i.e. not necessarily fully) specify their content.

We will call this two-part strategically weakened and re-formulated version of conceptualism, *Highly Refined Conceptualism*, or HRC. HRC entails, e.g. that even if it can be shown that some human or non-human cognizers do actually achieve demonstrative perceptual reference to some objects without actually possessing or even being capable of possessing a sortal term for the identification of those objects,¹⁹ conceptualism is not undermined. For according to HRC, the content of that perceptual act or state could *still* be conceptual, precisely because:

- (a) the failure of conceptual possession-conditions for a given perceptual act or state does not in itself entail that the content of this state is not conceptual,

and,

- (b) the truth of Conceptualism requires only that some possible non-contemporary or non-conspecific cognizer dispositionally possess the concepts needed to minimally specify the content of that perceptual act or state, which is a condition that is extremely easy to satisfy.

Indeed in recent work McDowell has implicitly adopted a version of HRC, by explicitly dropping his earlier stronger thesis that the content of rational human perception is always articulately and self-consciously propositional, and by asserting that the content of perception is 'intuitional' in Kant's sense.²⁰

Given the possibility of HRC, and given McDowell's recent move in this direction, we think that both state Non-Conceptualism and also the composition-

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based version and the compositional stuff based version of content Non-Conceptualism are ultimately *hopeless*. So instead of arguing for mental representation without concept-possession, non-conceptualists should argue directly against the Demonstrative Strategy and against Conceptualism—whether unrefined Conceptualism or HRC—by providing an explicit characterization of essentially non-conceptual content. So that is what we are going to do in the next section. It is also possible to provide an explicit Kantian argument for the actual *existence* of essentially non-conceptual content. But one of us has already done that elsewhere,²¹ so we will not do that again here.

3. The Nature of Concepts and Essentially Non-Conceptual Content

Another even more troubling, and for some strange reason often unnoticed, feature of the debate about non-conceptual content is the lack of any generally-accepted theory of *the nature of concepts*.²² But how can we critically evaluate the claim that non-conceptual content exists, and, if we are to be essentialist content non-conceptualists, that it has such-and-such a necessarily distinct semantic structure and psychological function from that of concepts, if we do not actually know what *concepts* are? In order to face up to that problem, we are going to make a positive, working proposal about the nature of concepts.

Mental content in general, as we spelled it out in section 1, is the cognitive or practical information that is contained in a mental representation, insofar as that representation is an intersubjectively shareable type that is also 'tokened in' individual minds like ours. According to our proposal about the nature of concepts, then, *X* is a concept—or what is the same thing, *X* is a conceptual content—if and only if *X* is a mental content such that:

- (i) *X* is either a *material* concept or a *formal* concept (**the conceptual dualism condition**),
- (ii) *X* is a material concept if and only if,
- (iia) *X* provides for the definite or indefinite categorization, classification, discrimination, identification, and cognitively significant presentation of some actual or possible individual things, or unordered or ordered *n*-tuples of individual things (which allows for monadic concepts like BACHELOR and also for relational concepts like TALLER THAN), and *X* is thereby inherently *descriptive* of those individual things, which in turn 'fall under' *X* (**the first-order descriptivity condition**),
- (iib) *X* is such that a conscious cognizer *need not necessarily be* directly acquainted with or confronted by whatever is represented by *X* (**the non-acquaintance condition**),
- (iic) *X* fully supports the truth of some analytic propositions that are necessarily true in virtue of intensional containment (**the containment analyticity condition**),

1 and,

- 2
3 (iid) the self-conscious cognition of *X* fully supports some sufficiently
4 justified analytically necessarily true beliefs, i.e. a priori analytic
5 knowledge (**the analytic a priori knowledge condition**),
6
7 (iii) *X* is a formal concept if and only if,
8
9 (iiia) *X* provides for the definite or indefinite categorization, classifica-
10 tion, discrimination, identification, and cognitively significant
11 presentation of *some material concepts*, and *X* is thereby inherently
12 *descriptive* of those material concepts, which in turn are inherently
13 descriptive of the individual things that fall under them (**the**
14 **higher-order descriptivity condition**),
15
16 (iiib) *X* is such that a conscious cognizer *need not necessarily be* directly
17 acquainted with or confronted by whatever individual things, or
18 unordered or ordered *n*-tuples of individual things, that fall
19 under any of the material concepts to which *X* applies (**the**
20 **higher-order non-acquaintance condition**),
21
22 (iiic) *X* partially or wholly provides for the logical consequence
23 relation, logical constants, logical laws and/or logical inference
24 rules of classical truth-functional logic, or classical first-order
25 predicate logic plus identity (a.k.a. 'elementary logic'), or some
26 conservative or deviant extension of elementary logic (**the logical**
27 **notions condition**),
28
29 (iiid) *X* fully supports the truth of analytic propositions that are
30 necessarily true in virtue of logic, i.e. logical truths (**the logical**
31 **truth condition**),

32 and,

- 33 (iiie) the self-conscious cognition of *X* supports some sufficiently
34 justified analytically necessarily true logical beliefs, i.e. a priori
35 logical knowledge (**the logical a priori knowledge condition**),
36
37 (iv) *X* is intersubjectively cognitively shareable and communicable by
38 means of some or another natural language *L*, precisely because *X*
39 is a linguistically- and logically-structured mental representation
40 type that can be variously tokened in the minds of competent,
41 rational speakers of *L* when they correctly use expressions (and
42 more specifically, *n*-place predicative expressions like ' is a
43 bachelor' and ' is married to ', sentential modifiers like
44 negation, and sentential connectives like conjunction) of *L* that
45 have *X* as their *linguistic meaning*, by virtue of the innate a priori
46 cognitive capacities that all competent, rational speakers of *L*
47 possess for generating linguistic and logical understanding (**the**
48 **linguistic cognitivism condition**),²³

and,

(v) if *X* is a material concept, then the human mind

(va) uses *X* to detect some essential or accidental *in re* manifest properties and relations of actual macroscopic material objects,* which are also their mereological structures²⁴ (**the world-detection condition**),

and also,

(vb) accurately mirrors and records this information in the intensional microstructure of the content of *X* when it cognitively generates it (**the world-mirroring condition**).

*This is *not* to say that no concepts pick out either *ante rem* properties or uninstantiated manifest properties, however. On the contrary, all the formal concepts pick out *ante rem* properties; and every consistent set of material concepts picks out a manifest property, whether or not it is actually instantiated. The fact remains, however, that every material concept picks out at least one *in rebus* manifest property. So conceptual content is anchored in the actual manifest natural world.

Just to give this five-part theory of concepts a convenient label, we will call it the *Logical Cognitivist Theory of Concepts*, or LCTC.

There are two things that follow directly from the LCTC, and are most certainly worth noticing right away.

First, it follows specifically from the four conditions on being a material concept—i.e. conditions (iia) through (iid)—together with **the world-detection condition** and also **the world-mirroring condition**, that one of the specific semantic roles of an *analytic truth* is to express essential connections between various manifest properties/relations and structural proper parts of macroscopic material things, via essential connections between the corresponding concepts/conceptual networks and structural proper parts of concepts that intensionally mirror and record precisely those manifest essential connections in the world. In turn and by contrast, one of the specific semantic roles of a synthetic a posteriori truth—and, in particular, one of the specific semantic roles of an ordinary singular categorical perceptual judgment—is to express the merely *contingent, given connections between things in the world*.

Second, it follows specifically from condition (iv)—**the linguistic cognitivism condition**—that it must be possible to convey the content of a concept linguistically to someone else who is not directly acquainted with or confronted with the individual things or things represented by that conceptual content. For example, it must be possible to convey that conceptual content linguistically to someone else (provided, of course!, that he is sufficiently capable of hearing, and

that the other obvious *ceteris paribus* conditions are all met) over the telephone, in the absence of the individual things or things represented by that concept.²⁵

In this particular connection, however, we want to emphasize strongly that the LCTC does *not* entail that there *cannot* be non-linguistic concepts. On the contrary, it seems to us very plausible to hold:

- (a) that pre-linguistic human children and many non-human animals can *effectively deploy and re-use* concepts as object-categorizing, object-classifying, object-discriminating, and object-identifying devices for the purposes of cognition and intentional action, even if they cannot *possess* these concepts,
- (b) that these concepts *can* be effectively deployed and re-used in the absence of the objects represented by them,
- (c) that these concepts *are* intersubjectively shareable by other human animals and non-human animals alike,

and also,

- (d) that these concepts are immediately present in their mental lives both causally and phenomenologically, but not by means of linguistic vehicles.

So according to the LCTC, there are indeed some *non-linguistic concepts*, in the quite specific sense that the conscious, intentional acts or states of some pre-linguistic humans or non-human animals do actually contain psychologically real conceptual contents, as tokens of their corresponding mental representations types, that are effectively deployed and re-used by those animals in cognition and intentional action. But those conceptual contents also *lack linguistic vehicles*, and thus those concepts simply *cannot* be possessed by those creatures, even according to the weakest theory of concept-possession, Highly Refined Conceptualism or HRC.²⁶

The possibility of non-linguistic concepts in this sense obviously does not in any way rule out the possibility of the sort of relatively weak but still quite substantive necessary connection between concepts and language²⁷ that the LCTC provides. The LCTC entails—again via its condition (iv), **the linguistic cognitivism condition**—that no concept is such that it *cannot* be conveyed by means of *some possible natural language* to someone else who is not directly acquainted with or confronted by the individual thing or things represented by that concept. Every concept is thereby *possessible* by some rational human agent or another. Thus the possible natural linguistic expressibility of every concept *suffices* to guarantee the inherently intersubjective and non-solipsistic character of concepts, even for pre-linguistic humans and non-humans, whose concept-deployment and conceptual re-use lacks linguistic vehicles, and thereby prevents their ever possessing those concepts, even though they do effectively deploy and

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re-use them in cognition and intentional action. But the concept-deploying and concept re-using animals who lack linguistic vehicles, lack them only *contingently*, not necessarily. So according to the LCTC, and as against the later Wittgenstein, counterfactually, if a lion *could* talk, then we *would* be able to understand him. And in that sense, all pre-linguistic human conceptualizers and non-human conceptualizers are *proto-linguistic* creatures. Or to borrow another Wittgensteinian metaphor, pre-linguistic human conceptualizers and non-human animal conceptualizers do not live in the center of the city of language—but they *do* live in the suburbs.

In any case, the *leading* theoretical virtue of the LCTC is that it permits us to map the contrast between essentially non-conceptual content and conceptual content directly onto the classical contrast between:

- (i) *knowledge by acquaintance*, or *immediate subjective experience* of the world, other minded animals, and oneself,

and,

- (ii) *knowledge by description*, or *logico-linguistically mediated thought* about the world, other minded animals, and oneself.

Two things about this distinction should be noted in passing, before we get to the crucial point.

First, knowledge by description or conceptual cognition in our sense—specifically expressed in LCTC by conditions (iia) and (iiaa), **the first-order descriptivity condition** and **the higher-order descriptivity condition**—basically captures everything that Frege means by cognition of things via a ‘mode of presentation’ (*Art des Gegebenseins*) or ‘sense’ (*Sinn*), and also *much more*. Frege held that modes or presentations or senses account for differences in cognitive significance across co-referential expressions; that they uniquely determine (purely attributive or descriptive) reference; and that they help to explain why there are failures of intersubstitutivity *salva veritate* in opaque contexts.²⁸ Knowledge by description or conceptual cognition in my sense plays these three roles by satisfying the two descriptivity conditions. Nevertheless it satisfies not *merely* those conditions, but also clearly satisfies **the conceptual dualism condition**, **the non-acquaintance condition**, **the analyticity condition**, **the logical-notions condition**, **the logical truth condition**, **the a priori knowledge condition**, and **the linguistic cognitivism condition**. And it is not at all clear whether Frege’s notion of a mode-of-presentation or sense, in and of itself or without theoretical supplementation, satisfies *any* of the latter seven conditions.

Second, although it is true that, in this way, we do generally support Russell’s classical distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description—which in turn, for Russell, was originally an updated version of Kant’s *intuition* versus *concept* distinction, whereby Meinong’s notion of a *presentation* was used to extend Kant’s notion of intuition beyond perceptual

1 contexts to cognitive acquaintance with universals, logical constants, and other
 2 platonically abstract objects²⁹—nevertheless, we also want to jettison most of
 3 early Russell's epistemology. Contrary to Russell, we hold that the primary
 4 objects of cognitive acquaintance are just individual macroscopic material beings
 5 in the local or extended natural environment of the rational human animals, or
 6 other conscious animals, who sense-perceive them, and *not* sense data,
 7 universals, logical constants, or other platonically abstract objects. And again
 8 contrary to Russell, we hold that cognitive acquaintance is always, necessarily,
 9 and paradigmatically also a matter of *knowing how to move one's own living*
 10 *organismic body* in response to the causal-dynamic powers of macroscopic
 11 external material beings in the natural environment. So 'knowing *X*' is always,
 12 necessarily, and paradigmatically also 'knowing how to move my body in
 13 response to *X*', where '*X*' ranges over the local and distal natural world of
 14 causally efficacious macroscopic external material beings.

15 But in any case, the crucial point is that we are proposing to identify
 16 conceptual contents, whether material concepts or formal concepts, with
 17 inherently *descriptive* representations, one of whose functions it must be logico-
 18 linguistically to categorize, classify, discriminate, identify, and provide cogni-
 19 tively significant presentations of individual macroscopic material beings, or
 20 unordered or ordered *n*-tuples of such things, or else to categorize, classify,
 21 discriminate, identify, and provide cognitively significant presentations of other
 22 (first-order, material) concepts that apply to those things, without our *necessarily*
 23 ever having to be cognitively *acquainted with* or cognitively *confronted by* those
 24 things. Otherwise put, knowledge by description is always either 'knowing *X as*
 25 *F*' (i.e. conceptual descriptive knowledge) or 'knowing *that X is F*' (i.e.
 26 propositional descriptive knowledge), without ever necessarily having to
 27 encounter *X*. In this way, knowledge by description expresses an inherently
 28 context-insensitive, *allocentric* or non-egocentric (whether third-personal or
 29 impersonal), shareable, communicable content.

30 By sharp contrast, knowledge by acquaintance expresses an inherently context-
 31 sensitive, *egocentric*, first-personal, intrinsically spatiotemporally structured content
 32 that is not ineffable, but instead shareable or communicable only to the extent that
 33 another ego or first person is in a cognitive position to be directly perceptually
 34 confronted by the same individual macroscopic material being in a space-time
 35 possessing the same basic *orientable and thermodynamically irreversible* structure. By
 36 'orientable space-time', we mean a global space-time with intrinsic directions: up,
 37 down, right, left, top, bottom, over, under, inside, outside, backwards, forwards,
 38 and so-on. And by 'thermodynamic irreversibility', we mean time's asymmetric
 39 forward arrow in the actual causally efficacious natural world

40 So given the LCTC, the very idea of a conceptual content entails the possibility
 41 of *mental-representation-without-direct-confrontation*—and if this is not always the
 42 possibility of a Nagel-like 'view from nowhere', then at least it is the possibility of
 43 a *view from somewhere else*. By contrast, the very idea of essentially non-conceptual
 44 content entails *mental-representation-with-direct-confrontation*, embedded in an
 45 egocentrically-centered orientable and thermodynamically irreversible space-

time. Hence essentially non-conceptual content is mental representation that necessarily involves a view of *that* macroscopic material being over *there*, from right *here* and right *now*, as directed towards *my/our future*.

In light of the LCTC, here is our Kantian non-conceptualist working analysis of essentially non-conceptual content. According to this analysis, *X* is an essentially non-conceptual content of perception if and only if *X* is a mental content such that:

- (i) *X* is not a conceptual content, as defined by the LCTC,
- (ii) *X* directly refers to some or another individual macroscopic material being *B* in the local or distal natural environment of the conscious (rational or non-rational) animal subject of *X*—and it is also really possible that the conscious animal subject of *X* = *B*—and thereby both uniquely (if not always perfectly accurately³⁰) locates *B* in 3D Euclidean orientable space and also uniquely (if not always perfectly accurately) tracks *B*'s thermodynamically irreversible causal activities in time for the purposes of cognitive and practical intentional agency,

and

- (iii) *X* is an inherently context-sensitive, egocentric, first-personal, intrinsically spatiotemporally structured content that is not ineffable, but instead shareable or communicable only to the extent that another ego or first person is in a cognitive position to be directly perceptually confronted by the same individual macroscopic material being *B* in a space-time possessing the same basic 3D Euclidean orientable and thermodynamically irreversible structure.

Before going on, it is very important to note that both the LCTC and also our Kantian non-conceptualist analysis of essentially non-conceptual content are perfectly consistent with the existence of *hybrid* contents that systematically combine one or more conceptual contents with one or more essentially non-conceptual contents. As Sean Kelly has correctly pointed out,

the demonstrative concept is something of a chimera: it has the head of a singular term but the body of a general concept. (Kelly 2001a: 398)

Indeed, as we would elaborate, reformulate, and strengthen Kelly's very good point, we think that we can easily see that the so-called 'demonstrative concept' *this F* is nothing more and nothing less than a 3-part hybrid demonstrative content consisting of:

- (i) the material essentially non-conceptual content *this*, which is the semantic content of the essential indexical 'this',³¹

- (ii) the formal essentially non-conceptual content *whatever is over here now in the place indicated by the speaker*, which is inherently associated with the speaker's ability to indicate, and which is roughly equivalent with what David Kaplan calls the 'character' of 'this' (Kaplan 1989a and 1989b),

and,

- (iii) the material concept *F*, which is roughly equivalent with the Fregean sense of the predicate 'x is an *F*'.

Now a 3-part hybrid demonstrative content consisting of a material essentially non-conceptual content, a formal essentially non-conceptual content (roughly equivalent with a Kaplanian character), and a material concept (roughly equivalent with a Fregean sense), is *both* essentially indexical and *also* conceptual, in the same way that a griffin has *both* an eagle's head and *also* a lion's body. But a griffin is not a special kind of lion: it is a sui generis zoological and biological composite. Hence it does not follow that a griffin is a *special kind of lion*, just because it includes a *lion part*. So too a hybrid demonstrative content is a sui generis semantic and psychological composite. Correspondingly then, it does not follow that a 3-part hybrid demonstrative content is a *special kind of concept*, just because it includes a *conceptual part*. Therefore it is fundamentally misleading to call *this F* a 'demonstrative concept', just as it would be fundamentally misleading to call a griffin an 'eagle-headed lion'. Hence any attempt to apply the Demonstrative Strategy, or DS, to our analysis of essentially non-conceptual content in order to bring it under the big tent of Highly Refined Conceptualism, or HRC, must fail. For it simply has not been shown by proponents of the DS and the HRC that demonstrative contents *are* concepts, and merely *calling* them 'demonstrative concepts' will obviously not suffice to do it either.

The very same basic points apply to *first-person singular thoughts* based on the essentially indexical term '*T*', e.g. the semantic content of the statement: I am a Canadian.

According to our account, here we have a statement whose semantic content is a hybrid singular proposition consisting of:

- (1) the material essentially non-conceptual content *I*, which is the semantic content of the essential indexical '*T*',
- (2) the formal essentially non-conceptual content *whoever is here now and using this token of the word-type 'T'*, which is inherently associated with the speaker's ability to uniquely locate, track, and guide her own intentional body movements in space and time, and which is roughly equivalent to the Kaplanian character of '*T*',³²

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and

- (3) the material concept *Canadian*, which is roughly equivalent to the Fregean sense of the predicate 'x is a Canadian'.

We will look more closely at the specific cognitive function of the mental contents associated with (1) and (2), in section 5 below. But the basic idea there will be this:

Because all singular first-person thoughts and perceptual thoughts alike are at least partially constituted by essentially non-conceptual perceptual contents, it follows that I can authoritatively know all those parts of my first-person and perceptual thoughts by acquaintance.

4. Reasons for Accepting Both the LCTC and Kantian Non-Conceptualism

To be sure, there are many contemporary theories of concepts and many contemporary theories of content that would reject the LCTC. For example, by an *empiricist* theory of concepts we mean any theory that rejects the possibility of formal concepts.³³ By a *Fregean* theory of concepts we mean any theory that narrowly identifies concepts with either *rough-grained intensions* (i.e. Frege's 'concepts') or *fine-grained intensions* (i.e. Frege's 'modes-of-presentation' or 'senses') alone, whether these intensions are taken to be modally one-dimensional or modally two-dimensional.³⁴ By a *possession-theoretic* theory of concepts we mean any theory that identifies concepts with capacities for having propositional attitudes or other epistemic capacities.³⁵ By a *Quinean* theory of concepts we mean any theory of concepts that rejects the analytic-synthetic distinction.³⁶ By a *reductive materialist* theory of concepts we mean any theory of concepts that ontologically or explanatorily reduces concepts to physical properties (whether fundamental, functional, or biological).³⁷ By an *amorphous* theory of mental content we mean any theory that assigns no definite underlying semantic structure to mental content.³⁸ And finally by a *vacuous* theory of conceptual content we mean any theory that straightaway identifies *all mental content*, including all perceptual content, propositional content, thought-content, and belief-content with *conceptual content*, by more or less explicitly arguing in the following way:

- (1) All mental content must be normative and rule-governed.
- (2) Only conceptual representations can be normative and rule-governed.
- (3) Therefore all mental content must be conceptual, and nothing will ever count as real mental content unless it is conceptual.³⁹

Quite obviously, the defenders of empiricist theories of concepts, Fregean theories of concepts, possession-theoretic theories of concepts, Quinean theories of concepts, reductive materialist theories of concepts, amorphous theories of

1 mental content, and vacuous theories of conceptual content would all want to
 2 reject the LCTC. And that is quite a lot of philosophical enemies to have. So what
 3 can we say on the LCTC's behalf in critical response?

4 We can say at least two things. First, as regards the empiricist, Fregean,
 5 possession-theoretic, Quinean, and reductive materialist theories of concepts, we
 6 can offer a collective explanatory challenge: Either you do a *better* job of
 7 accounting for all the psychological, semantic, epistemological, linguistic, and
 8 logical data that the LCTC accounts for, or else you must accept the LCTC by
 9 *inference-to-the-best-explanation*, or IBE. This explanatory challenge from IBE, at the
 10 very least, gives us some theoretical breathing space, since in effect it is a rational
 11 license to postulate the LCTC in order to develop and defend our theory of
 12 essentially non-conceptual content more fully. By the end of that, we predict, it
 13 should be sufficiently clear that theories of concepts which reject the existence of
 14 formal concepts, which narrowly identify concepts with rough-grained or fine-
 15 grained Fregean intensions alone, which identify concepts with capacities for
 16 having propositional attitudes or other epistemic capacities, which reject the
 17 analytic-synthetic distinction, or which ontologically or explanatorily reduce
 18 concepts to physical properties, are all more or less seriously explanatorily
 19 impoverished, and that only the LCTC is able to capture adequately all our robust
 20 philosophical intuitions about the roles of essentially non-conceptual content and
 21 concepts alike in rational cognition and intentional agency. We develop one smaller
 22 part of that much larger argument in section 5 below, by applying Kantian Non-
 23 Conceptualism to the problem of perceptual self-knowledge.

24 Second, as regards the amorphous theories of content and the vacuous theories
 25 of conceptual content, we have a more overtly dialectical response to them on
 26 behalf of the LCTC and Kantian Non-Conceptualism taken as a coherent pair. It
 27 seems to us obvious that *if* either amorphous theories of content or vacuous
 28 theories of conceptual content are true, then they *preemptively* make a genuine
 29 debate between essentialist content Non-Conceptualism and Conceptualism
 30 impossible by ruling out any way of marking an intrinsic or essential difference
 31 between non-conceptual content and conceptual content. In other words, they
 32 rule out essentialist content Non-Conceptualism from the get-go. For if, by a
 33 *a priori* fiat, no kind of mental content can ever be intrinsically structurally
 34 distinguished from any other kind, or if, again by a *a priori* fiat, only conceptual
 35 content will ever count as real mental content, then obviously essentialist content
 36 Non-Conceptualism is false. But that is like winning a race by having your most
 37 challenging opponent disqualified by friends on the Rules Committee. So it
 38 seems to us only rationally fair that essentialist content Non-Conceptualism be at
 39 least allowed to *compete*. And if essentialist content Non-Conceptualism is
 40 allowed to compete, then so is the LCTC, since the former requires the latter.
 41 Thus for the purposes of our argument, we are henceforth going to assume that it
 42 is at least an *open* question whether amorphous and vacuous theories of content
 43 are true, and also that Kantian Non-Conceptualism and the LCTC, when taken
 44 together, constitute at least a *coherent pair of admissible candidates* for jointly
 45 explicating the nature of mental content.

According to Kantian Non-Conceptualism, essentially non-conceptual content is mental content that is inherently sensitive to the egocentrically-centered orientation, intrinsic topology, intrinsic thermodynamically irreversible temporality, and causal activities of macroscopic material objects and of conscious, essentially embodied subjects themselves in their perception of any distal object or any part of their own living bodies that has an actual or possible incongruent counterpart. Or again, in a word, essentially non-conceptual content is *situated* content. Because *only* essentially non-conceptual content can accurately and therefore adequately represent the unique location, movement, change, and causal activities of macroscopic material objects, of other essentially embodied cognitive and practical subjects, and of the essentially embodied subject herself from the subject's own unique spatial and temporal standpoint, it then seems clearly true that *only* essentially non-conceptual content is structurally and functionally suited to the fine-grained and hyper-fine-grained sensorimotor control of the body in human and non-human perceptual cognition and basic intentional action.

For example, it seems clearly true that only essentially non-conceptual content is structurally and functionally suited to mediate my conscious ability to get my key quickly and smoothly out of my pocket and directly into the keyhole of the front door of my house—even in the dark, and possibly with a drink or two in me. Of course, this is only an extreme (and extremely rare, we both assure you) case. More specifically and far less unusually, essentially non-conceptual content inherently involves what Adrian Cussins calls 'basic spatial and temporal tracking and discriminatory skills which are required to find our way around the environment', what Shaun Gallagher calls 'body schemas', and what Alva Noë calls 'sensorimotor knowledge'.⁴⁰ Indeed, there is now an impressively large amount of compelling empirical research which directly supports the thesis that sensorimotor activity in embodied cognition and intentional body movement is inherently pre-reflective, non-propositional, non-epistemic, and situated⁴¹—in a word, essentially non-conceptual.

One direct consequence of this is that the knowledge yielded by essentially embodied mental states with essentially non-conceptual content is fundamentally and irreducibly knowledge-*how*, not knowledge-*that*. Moreover, even if it turns out to be correct, as Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson have argued (Stanley and Williamson 2001), that knowledge-how can be analyzed in terms of knowledge-that for self-conscious or self-reflective rational cognitive and practical intentional action, this result will not follow for *pre-reflectively conscious* cognitive and practical intentional action, whether rational or non-rational, since this can occur without any conceptual or propositional content whatsoever. This is doubly ironic in the case of Noë, since not only has he argued directly against Stanley and Williamson (Noë 2005), but also he explicitly describes himself as a *conceptualist* (Noë 2004: ch. 6). We think that Noë has assumed the truth of a *vacuous* theory of conceptual content and thus over-extended conceptual content into the domain of the essentially non-conceptual.

Be that small twist of dialectical irony as it may, however, the point we are emphasizing here is that according to Kantian Non-Conceptualism, the primary

psychological function of essentially non-conceptual perceptual content is uniquely and (more or less) accurately to locate and track either:

- (i) causally efficacious, practically relevant or even usable, static or dynamic actual macroscopic material objects, or alternatively other embodied cognitive and practical subjects, that exist in the local or distal natural environment of the embodied cognitive and practical intentional agent (*environmental location and tracking*),

or,

- (ii) the embodied cognitive and practical intentional agent herself (*reflexive location and tracking*),

in their egocentrically-centered intrinsically spatiotemporal contexts, for the various normatively-governed purposes of cognitive and practical agency.

But what ultimately *unifies* these capacities? We think that the answer to this question is delivered to us by the distinctively Kantian idea, developed in the Transcendental Aesthetic, that the representation of space and the representation of time are the necessary a priori subjective forms of sensibility.⁴² Here we must remember that for Kant the domain of sensibility or *Sinnlichkeit* includes not just sense perception, but also phenomenal consciousness or 'inner sense', the imagination, pleasure and pain, and desire. So what we are saying is that we should think of the representation of space and the representation of time as the necessary a priori subjective forms of embodied, egocentrically-centered, conscious, intentional rational human agency and non-rational or non-human animal intentional agency alike.

Now essentially non-conceptual content is either directly referentially *accurate* or else (to some degree) directly referentially *inaccurate*, and as we have claimed, also inherently poised for guiding and mediating the cognitive and practical intentionality of conscious animal agents. Thus essentially non-conceptual content is inherently normative and practical. But for *rational human agents*, or real human persons, essentially non-conceptual content is also inherently poised for use in logical cognition (including belief, judgment, inference, and theory-construction) and in self-conscious, deliberative, and morally responsible action. Therefore in real human persons, essentially non-conceptual content is inherently *proto-rationally* cognitively and practically normative.

Content non-conceptualists now have within their grasp a decisive reply to Speaks's important challenge. If, as we have argued, essentially non-conceptual perceptual content is *situated* content, that Kantian Non-Conceptualism is true, and Conceptualism is false. But once they have made this decisive reply to Speaks, then content non-conceptualists will also be committed to the deeper and larger task of *explaining* the nature of essentially non-conceptual content by relating it directly to embodied rationality in real human persons.

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This explanation, in turn, must also invoke a broadly Kantian cognitive-semantic and practical-semantic framework. Indeed even Speaks, who of course is skeptical about the existence of absolutely non-conceptual perceptual content, thinks that progress on the question of the relations between thought and perception cannot be made until we resuscitate and re-think some basic Kantian themes:

I do think that there is a natural understanding of the questions about nonconceptual content which I have not discussed, but which seems to be in the background of McDowell's discussions of the issue. I have in mind his many discussions of the involvement of a faculty of spontaneity in perception. This is the Kantian question of how far one's conceptual capacities—one's abilities to have thoughts involving certain kinds of concepts—go toward shaping the contents of one's experience. But is this a matter of the new concepts entering into the content of one's perceptions, or of one simply being able to infer more sophisticated beliefs from a more or less stable perceptual content? This does strike me as an interesting and fundamental question with broad consequences for our understanding of the nature of intentionality. (Speaks 2005: 389–390)

Here is a preliminary sketch of how Kantian Non-Conceptualism can answer this 'interesting and fundamental question'. This larger theory will hold that essentially non-conceptual content has its *own* 'lower-level spontaneity' (what Kant calls the spontaneity of the *synthesis speciosa* or 'figurative synthesis' of the imagination at *CPR* B151) and hence its own lower-level normativity, that is based on intrinsically spatiotemporally-structured and egocentrically-oriented instrumental—or hypothetically practical—rules for the skillful manipulation of tools and of the proximal or distal environment, and for the skillful fine-grained or hyper-fine-grained sensorimotor control of one's own body in basic intentional actions. This theory will also hold that the lower-level spontaneity of our non-conceptual cognitive capacities is irreducible to the 'higher-level spontaneity' (what Kant calls the spontaneity of the *synthesis intellectualis* or 'intellectual synthesis' of the understanding and reason at *CPR* B151–152) of our conceptual capacities and our self-consciousness, and thus that its lower-level normativity is irreducible to the higher-level normativity of our conceptually-funded rationality, which is based on non-instrumental—or categorically practical—rules of logic and morality. And finally this theory will hold that the lower-level spontaneity and lower-level normativity of essentially non-conceptual content, as situated content, is the necessary, presupposed ground of the higher-level rational spontaneity and normativity of conceptual content, and that both kinds of content are *complementary* to one another in the constitution of atomic or basic perceptual judgments, or what Kant calls 'judgments of experience',⁴³ as well as a posteriori instrumental-practical judgments.

This in turn answers the important question, raised by McDowell in *Mind and World*, of how non-conceptual content can ever really and truly *justify*, and not

1 just 'exculpate'—i.e. merely *cause*, *occasion*, or *trigger*—any of our rational human
 2 cognitions, choices, and actions? The answer we are giving has three parts.

3 First, non-conceptual content simply *cannot* justify, if one adopts the false
 4 'sensationalist' conception of non-conceptual content that accepts the Myth of the
 5 Given, whereby non-conceptual content is nothing but the unstructured causal-
 6 sensory 'given' input to the cognitive faculties, passively waiting to be carved up
 7 by concepts and propositions. To hold that non-conceptual content, so construed,
 8 *could* ever justify, would be mistakenly to accept the Myth of the Given. But to
 9 believe that the 'sensationalist' conception is the *only* theory of how non-
 10 conceptual content could ever justify, is equally mistakenly to accept the Myth of
 11 the Myth of the Given.

12 Second, and again, non-conceptual content simply *cannot* justify if one adopts
 13 state Non-Conceptualism, which provides no well-grounded principles or reasons
 14 for cognizing or acting, and instead asserts only the subject's non-possession of
 15 concepts. This is shown by the possibility (and in recent work by McDowell, the
 16 actuality) of Highly Refined Conceptualism, or HRC, which in turn demonstrates
 17 that failures of concept-possession are systematically consistent with the thesis that
 18 the content of perception is still thoroughly conceptual.

19 But third, according to Kantian Non-Conceptualism, essentially non-con-
 20 ceptual content is *presupposed* by rational conceptual/propositional content and
 21 thus is inherently *proto-rational* and *normative*, and, in rational human agents, also
 22 *self-reflectively* constrained by categorically normative moral principles, and
 23 therefore *can* and *does* sometimes sufficiently justify perceptual beliefs and basic
 24 intentional actions.

25 Here is the explicit rationale for that claim. Essentially non-conceptual content
 26 provides rational human cognitive agents with an inherently spatiotemporally
 27 situated, egocentrically-centered, neurobiologically embodied, pre-reflectively
 28 conscious, skillful perceptual and practical *grip* on things in our world. Call this
 29 normative fact *the Grip of the Given*, with due regard to the two-part thought that
 30 to be *in* the Grip of the Given is also thereby to *have* a grip on things in our world.
 31 More precisely: To be in the Grip of the Given is to be so related to things in our
 32 world, and thereby to have a grip on things in our world, via essentially non-
 33 conceptual content, that we are *poised for achieving* accurate reference, true
 34 statements, knowledge, consistency in logical reasoning, effectiveness in
 35 intentional performance, goodness of means or ends, rightness in choice or
 36 conduct, and consistency in practical reasoning—in short, we are poised for
 37 achieving any or all of the highest values of our cognitive and practical lives.
 38 Whenever as perceivers we are in the Grip of the Given, then all of these
 39 achievements actually lie within the scope of our cognitive and practical powers.
 40 As cognitive and practical agents we are then *good-to-go*, and the fact that *we*
 41 *ought to X* necessitates the fact that *we really can X*. To be sure, being in the Grip
 42 of the Given is not an absolute guarantee. It does not *ensure* any of these cognitive or
 43 practical achievements. In the event, stuff can happen and things can go
 44 colossally or trivially wrong. But the Grip of the Given does *enable* and *legitimate*
 45 these achievements. It makes them *really possible* for minded animals like us.

Therefore it is precisely the Grip of the Given, via essentially non-conceptual content, that is our non-inferential sufficiently justifying reason for perceptual belief or basic intentional action, or at least this grip is the primitive fact that provides non-inferential sufficiently justifying reasons *for us* to hold perceptual beliefs or perform basic intentional actions. No rational human cognitive or practical activity could ever be actually accurate, true, sufficiently justified, logically consistent, effective, good, right, or practically consistent without essentially non-conceptual content. And correspondingly no essentially embodied rational human agent, or real human person, could ever freely and successfully navigate her way through the world and perform basic intentional acts according to principles without it. So that is why essentially non-conceptual content really and truly sufficiently justifies, when it is combined with the other cognitive and practical capacities that are jointly essential to rational human agency.

In short, the theory of perceptual knowledge that we are proposing is an ‘internalistic externalism’. Classical *Internalism* in the theory of knowledge says that knowledge is sufficiently justified true belief by virtue of my knowing that I know, which yields indubitability. Classical *Externalism* in the theory of knowledge, by contrast, says that knowledge is true belief *plus* justification by a reliable sub-personal causal mechanism of belief-formation, hence *without* my having to know that I know. Classical Internalism makes no appeal to inherently worldly factors and instead appeals to airtight inferential reasons for the justification of belief, usually in the guise of mentalistic evidence; whereas classical Externalism makes no appeal to inherently inferential factors and instead appeals to inherently worldly factors—natural mechanisms and sub-personal belief-causing processes—for the justification of belief.⁴⁴ By contrast to both classical Internalism and classical Externalism, according to our view *perceptual knowledge is sufficiently justified true belief by virtue of the Grip of the Given*. The Grip of the Given, via essentially non-conceptual content, provides an inherently worldly factor which is nevertheless neither naturally mechanistic nor sub-personal, precisely because it also inherently includes *my* pre-reflectively conscious causally efficacious grip on the world in the very same relation which constitutes the world’s causal efficacious grip on me. As a direct consequence, the Grip of the Given is an inherently worldly but also inherently non-inferential, pre-reflectively conscious, and practical factor that fully self-enables and self-legitimizes belief, without my having to know that I know.

So, to summarize, according to our view, perceptual knowledge is sufficiently justified true belief precisely *because* it is non-inferentially, pre-reflectively, and practically self-enabled and self-legitimated—without my having to know that I know—by the Grip of the Given, which *in turn* is an inherently worldly basic epistemic fact that is neither naturally mechanistic nor sub-personal. This is our internalistic externalism.

If what we have argued so far is correct, then it follows that essentially non-conceptual content, or *situated* content, unified by the Kantian necessary a priori

subjective forms of sensibility, not only exists, but also is the original and necessary two-way ladder by which the world is pre-reflectively consciously delivered up from embodied animal experience to self-conscious or self-reflective thought and action-oriented deliberation, and then is downwardly transformed by our thinking and deliberative action under universal a priori categorically normative principles. Or otherwise put, Sellars's 'logical space of reasons' is nothing more and nothing less than a discursive—that is, a conceptual, judgment-driven, self-conscious, self-reflective, and linguistic—and a priori normative superstructure constructed on the inherently proto-rational and normative *ground* of essentially non-conceptual, situated, sensorimotor-subjective or pre-reflectively conscious essentially embodied rational human animal cognitive and practical agency.

5. The Problem of Perceptual Self-Knowledge, and a Minimalist Solution

Precisely what is it, and what is it like, for me to be a rational human agent that *knows myself perceptually*? In this section, we apply Kantian Non-Conceptualism to the contemporary debate about the nature of self-knowledge, in order to preserve the widely-held and prima facie compelling intuition that at least some first-person ascriptions of contentful perceptual acts or states enjoy a *special* kind of authority, even in the face of *strong externalist* worries which seem to undermine this authority.

More precisely, however, our three-part thesis is:

- (1) that my pre-reflectively conscious awareness of my own embodiment has a primitive epistemic authority that is primary and grounds every other kind of perceptual self-knowledge,
- (2) that this primitive and primary perceptual self-knowledge is an essentially non-conceptual or acquaintive kind of self-knowledge, and not a conceptual or descriptive kind of self-knowledge,

and,

- (3) that by means of this primitive and primary perceptual self-knowledge, I am directly acquainted with the perceptual contents of my own thoughts.

If we are correct, then in this three-part sense, I primitively, primarily, acquaintively, and essentially non-conceptually know myself in sense perception just by being an embodied mind, and just by being directly consciously in touch with my own body in the skillful pre-reflective performance of its spontaneous intentional movements.⁴⁵ Thus primitive and primary self-knowledge is *not* self-conscious or self-reflective knowledge of the conceptual parts of the propositional contents of my own perceptual acts or states. On the contrary, I

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perceptually know myself primitively and primarily by pre-reflectively consciously knowing *how* to perform spontaneous intentional body movements, and not by self-consciously knowing *that* I think such-and-such. This in turn guarantees that I am directly acquainted with the essentially non-conceptual perceptual contents of my own thoughts. So I am directly acquainted with the essentially non-conceptual perceptual contents of my thoughts just by *enacting*⁴⁶ those very contents. In turn, precisely because all singular first-person thoughts and perceptual thoughts alike are at least partially constituted by essentially non-conceptual perceptual contents, it follows that I can authoritatively know all those parts of my first-person and perceptual thoughts by acquaintance. We call this *the Embodied Special Authority Thesis*, or ESAT.

Otherwise and more metaphorically put, and borrowing from Yeats, our thesis is that *I know myself perceptually because I can dance*: How can we know the dancer from the dance?

The notion of 'dancing' we are using here should be taken in the very broad sense of skillful, pre-reflectively conscious spontaneous intentional bodily movements performed in direct response to some immediate emotional impulse or stimulation, i.e. performed in direct response to 'music' in a similarly broad sense. It is therefore closely related to what Nietzsche aptly calls the 'Dionysian' form of life in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and also specifically designed to capture the action-theoretic correlate of the Dionysian form of life—intentional actions without self-conscious deliberative reasons.⁴⁷

In any case, the ESAT also bears an intimate relation to the contemporary thesis of Disjunctivism about perception⁴⁸ Disjunctivism about perception says:

(DP1) that a consciously experiencing subject can be EITHER perceiving veridically, in which case the subject stands in a direct cognitive relation to an individual macroscopic material being that is consciously and correctly perceived by her in that context, OR else consciously experiencing in a non-veridical way, such as illusion, imagination, or hallucination, in which case the experiencing agent does not stand in a direct cognitive relation to an individual macroscopic being that is consciously and correctly perceived by her in that context, but NOT BOTH,

and,

(DP2) that any two such conscious experiences, one of which is a veridical perception, and the other of which is a non-veridical conscious experience, can be the same ONLY in whatever determines the possibility of an experiencing agent's being sometimes unable to discriminate self-consciously or self-reflectively between them—namely, the capacity for perceptual self-knowledge, which is *authoritative* but *not infallible*.

In an intimately related way, our Disjunctivism about perceptual self-knowledge says:

(DSK1) that a consciously experiencing subject can be EITHER engaging in a veridical self-acknowledging act or state, in which case the subject knows exactly what and who she is in that context, including exactly knowing the contents of her own mind, OR engaging in a self-deceived or self-ignorant act or state, in which case the subject does not know exactly what or who she is in that context, including not exactly knowing the contents of her own mind, but NOT BOTH,

and,

(DSK2) that any two such experiences, one of which is a veridical self-acknowledging act or state, and the other of which is a self-deceived or self-ignorant act or state, are the same ONLY in whatever determines the possibility of a consciously experiencing subject's being sometimes unable to discriminate self-consciously between them—namely, the capacity for perceptual self-knowledge, which is *authoritative*, but not *infallible*.

The ESAT fully satisfies both (DSK1) and (DSK2). On the view we are proposing, then, a subject's knowing exactly what and who she is in a given context, including her authoritatively and exactly knowing the perceptual contents of her own thoughts by acquaintance, is primitively and primarily grounded on her pre-reflectively consciously exactly knowing how to perform spontaneous intentional body movements in that context, *even if* she is unable, in that context, to discriminate self-consciously between this state and a self-deceived or ignorant state.

In section 2, we identified seven different arguments for Non-Conceptualism in the contemporary literature on mental content:

- (I) *From phenomenological richness.*
- (II) *From perceptual discrimination.*
- (III) *From infant and non-human animal cognition.*
- (IV) *From the distinction between perception (or experience) and judgment (or thought).*
- (V) *From the knowing-how versus knowing-that (or knowing-what) distinction.*
- (VI) *From the theory of concept-acquisition.*
- (VII) *From the theory of demonstratives.*

And in an earlier paper, one of us has worked out an eighth argument for Kantian Non-Conceptualism in particular:

- (VIII) *From our experience of enantiomorphy (a.k.a. 'the Two Hands Argument').⁴⁹*

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Now we want to propose adding a *ninth* argument to the list of arguments for Non-Conceptualism, which in turn is also a *second* argument for Kantian Non-Conceptualism:

- (IX) *From the theory of embodied self-knowledge:* My pre-reflectively conscious awareness of my own embodiment has a primitive epistemic authority that grounds every other kind of perceptual self-knowledge. Furthermore, this primary and primitive perceptual self-knowledge, obtained via my pre-reflectively consciously knowing how to perform spontaneous intentional body movements, is an essentially non-conceptual or acquaintive kind of self-knowledge, and not a conceptual or descriptive kind of self-knowledge. Therefore normal human perceptual self-knowledge is always at least partially essentially non-conceptual and necessarily includes essentially non-conceptual content.

This argument, in turn, is based on a basic distinction between:

- (i) *sensorimotor-subjective consciousness, or pre-reflective consciousness*,⁵⁰ which is the primitive and non-self-consciously conscious ability of minded animals like us to have what Nagel calls a 'single point of view', and is grounded in egocentrically-centered embodiment, and *primitive bodily awareness*,

and,

- (ii) *self-consciousness, or self-reflective consciousness*, which is the more sophisticated and derivative ability of a rational human or non-human animal to have conscious conceptual/propositional meta-representational states.

Before we can advance to the explicit formulation of our argument, however, a clarification of the ESAT is needed. The *minimally special* kind of authority enjoyed by at least some first-person intentional states must be distinguished from the *maximally special* kind of authority entailed by the classical Cartesian thesis that rational human animals can have 'privileged access' to our own mental states, by which we mean the following thesis:

Rational human agents possess unique self-conscious or self-reflective conceptual/propositional access to our own perceptual mental acts or states, and thereby are also epistemically infallible about them.

We will call this *the Cartesian Special Authority Thesis*, or the CSAT. Most philosophers of self-knowledge nowadays reject the CSAT. But even those who reject the CSAT by denying privileged access usually hold the further thesis that

we possess, at the very least, a *fairly robust* kind of special epistemic authority about our first-person states, which we will formulate as follows:

Necessarily, other things being equal, and in any ordinary context, I am normally in the best position to know exactly what I am and who I am, including exactly knowing the contents of my own perceptions.

To deny this carefully qualified but still quite substantive thesis would be to defend either deflationism or outright skepticism about perceptual self-knowledge. Hence we dub this thesis *the Minimal Special Authority Thesis*, or the MSAT, which must be explained and accommodated by any non-deflationist, non-skeptical account of self-knowledge. Given the highly intuitive plausibility of the MSAT, it is unsurprising that most philosophers of self-knowledge nowadays are looking for characterizations of self-knowledge that preserve minimal special authority without privileged access.⁵¹

The MSAT, however, has recently been under threat. The advent and widespread popularity of *Strong Externalism* about mental content poses a serious challenge to even the minimal special authority of perceptual self-knowledge. Assuming that the *subject* of mental content is a minded living organism or conscious animal, then there are two sharply distinct and opposed theses about content that philosophers of cognition have defended:

Strong Individualism: The representational properties and structures of all mental contents are solely and wholly causally generated and determined *endogenously* (i.e. inside the animal), even if causal initiation and triggering occurs exogenously (i.e. outside the animal), and even if the vehicles of content are also exogenous. Mental content for which this thesis holds is *narrow* content.

Strong Externalism: The representational properties and structures of all mental contents are solely and wholly causally generated and determined *exogenously*, even if causal initiation and triggering occurs endogenously, and even if the vehicles of content are also endogenous. Mental content for which this thesis holds is *broad* or *wide* content.⁵²

If Strong Externalism is correct, then since the contents of one's words and mental states are solely and wholly fixed or individuated by exogenous factors that one does *not* know self-consciously, conceptually, or by description, then it seems to follow that at best one can only ever have non-exact or partial knowledge of those contents. This apparent entailment obviously puts the MSAT in serious jeopardy.

In the face of this challenge to the MSAT, some externalists have attempted to preserve or reinstate the minimally special authority of perceptual self-knowledge,⁵³ and there has been much interesting discussion in the recent literature about whether strong externalists can give an account that vindicates the MSAT, or not. Nevertheless, in our opinion, its interestingness notwithstanding, this discussion ultimately leads to a sharp and seemingly unresolvable dilemma between, on the one hand, the intuitively plausible thesis:

- (1) that, given Strong Externalism, some 18th century thinker *T*, who by assumption knows his own water thoughts, also does not self-consciously or self-reflectively know that his water thoughts involve the concept *water* and not the concept *te-water* (i.e. the Twin-Earthian concept of water, whose content is partially determined or fixed by the presence of XYZ in the local Twin-Earthian environment, and not by H₂O),

and the seemingly equally intuitively plausible thesis:

- (2) that if some 18th century thinker *T* does not self-consciously or self-reflectively know that his own water thoughts involve the concept *water* and not the concept *te-water*, then *T* does not know his own water thoughts.

We will call this *the Strong Externalist Dilemma about Perceptual Self-Knowledge*.

Clearly, one possible strategy for resolving the Dilemma would be to argue that Strong Externalism is false just because some form of Individualism is true, and that the Dilemma dissolves for lack of a sufficient reason to take one of its two horns to be true, and is thereby resolved. But it is equally clear that this strategy is highly strenuous, in that it would require both a careful critical examination and also a conclusive evaluation of the vigorous debate between Individualism and Externalism, and a full clarification of the distinction between narrow content and wide content. Nevertheless there is a much simpler, and in fact far more explanatorily illuminating, way out of the Dilemma. Or in other words, in this particular case, less really *is* philosophically more. So for our present purposes, we want to pursue the following two-part *minimalist* strategy instead.

First, we think that the key false and vitiating assumption shared by all externalist accounts of perceptual self-knowledge, whether they are strongly externalist or not, is just that all self-knowledge *must be* self-conscious, self-reflective knowledge by description, or conceptual self-knowledge. The problem that motivates the Strong Externalist Dilemma about Perceptual Self-Knowledge is just that the perceiver is unable to individuate, in a self-conscious descriptive way, the concepts that partially compose his thoughts. So he is apparently unable to know his own perceptual thoughts, and yet by hypothesis he knows his own perceptual thoughts. But the fact that the perceiver is unable to individuate, in a self-conscious descriptive way, the concepts that partially compose his thoughts is in fact perfectly consistent with the thesis that it is the essentially non-conceptual parts of perceptual thoughts that are knowable with authority, not self-consciously by description, but instead pre-reflectively consciously by acquaintance.

Then, second, our vindication of the Minimal Special Authority Thesis in terms of the Embodied Special Authority Thesis is grounded directly on the

thesis that primary, primitive perceptual self-knowledge is a certain kind of pre-reflectively conscious knowledge by acquaintance, namely essentially non-conceptual perceptual self-knowledge. That falsifies the vitiating assumption and puts in its place the doctrine that you primarily and primitively know yourself, and thereby acquaintively know the perceptual contents of your own thoughts, by just by *being* an embodied mind, which in turn is just *being* pre-reflectively consciously in touch with your own body in the skillful performance of its spontaneous intentional movements. That is: You primarily and primitively know yourself, and thereby acquaintively know the perceptual contents of your own thoughts, just by *pre-reflectively consciously knowing how to move around freely in the directly perceived manifest world*—just by pre-reflectively consciously knowing how to ‘dance to the music’.

Furthermore, and as a direct philosophical payoff, our minimalist vindication of the MSAT in terms of the ESAT has the immediate consequence that it effectively resolves the Strong Externalist Dilemma about Perceptual Self-Knowledge, *even if* we suppose Strong Externalism to be true. More precisely, our minimalist vindication does this by falsifying the second horn of the dilemma: Just because some thinker does not self-consciously or self-reflectively know that her water thoughts involve the concept *water* and not the concept *te-water*, it does *not* follow that this thinker does not know her water thoughts in *any* robust sense of self-knowledge. She can still primarily and primitively know herself, and thereby acquaintively know the perceptual contents of her own thoughts, just by pre-reflectively consciously knowing how to move around freely in different ways on Earth and on Twin Earth.

For example, suppose that a person aptly named *Divine* is a highly-skilled and successful water diviner on Earth in the 18th century. Who knows how she does it? But the simple fact is that on Earth, *Divine* *pre-reflectively consciously knows how to find H₂O* with remarkable skill and success. And if someone asks her *what* she knows, she can authoritatively answer this question just by saying ‘I know *this*’, and in so saying, thereby display or show precisely *what* she knows by carrying out another skillful and successful act of water divining. So the word standing for the content of her thought is semantically completed by the deed, and knowing the meaning of the content-word is just doing the deed. Analogously, someone might authoritatively answer the question, ‘What do you know about circles?’ by saying, ‘I know *this*’, and in so saying, thereby display or show precisely *what* he knows by drawing a circle on a piece of paper, or by moving his arm in a circle.

On Twin Earth, *Divine*’s water divining sense works equally well and tells her that there is no water there at all, only some other watery stuff, which is, self-consciously or self-reflectively unbeknownst to her, XYZ. So *Divine* does *not* know her own water thoughts in one sense of perceptual self-knowledge—i.e. self-conscious, self-reflective, conceptual self-knowledge—but *Divine* also *does* know the essentially non-conceptual perceptual content of her own water thoughts in the quite distinct, primary, and primitive sense of the ESAT, namely by pre-reflectively conscious acquaintance. She cannot describe what she knows. Nevertheless, *she shows exactly what she knows* and *she knows exactly what she shows*.

This effectively resolves the Strong Externalist Dilemma about Perceptual Self-Knowledge, whether or not Strong Externalism is true.

6. Conclusion

At the outset of this essay, we said that its three goals were, first, to identify the notion of essentially non-conceptual content by critically analyzing the recent and contemporary debate about non-conceptual content; second, to work out the basics of broadly Kantian theory of essentially non-conceptual content in relation to a corresponding theory of conceptual content; and then third, to demonstrate one effective application of the Kantian theory of essentially non-conceptual content by using this theory to provide what we call a 'minimalist' solution to the problem of perceptual self-knowledge which is raised by Strong Externalism. We have now done all that. Or at the very least, we think we have shown that Kantian Non-Conceptualism offers a serious alternative to the standard theories of mental content and perceptual self-knowledge.⁵⁴

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NOTES

¹ Kant 1997: A90/B123. For convenience, we follow the common practice of giving page numbers from the A (1781) and B (1787) German editions only.

² See, e.g. Bermúdez 2003a; Evans 1982: esp. chs. 4–6; and Gunther 2003a.

³ See, e.g. McDowell 1994; Sedivy 1996; and Brewer 1999.

⁴ See Sellars 1963; and McDowell 1994.

⁵ See, e.g. Heck, 2000; Heck 2007; Crowther 2006; Laurier 2004; and Speaks 2005.

⁶ All of these arguments are covered in Gunther 2003a.

⁷ See also Hanna 1993.

⁸ 'Ak' refers to the standard 'Akademie' edition of Kant's works: *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Königlich Preussischen (now Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: G. Reimer [now de Gruyter], 1902-).

⁹ See, e.g. Evans 1982: 229; Peacocke 2001; and Peacocke 1998.

¹⁰ See, e.g. McDowell 1994: 56–60 and 170–3. The Demonstrative Strategy is also endorsed in Brewer 1999 and Sedivy 1996.

¹¹ See Kelly 2001a; and Kelly 2001b.

¹² See Chuard 2006.

¹³ See, e.g. Heck 2000; and Heck 2007.

¹⁴ See Tye 2006.

¹⁵ See Hanna 2008.

¹⁶ See also Hanna 2001: ch. 3.

¹⁷ See Yablo 1992.

¹⁸ See McDowell 1984.

¹⁹ See, e.g. Campbell 2002: ch. 4.

²⁰ See McDowell 2008.

²¹ See Hanna 2008.

²² See also Bermúdez 2003a: section 6.

²³ See Hanna 2006: chs. 4–6.

²⁴ See, e.g. Koslicki 2008.

²⁵ Many thanks to Jane Heal for suggesting this informal ‘over-the-telephone test’ for conceptuality.

²⁶ See also Bermúdez 2003b. Like Bermúdez, we hold that there are non-linguistic concepts and thoughts; but unlike Bermúdez, who is a state non-conceptualist, we do not identify non-conceptual content with the content of mental states not involving concept-possession.

²⁷ See also Carruthers 1998. Like Carruthers, we hold that there is a substantive connection between conceptual thought and language; but unlike Carruthers, who is a higher-order thought theorist about consciousness, we do not think that the substantive connection between conceptual thought and language inherently constrains the nature of consciousness, which has an essentially non-conceptual basis in pre-reflective subjectivity.

²⁸ See, e.g. Frege 1984.

²⁹ See, e.g. Russell 1995: chs. V–X.

³⁰ In other words, essentially non-conceptual content is normatively governed by an ideal standard of accurate direct reference, and can still be directly referential when it is more or less inaccurate.

³¹ See Perry 1979. See also Hanna 1993.

³² See, e.g. Campbell 1994.

³³ See, e.g. Prinz 2002.

³⁴ See, e.g. Bealer 1982; and Chalmers 2004.

³⁵ See, e.g. Peacocke 1992. Peacocke’s theory is also a Fregean theory of concepts.

³⁶ See, e.g. Fodor 1998.

³⁷ See, e.g. Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson 2007: chs. 10–13; Cummins, 1989; and Dretske 1995.

³⁸ See, e.g. Stalnaker 1998.

³⁹ This is Speaks’s own view of the nature of conceptual content.

⁴⁰ See Cussins 2003: 147; Gallagher 2005: chs. 1–6; and Noë 2004.

⁴¹ See Ismael 2007.

⁴² See Hanna 2001: ch. 4; Hanna 2008: sections IV and V; and Hanna 2006a: chs. 2 and 6.

⁴³ See Hanna 2006a: chs. 1–2.

⁴⁴ See, e.g. Steup 2008.

⁴⁵ See Hanna and Maiese 2009: esp. chs. 3–5.

⁴⁶ There is an important parallel here between our view and Noë’s ‘enactive’ theory of perception in *Action in Perception*. But there is also an important difference. Noë’s basic claim is that the perceiver’s acts or dispositions to act constitute and individuate perceptual content *itself*. So for him, the enactive theory of perception is a metaphysical

thesis about content. By contrast, our view is that the perceiver's acts or dispositions to act constitute and individuate the *self-knowledge* of the perceptual content of our thoughts, but not the content of perception itself. So for us, the enactive approach to perception is only an *epistemological* thesis about content.

⁴⁷ See Hanna and Maiese 2009: 126–53.

⁴⁸ See, e.g. Martin 2006. See also Haddock and McPherson 2008.

⁴⁹ See Hanna 1993.

⁵⁰ See Thompson 2005.

⁵¹ See, e.g. Burge 1996; Cassam 1994; Heal 2001–02: 1–19; Moran 2001; and Wright 1998.

⁵² See, e.g. Braddon-Mitchell and F. Jackson 2007: esp. chs. 10–13; Burge 2002; Fodor 1987; Kim 2006: ch. 9; McGinn 1989; Putnam 2002; and Segal 2000.

⁵³ See, e.g. Burge 1988; and Brown 2004.

⁵⁴ Many thanks to Philippe Chuard and Jeff Speaks for comments on earlier versions of this material.

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