

Perceptual Content Defended

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Abstract

Recently, the thesis that experience is fundamentally a matter of representing the world as being a certain way has been questioned by austere relationalists. I defend this thesis by developing a view of perceptual content that avoids their objections. I will argue that on a relational understanding of perceptual content, the fundamental insights of austere relationalism do not compete with perceptual experience being representational. As it will show that most objections to the thesis that experience has content apply only to accounts of perceptual content on which perceptual relations to the world play no explanatory role. With austere relationalists, I will argue that perceptual experience is fundamentally relational. But against austere relationalists, I will argue that it is fundamentally both relational and representational.

It used to be common ground that perceptual experience represents the world as being one way rather than another. The thesis that perceptual experience is fundamentally representational can be traced back to Kant.¹ With few interludes, it has been orthodoxy in philosophical views about perceptual experience ever since. It figures prominently in the work of thinkers as different as Evans (1982), Searle (1982), Peacocke (1983), McDowell (1994), Dretske (1995), Tye (1995), Chalmers (1996), and Byrne (2001). I will call the thesis that perceptual experience is fundamentally a matter of representing the world as being a certain way the *content thesis*. This thesis has been questioned by Reid (1764), by sense-data theorists, such as Russell (1913), Price (1950), and Moore (1953), and most recently by what I will call austere relationalists: Campbell (2002), Travis (2004), Brewer (2006), and Fish (2009) among others.² According to austere relationalists, perceptual experience is not representational, but rather fundamentally a matter of a subject being

perceptually related to mind-independent objects, properties, events, or the event in which such relations obtain.

The aim of this paper is twofold: to consider in detail the austere relationalist objections against the content thesis and to develop and defend a version of the content thesis that avoids these objections. The main thesis is that on a relational understanding of perceptual content, the fundamental insights of austere relationalism do not compete with perceptual experience being representational. I will argue that most of the objections to the content thesis are objections only against accounts of perceptual experience on which perceptual relations to the world play no explanatory role. With austere relationalists, I will argue that perceptual experience is fundamentally relational. But against austere relationalists, I will argue that it is fundamentally both relational and representational. So the focus of the paper is not to argue against austere relationalists, but rather to defend the idea that experience has content in a way that acknowledges their insights. In §1, I will identify the four main objections that austere relationalists have articulated against the content thesis. In the rest of the paper, I will defend the content thesis by considering the objections in turn. In doing so, I will present a positive argument for the content thesis.

First, it will be helpful to clarify the notions of relation and representation. Perceiving subjects have been argued to be related to many different kinds of entities. These entities fall into two groups: *abstract* or *mind-dependent* entities, such as qualia, sense-data, propositions, or intentional objects, on the one hand; and on the other hand, *concrete*, *mind-independent* objects, property-instances, or events, such as a white coffee cup being on a desk. In the discussion under consideration, the thesis that perception is relational means always that perception is fundamentally a matter of a subject being perceptually related to concrete, mind-independent objects, property-instances, events, or a combination thereof.

Following Campbell (2002), I will use the label “the representational view” or “representationalism” for any view on which experience is fundamentally a matter of representing the world as being a certain way and thus for any view that endorses the content thesis. So as to avoid terminological confusion, it is important to distinguish this view from the more specific view according to which the phenomenology of experience supervenes on or is identified with its content. Such views are sometimes labeled “representationalism” rather than the more traditional “intentionalism”. I will reserve “representationalism” for any view that endorses the content thesis. “Representationalism”, so understood, is neutral on the relationship between content and phenomenology.

The most minimal representationalist commitment is that perceptual experience is a matter of a subject representing her environment as being a certain way.³ When I speak of perception as being representational without qualification I mean no more than this idea. There are many different ways of understanding the nature of content given this constraint. More specifically,

there are three critical choice points for any view of perceptual content. One choice point is how to understand the nature of perceptual content. The content can be conceived of as (i) a Russellian proposition, a possible world proposition, a Fregean sense, or a combination thereof; (ii) as independent or (partly) dependent on the experiencer's environment; (iii) as conceptually or nonconceptually structured; and (iv) as propositional or non-propositional. A second choice point is how to understand the relationship between the experiencing subject and the content of her experience: (i) content can be conceived as merely associated with the experience, (ii) the experiencing subject can be understood to be aware of the content, or (iii) the experience can be understood as having content in that the experiencing subject represents or misrepresents the world. A third choice point is how to understand the relationship between the content and phenomenology of perceptual experience: (i) content can be understood as identified with phenomenology or (ii) as supervening on phenomenology, (iii) phenomenology can be understood as supervening on content, or (iv) phenomenology can be understood to be independent of content. I will take a particular stance on all three choice points and will argue that while some accounts of perceptual content fall prey to the austere relationalist objections, a view on which content is constituted by potentially gappy Fregean modes of presentation does not fall prey to these objections (1st choice point). On this view, the experiencing subject represents or misrepresents the world (2nd choice point) and the phenomenology of her experience supervenes on its content (3rd choice point).

1. Objections to the Content Thesis

Austere relationalists have formulated at least four different objections to the content thesis.⁴ To a first approximation they can be stated as follows. A first objection is that if perception has representational content, then the way an object looks on a given occasion must fix what representational content the perception has. However, the way an object looks on a given occasion does not fix what representational content the perception has. Therefore, perception does not have representational content (e.g. Travis 2004). Let's call this the *indeterminacy objection*. A second objection is based on the observation that perception is not the kind of thing that can be accurate or inaccurate. Perception is simply a relation between a perceiving subject and perceived objects, properties, events, or alternatively an event in which such a relation obtains. If accounting for accuracy conditions is the reason for introducing content, then arguing that perception is simply such a relation undermines at least this reason for the content thesis (e.g. Brewer 2006). Let's call this the *accuracy condition objection*. A third objection is that representational views misconstrue the phenomenological basis of perceptual experience insofar as they detach the phenomenology of experience from relations to qualitative features of the world (e.g. Campbell 2002, Martin 2002a, Brewer 2007). Let's call this the *phenomenological objection*.

A fourth objection is that representational views do not properly account for the epistemological role of perceptual experience. Only if perceptual experience is itself not representational can it constitute the evidential basis for demonstrative thoughts and ultimately perceptual knowledge (e.g. Campbell 2002). Let's call this the *epistemological objection*.⁵

Following upon these four objections, a view has been defended that rejects the content thesis. The central positive idea of the view is that perceptual experience is fundamentally a matter of a subject standing in an awareness or an acquaintance relation to a material, mind-independent object, a property that this object instantiates, an event, or a combination thereof (Campbell 2002, Brewer 2006). Alternatively, experience is thought of as an event in which such a relation obtains (Martin 2002a). Views differ moreover on whether subjects are perceptually related only to objects (Brewer 2006) or whether they are related also to the properties that these objects instantiate (Campbell 2002). What the views have in common is that they endorse the *negative thesis* that no appeal to representational content is necessary in a philosophical account of perceptual experience, in conjunction with the *positive thesis* that any perception essentially involves at least three components: a subject, the environment of the subject, and an awareness or an acquaintance relation between the subject and certain elements of her environment.

For ease of presentation, I will focus on the case of a subject being perceptually related to a mind-independent object that instantiates a perceivable property. Everything I will say about this case needs to be modified only slightly to fit with the version of austere relationalism according to which perceptual experience is an event in which such a relation obtains or the version according to which perceptual experience is simply a matter of being perceptually related to an object. I will make the necessary modifications explicit when required to establish my argument. It is important to note that any visual experience of an object arguably involves perceiving at least a color and a spatial property that this object instantiates along with their correlating situation-dependent properties.⁶ So the case of a subject being perceptually related to a mind-independent object that instantiates only one perceivable property requires making the simplifying assumption that there can be a perception of an object as instantiating only one perceivable property.

Given this simplifying assumption, the austere relationalist thesis can be articulated in the following way: a subject perceives a particular white cup only if she is perceptually related to that particular white cup. Being perceptually related to a white cup may in turn be analyzed in terms of being perceptually related to a cup instantiating whiteness, where the relevant object and property-instance are collocated. More generally, subject *s* perceives object *o* as instantiating property *F* only if *s* is perceptually related to *F* and to *o*, where *F* and *o* are collocated.⁷

It will be helpful to make three clarifications about the view at stake. First, austere relationalists do not deny that beliefs and judgments are formed on the basis of perception. So what is contentious is not whether perception brings about mental states with content. The question is whether this content is the content of perception proper. Second, austere relationalists do not contest that perception involves cognitive processing. As Campbell argues, “[o]n a Relational View of perception, we have to think of cognitive processing as ‘revealing’ the world to the subject” (2002, p. 118). Rather than deny that perception involves cognitive processing, austere relationalists insist that no appeal to content is necessary to explain the nature of the awareness of our surroundings that we have as a consequence of this cognitive processing. Finally, austere relationalists need not deny that we can articulate propositions to express what we experience. Acknowledging that a subject can articulate such propositions entails no commitment to positing that her experience itself has the content articulated. So in order to establish the content thesis, we cannot simply appeal to the fact that we can articulate propositions to express what we experience.

Austere relationalists present us with a dilemma: either reject the thesis that perception has content or fail to adequately account for its epistemological and phenomenological role. I will argue that we need not accept this dilemma since there is a view of perceptual content that circumvents the austere relationalist objections. In the next section, I will argue for the content thesis, by arguing against the indeterminacy and the accuracy condition objections. In the rest of the paper, I will qualify the notion of perceptual content defended in §2. I will argue that if perceptual content is recognized to be inherently relational, then a representational view can circumvent the phenomenological and epistemological objections and indeed can account for the phenomenological and epistemological insights of austere relationalism.

2. The Master Argument for Perceptual Content

Why should we be concerned with defending the content thesis? There are at least six intuitive reasons to think that perceptual experience has content. One reason is to account for the fact that when we perceive, our environment seems a certain way to us. A second reason is to account for the fact that our environment can be as it seems to us in perceptual experience or can fail to be the way it seems to us. So the second reason is to account for the fact that the way our environment seems to us is assessable for accuracy. A third reason is to account for the fineness of grain of perceptual experience. The very same scene perceived from the very same angle can be experienced in a number of different ways. Take Mach’s example of perceiving a shape from the same angle once as a square and once as a diamond. Arguably, the phenomenology of the two perceptions will differ despite there being no difference in the

perceiver's environment. If experience is argued to have content, the difference in phenomenology can be accounted for by appealing to differences in the content of the experiences. A fourth reason is to explain how we can remember past experiences. An intuitive way of accounting for the memory of an experience is in terms of recalling its content. A fifth reason is to account for the phenomenology of illusions and hallucinations. Austere relationalists argue that the phenomenology of perceptual experience is constituted simply by perceptual relations to mind-independent objects and property-instances. Now when we suffer a hallucination, we fail to be perceptually related to the mind-independent object that it seems to us we are perceiving. When we suffer an illusion, we fail to be related to the property-instance that it seems to us we are perceiving. If phenomenology is accounted for simply in terms of relations to mind-independent objects and property-instances, it is on the face of it mysterious how the phenomenology of illusions and hallucinations can be accounted for. A sixth reason is to account for the phenomenal effects of cognitive penetration. If I speak Urdu, then a sentence uttered in Urdu sounds different to me than if I do not speak Urdu. Similarly, if I possess the concept of a skyscraper, then a tall building arguably looks different than if I do not possess the concept. If experience is argued to have content, then these differences can easily be accounted for. If however experience does not have content, then it is unclear how to account for phenomenal differences due to cognitive penetration.

As austere relationalists point out, the content thesis is typically taken for granted and rarely argued for.⁸ To be sure many views have been defended that involve and rely on the content thesis. But more often than not such views simply assume that experience is representational and proceed to argue for one particular way of understanding its content. In this section, I will present an argument for perceptual content. The skeleton of my argument is as follows:

- P1:** If a subject is perceptually related to the world (and not suffering from blindsight etc.), then she is aware of the world.
- P2:** If a subject is aware of the world, then the world seems a certain way to her.
- P3:** If the world seems a certain way to her, then she has an experience with content *C*, where *C* corresponds to the way the world seems to her.
- Conclusion 1:** If a subject is perceptually related to the world (and not suffering from blindsight etc.), then she has an experience with content *C*, where *C* corresponds to the way the world seems to her.
- P4:** The world is either the way it seems to her or it is different from the way it seems to her.
- P5:** If a subject has an experience with content *C*, then *C* is either accurate (if the world is the way it seems to her) or inaccurate (if the world is not the way it seems to her).

Conclusion 2: If a subject is perceptually related to the world (and not suffering from blindsight etc.), then the content of her experience is either accurate or inaccurate.

I will call this argument the *Master Argument*.⁹ In §2.1 I will defend the first three premises by critically discussing the indeterminacy objection. In §2.2 I will defend the fourth and fifth premises by critically discussing the accuracy condition objection. In §3, I will show that the Master Argument is neutral between three different ways of understanding the relation between the experiencing subject and the content of her experience. On the weakest way of understanding this relation, it is simply one on which content is associated with the experience. This way of understanding the relation is too weak to give support to the content thesis: it does not give support to the thesis that experience is *fundamentally* a matter of representing the world. So the Master Argument is not sufficient to establish the content thesis. In §4, I will qualify the defended notion of perceptual content in light of the phenomenological and epistemological objections. By doing so, I will argue for a notion of perceptual content that—in contrast to the idea that content is simply associated with the relevant experience—amounts to a version of the content thesis.

2.1 *The Indeterminacy Objection and the Master Argument*

Austere relationalists argue that when we see an object, there are many ways that the object can look. Let's assume for a moment that it is clear what it means for an object to look a certain way. Given this assumption, the indeterminacy objection can be formulated in terms of the following argument:

IO₁: If perception has representational content, then the way an object looks on a given occasion must fix what representational content the perception has.¹⁰

IO₂: The way an object looks on a given occasion does not fix what representational content the perception has.

Conclusion: Perception does not have representational content.

The second premise needs explaining. As Travis points out, there are different and incompatible ways an object can look to be: “A peccary . . . may look exactly like a pig . . . It may also look like a tapir, a clever dummy pig, a wax imitation peccary, and so on. Experience cannot coherently represent it to us as both a peccary and wax (and a pig, and so on)” (2004, p. 73). Moreover, no one way an object can look to be should be given primacy. So one and the same pig—with one and the same look—may bring about perceptions with different representational contents.

I will argue against the indeterminacy objection, by showing that on at least one understanding of “looks” the second premise must be rejected. As I will show, the force of the indeterminacy objection relies on a particular understanding of “looks”, namely on what Chisholm calls the comparative use of appearance words.¹¹ Austere relationalists do not deny that when a subject is experiencing, she is aware of the world. So they accept *P1* of the Master Argument. On the face of it, the fact that a subject is aware of the world entails that the world seems a certain way to her (*P2*). Now, austere relationalists argue that perceptual experience is simply openness to the world, and by doing so may be read as questioning *P2*. As Travis formulates the idea:

perception, as such, simply places our surroundings in view; affords us awareness of them. There is no commitment to their *being* one way or another. It confronts us with what is there, so that, by attending, noting, recognizing, and otherwise exercising what capacities we have, *we* may . . . make out what is there for what it is—or, again, fail to . . . in perception things are *not* presented, or represented, to us as being thus and so. They are just presented to us, full stop. (2004, p. 65; see also Brewer 2006, p. 174)

One can accept that perception simply affords us awareness of our surroundings, while accepting that if one is aware of the world, then the world seems a certain way (*P2*). The thesis that the world seems a certain way implies only that it seems this way, rather than that way. To give an example, right now I am aware of a desk not a chair. Were I aware of a chair, the phenomenology of my perception would be different. If one can accept that perception affords us awareness of our surroundings, while accepting that awareness of the world implies that the world seems a certain way, then there is no obvious reason why austere relationalists should not accept *P2*.

However even if austere relationalists would accept *P1* and *P2*, they would reject the thesis that if the world seems a certain way to an experiencing subject, then she has an experience with content *C*, where *C* corresponds to the way the world seems to her. So they would reject *P3*. Travis argues against the thesis that the content of experience corresponds to how things look to the experiencing subject, by arguing against the idea that experience is looks-indexed, that is, the idea that “the representational content of an experience can be read off of the way, in it, things looked” (2004, p. 69). He considers the comparative and the epistemic sense of looks, although he does not use these labels to distinguish these different senses of looks. Following Chisholm, we can understand the comparative sense of appearance words as pertaining to cases in which appearance words are used to make comparisons in the ways things look. Examples of this use are “That looks as if it is a coffee cup” and “That sounds as if it is a cello”. The epistemic sense of appearance words pertains to cases in which appearance

words are used to express evidence in support of a proposition. One might say for example when confronted with a puddle of coffee and a broken cup: “It looks like someone dropped their coffee cup” or when hearing a beautiful rendition of Brahms’ cello trio: “It sounds like someone has been practicing”.¹²

For the sake of argument, let’s accept Travis’s reasons against the thesis that the content of experience is looks-indexed on the epistemic or comparative use of appearance words. This leaves the option that the content of experience corresponds to how the world looks (or more generally seems) on a noncomparative use of appearance words. Following Chisholm (1957, pp. 50–53), we can understand the noncomparative use as pertaining to cases in which appearance words are used to pick out or refer to particulars, such as objects or property-instances, without thereby making comparisons to other particulars. Cases include uses of demonstratives, such as “that shade of blue”, “that shape”, and “this high pitch”. Arguably, the epistemic and comparative uses are parasitic on such demonstrative, noncomparative uses of appearance words. How the world seems in such cases provides the basis on which comparisons are drawn and thus provides the basis for the world to seem a certain way comparatively. Moreover, how the world seems noncomparatively provides the evidence that allows for the world to seem a certain way in the epistemic sense of seems. The force of the indeterminacy objection relies on “looks” being understood comparatively. If “looks” is understood noncomparatively, then the second premise of the indeterminacy objection (*IO*₂) is false. For if “looks” is understood noncomparatively, then the way things look fixes the content of experience.

By denying that representational contents play any fundamental role in perception, austere relationalism amounts to a view on which how the environment seems to a perceiving subject is matched by a contentful mental state only at a second stage when judgments or beliefs are formed on the basis of the perception. Austere relationalism relies on a distinction between a perceptual state of awareness that does not have content and a (causally downstream) state of awareness that has content, namely the state one is in when one judges and believes certain things about one’s environment on the basis of perceptual experience. The critical question is what it can be for the world to seem a certain way to a subject without her being in a contentful mental state. As I will argue in the rest of this section, the mere fact that the world seems a certain way when one perceives entails that the perception has content.¹³ I will argue for this by establishing the first three premises of the Master Argument and will thus show that there is a notion of perceptual content that anyone should accept.

The first premise of the Master Argument is uncontroversial. It is not contentious that if one is perceptually related to the world, then one will be aware of the world (*PI*). Moreover, it is not contentious that if one is aware of the world, then the world will seem a certain way to one on at

least the noncomparative sense of seems (*P2*).¹⁴ In order to establish the third premise, more needs to be said than what was required for the first two premises. The third premise has it that if the world seems a certain way to an experiencing subject, then she has an experience with content *C*, where *C* corresponds to the way the world seems to her. We can recognize this premise to be true, if we recognize that there is a notion of content on which the content of experience corresponds to the way the world seems to the experiencing subject given one or more sensory modes of experience. Let's call this connection between content and the way the world seems *the seems-content link*. The qualification "given one or more sensory modes of experience" rules out cases in which something seems a certain way to a subject without that seeming being a matter of experiencing the world in a certain way, such as when a joke seems funny or a proof seems valid.¹⁵ So it constrains the relevant cases to those in which a subject is hearing, seeing, smelling, touching, or experiencing the world in some other sensory mode, or a combination of sensory modes. An object in one's environment may look a certain way, sound a certain way, or jointly look and sound a certain way. If we recognize the seems-content link, then the idea that the environment can seem a certain way to a subject without her being in a contentful mental state becomes impossible. But the idea that the environment can seem a certain way to a subject without her being in a contentful mental state is precisely the idea that austere relationalism relies on.

Now one might argue that the seems-content link, *P2*, and *P3* hold only on a noncomparative understanding of "seems". If we accept Travis's argument that neither epistemic nor comparative looks fix the content of experience, then we must understand the seems-content link, *P2*, and *P3* as holding only on a noncomparative understanding of "seems". However, while this restricts the scope of the Master Argument, it does not pose a problem for the argument. For all we need to establish the argument is to show that there is at least one understanding of "seems" on which *P2* and *P3* jointly hold. There are powerful reasons to believe that the phenomenology of experience captures only the way the world seems noncomparatively.¹⁶ It is however important to note that if we reject Travis's argument, then the seems-content link, *P2*, and *P3* can be understood as holding not only for the noncomparative, but moreover for the comparative and even the epistemic understanding of "seems".¹⁷ If we accept *P1* to *P3*, then it follows that if a subject is perceptually related to the world, then she has an experience with content *C*, where *C* corresponds to the way the world seems to her. This is the first conclusion of the Master Argument. If one understands *P2* and *P3* as constrained to the noncomparative understanding of "seems", then content *C* will correspond to the way the world seems noncomparatively. If one rejects Travis's argument, then content *C* can be understood as corresponding to the way the world seems noncomparatively, comparatively, epistemically, or any combination thereof.

To what degree can we accept the insights motivating the indeterminacy thesis, given the notion of content established by the Master Argument? Even if we recognize the noncomparative use of appearance words and thus reject the second premise of the indeterminacy argument, we can nonetheless accept the indeterminacy thesis that many propositions can be associated with any given perception. Recognizing the seems-content link is compatible with accepting that any given scene can be perceived in many different ways and it is compatible with accepting that any given perception can be articulated in many different ways. The way the world noncomparatively seems to the perceiver may change from moment to moment even as her gaze remains steady. Say she is looking at a pig. She can direct her attention at its shape, its color, the texture of its skin, or any combination of these features. As her attention shifts, her phenomenology will change. One or more propositions can be associated with every one of these phenomenal states and thus with every one of these ways that the world may noncomparatively seem to her. All these propositions are equally legitimate. Nevertheless, at any given moment the world will noncomparatively seem to her to be one single way. This is all that we need to establish the seems-content link.

Travis considers, but immediately dismisses the idea that the content of experience is looks-indexed on a noncomparative use of “looks”. He does so on grounds that a noncomparative use presupposes a comparative use of “looks”—though again he does not use Chisholm’s labels to distinguish between the different uses (2004, p. 81). No doubt perceptual reports typically involve concepts the meaning of which abstract from the richness of what is perceived. Typically we abstract from the particular shape of a perceived object by using concepts such as “round” or “square” to express what shape the object seems to us to have. But although the content of perceptual reports may be coarse-grained in this way, there is no reason to think that the content of the relevant perceptual experiences is as coarse-grained as the content of the perceptual reports. If the content of perceptual experience is understood as corresponding to how the world seems to us, then the content can be understood to be as fine-grained as our phenomenology.¹⁸

I have argued that if we recognize that the world seems a certain way to us when we perceive, then we must recognize that the relevant perception has content *C*, where *C* corresponds to the way the world seems to us. I showed moreover that this seems-content link can be understood most minimally as corresponding to the way the world noncomparatively seems to us. By contrast, the indeterminacy objection depends on a comparative understanding of appearance words. I showed moreover that if “looks” is understood non-comparatively, then the way things look fixes the content of experience. So if appearance words are understood noncomparatively, then the second premise of the indeterminacy argument is false and the indeterminacy objection can be rejected. As I argued, if we reject Travis’s argument that looks—in the comparative or epistemic sense—do not fix the content of experience, then

the scope of the seems-content link and the Master Argument can be understood as pertaining not only to the way the world seems noncomparatively, but moreover to the way it seems comparatively and epistemically.

2.2 The Accuracy Condition Objection and the Master Argument

Austere relationalists argue that perceptual experience is not the kind of thing that can be accurate or inaccurate. Brewer articulates the idea in the following way:

in perceptual experience, a person is simply presented with constituents of the physical world itself. Any errors which result, in belief, or indeed in anything else, are products of the subject's responses to this experience, however natural, on the one hand . . . or else reflectively reasoned, on the other, these responses may be. Error, strictly speaking, given how the world actually is, is never an essential feature of experience itself. (2006, p. 169)

No doubt neither events nor relations are assessable for accuracy. So if perceptual experience is analyzed in terms of a perceptual relation to the world or the event in which such a relation obtains, then perceptual experience cannot be assessable for accuracy. On the way austere relationalists understand experience, it is trivially true that experience itself is not assessable for accuracy. When representationalists say that experience is accurate or inaccurate, they must be understanding experience either as something other than a perceptual relation, or they must be using the phrases "the experience is accurate" or "the experience is inaccurate" as elliptical for "the content of experience is accurate" or "the content of experience is inaccurate".

In order to avoid any terminological disputes, I will follow austere relationalists in understanding perception as (among other things) a matter of being perceptually related to the world. As I argued in the last section, accepting this idea is compatible with perceptual experience having content, if content is understood as corresponding to the way the world seems to the experiencing subject. Once one has recognized the seems-content link, only minor further commitments are necessary to establish that the way the world seems to an experiencing subject is assessable for accuracy. In this section, I will make these commitments explicit. In the interest of generality, I will talk of accuracy conditions rather than truth conditions: only if the content of experience is understood as having a propositional structure, will it have truth conditions. My argument is neutral on whether the content of experience is propositional or non-propositional.

Before I establish the remaining two premises of the Master Argument, it will be necessary to make some clarifications about the notion of accuracy conditions. The accuracy conditions of an experience are often equated with the content of the experience. But this cannot be right. Accuracy conditions need to be distinguished both from the content and from the way the

world is. The accuracy conditions of an experience specify the way the world would have to be for the content of the experience to be accurate. More schematically, the idea is that:

- (AC) The experience of a subject *s* with content *C* is accurate iff the world is the way it seems to *s*, where *C* corresponds to the way the world seems to *s*.¹⁹

There are many other ways to articulate accuracy conditions, but I take this to be the most neutral one. It will be helpful to consider an example. Say I see a white cup to my right. I can articulate the content of my experience in the following way:

- (C₁) That white cup is to my right.

This content determines accuracy conditions, which can be articulated in the following way:

- (AC₁) My experience with content *C*₁ is accurate iff that white cup is to my right, where *C*₁ corresponds to it seeming to me that the white cup is to my right.

In light of these clarifications, we can proceed to defend the claim that the content of experience is assessable for accuracy. In virtue of a subject perceiving the world, it seems a certain way to her. The way the world seems to a subject determines the way the world would have to be for the content of her experience to be accurate. The world is either the way it seems to her or it is different from the way it seems to her (*P4*). If the world is the way it seems to her, then the content of the experience is accurate. In all other cases, the content of the very same experience is inaccurate. So if a subject has an experience with a particular content, then this content is either accurate or inaccurate (*P5*). It follows from this, together with *P1* and *P2* of the Master Argument, that if a subject is perceptually related to the world, then the way the world seems to her is assessable for accuracy. Together with *P3*, it follows that if a subject is perceptually related to the world, then the content of her experience is either accurate or inaccurate.

Now, the accuracy condition objection could be understood as implying that the way the world seems to one is necessarily the way the world is. The idea is that if in perceptual experience the way the world seems is necessarily the way the world is, then perceptual experience does not have accuracy conditions. This idea needs to be contrasted with the less controversial idea that one cannot be wrong about how the world seems to one when one experiences. The idea that the way the world seems to one is necessarily the way the world is can be understood in at least two ways. On one understanding,

the idea is that perception is infallible. The idea that perception is infallible may be argued to follow from a certain understanding of what it means for perception to be a matter of being perceptually related to the world. Let's assume for the sake of argument that perception is indeed infallible. Even if we make this assumption, there is no reason to think that perceptual content does not have accuracy conditions. On the contrary, even if the way the world seems to one is necessarily the way the world is, the content of the experience is nonetheless accurate if and only if the world is the way it seems to one to be. Infallibilism about perception implies that perceptual content is necessarily accurate. It does not imply lack of accuracy conditions. On a second understanding of the accuracy condition objection, the idea is that the fact that one perceives *o*'s *F*ness implies that *o* is *F*.²⁰ But even if this implication holds, the fact that one perceives *o*'s *F*ness does not imply that the way the world seems to one is not assessable for accuracy. It implies only that the way the world seems to one is necessarily the way the world is. So like infallibilism, it implies only that perceptual content is necessarily accurate. Perceptual content can be necessarily accurate but nonetheless have accuracy-conditions.

Before we move on to the next section, it will be helpful to make two clarifications about the thesis that the way the world seems to one determines accuracy conditions. First, there can be phenomenal differences between experiences that are not a matter of how the world seems to one, but rather a matter of how one experiences. If I am shortsighted, my experience may be blurry, but I need not perceive the world as being blurry. I have argued that perceptual content corresponds to the way the world seems to the perceiver. This seems-content link is neutral on how those aspects of phenomenology are accounted for that do not pertain to the way the *world* seems to the perceiver.

Second, the world is arguably rarely and perhaps never the way it seems to us to be. We perceive plates to be round, although their shapes are much more complicated. We see surfaces to be colored, but it has been argued that surfaces do not have color properties. We see our environment to be populated by objects, but it has been argued that there really are no objects or at least not the kind of objects that we seem to see. In order to accommodate these phenomena, we need to loosen the notion of accuracy conditions in play or alternatively we need to accept widespread but explicable perceptual error.²¹ If my argument for the thesis that experience has accuracy conditions holds, then it holds regardless of what stance one takes on this set of issues.

3. The Relation between Perceptual Experience and its Content

I have argued that the content of experience corresponds to the way the world seems to the experiencing subject. Accepting this seems-content link is compatible not only with almost any view of perceptual experience, it

is compatible with almost any notion of perceptual content. On one view, content is understood to stand in a one-to-one correspondence to the way the world seems to the experiencing subject.²² If content is in this way identified with how the world seems to the subject, then content is simply what can be called phenomenal content. Even if austere relationalists would accept the seems-content link, they would nonetheless reject the content thesis on phenomenological or epistemological grounds. In the rest of this paper, I will argue that the phenomenological and epistemological objections pose only a challenge to the idea that the content of experience is identified with phenomenal content. As I will show, a view on which perceptual content is understood to be inherently relational does not fall prey to these objections. Indeed, such a view can explain phenomenology in terms of perceptual relations to objects and property-instances and can explain how perception grounds knowledge of particular objects. On the view that I will defend phenomenology is not identified with the content of experience, but rather supervenes on its content.

Let's call a view on which the content of experience is phenomenal content an *austere representationalist view*.²³ The view is austere since it leaves no significant room for a relational component. According to austere representationalism, the only difference between subjectively indistinguishable experiences in distinct environments is a difference in the causal relation between the experiencing subject and her environment. This difference in the causal relation has no repercussions for the content or the phenomenology of the distinct experiences. If content is phenomenal content, then there can be an exact duplicate of an experience and its content in an environment in which a different object is present or in which no appropriate object is present. Phenomenal content can be analyzed in terms of existentially quantified content of the form that there is an object x that instantiates a certain property F : $(\exists x)Fx$. What characterizes this way of thinking about content is that experience represents only that there is an object with the relevant properties in the external world. No element of the content depends on whether there is in fact such an object present. The object of the experience does not fall out of the picture altogether on austere representationalism. Although no reference to the object is necessary to specify the content, the view has it that a subject s perceives an object o at a particular location only if o satisfies the existential content of s 's experience. So the content of the experience is accurate only if there is an object at the relevant location that instantiates the properties specified by the content. But the important point is that whether an object of the right kind is present has a bearing only on the *accuracy* of the content, not on the *content* itself.

In order to assess the thesis that the content of experience is phenomenal content, it is necessary to distinguish between three ways in which one might understand the relationship between the experiencing subject and the content of her experience. On one understanding, the relation is simply one of

association: every experience can be associated with a (propositional) content that describes how the world seems to the subject, without that content being a proper part of the experience. Let's call this *the association thesis*. This thesis posits only that every experience can be described by articulating a (propositional) content. A painting can be described, but it does not follow from this that the painting has the content of the description.²⁴ Similarly, an experience can be described, but it does not follow from this that the experience has the content of the description. While articulating a content that describes what a subject is aware of is informative, the thesis that such a content can be articulated and associated with the experience does not entail that the relevant experience has content in any substantive sense of "has". Certainly, it does not entail that perceptual experience is fundamentally a matter of representing the world as being a certain way. So the association thesis does not entail the content thesis. Any account of experience can accept the association thesis.

On a second understanding, the relation between the experiencing subject and the content of her experience is understood to be an awareness relation: the experiencing subject stands in an awareness relation to the content or its constituents, such that this awareness relation grounds the phenomenology of the experience. Call this *the awareness thesis*. This thesis originates with Russell (1913), who argued that an experiencing subject stands in acquaintance relations to the constituents of the proposition that characterizes her experience. In the tradition of Russell, some views according to which experience is a propositional attitude to a content are formulated in a way that suggests a commitment to the awareness thesis.

There is a middle ground between the association and the awareness theses: experience can be understood to have content without the subject standing in an awareness relation to that content. We can call this *the representation thesis*. There are several possible ways of specifying this thesis. I will argue that in virtue of being perceptually related to objects and the properties they instantiate, one represents those very objects and property-instances by employing concepts by means of which one refers to those objects or property-instances.²⁵ The content of the experience ensues from employing concepts. So far there is no need to say that one stands in an awareness relation to the content. What happens in the case of a hallucination? One employs the very same concepts employed in a subjectively indistinguishable perception without being related to the relevant objects or property-instances. As in the perceptual case, there is no need to say that one stands in an awareness relation to the ensuing content. Rather one employs concepts in virtue of which one is intentionally directed at what seems to one to be an object or a property-instance. The notion of content in play is committed only to the thesis that experience represents the world. In this sense, the representation thesis does not entail any commitment to the subject standing in an awareness relation to that content.

One particular version of the representation thesis has it that the experiencing subject stands in a propositional attitude to the content of the experience. This version of the thesis posits both that the content of experience is a proposition and that experience is a matter of standing in a certain attitudinal relation to this proposition, analogous to the sense in which one might say that belief is a matter of standing in the believing relation to the content of the belief. English does not have a word to denote such a perceptual attitudinal relation. Byrne (2009, p. 437) calls the relation the *ex-ing* relation; Pautz (2010, p. 54) calls it the *sensorily entertaining* relation; Siegel (2010, p. 22) calls it the *A*-relation. The version of the representation thesis that I will defend is not committed to the content of experience being a proposition. Moreover, it is not committed to more than the thesis that experiencing subjects represent objects and property-instances (possibly under a mode of presentation). Typically, propositional attitudes are understood to be more substantive than that the experiencing subject represents objects and property-instances.²⁶ So the representation thesis that I will defend is more modest than most ways of understanding the thesis that experience is a propositional attitude to the content of the experience. It allows that beings can have contentful perceptual experiences although they are not capable of having propositional attitudes.

In light of these three ways of understanding the relationship between the experiencing subject and the content of her experience, we can assess austere representationalism. If phenomenal content is understood to be mere associated content, then the austere representationalist commits herself only to a very weak thesis. Indeed, given that the association thesis does not amount to a version of the content thesis, an austere representationalist who understands phenomenal content to be mere associated content would not be committed to the content thesis. If the aim is to defend the view that experience has content, then something more substantial is required than the association thesis.

In the next section, I will argue that if the phenomenological and epistemological objections carry any weight, then any austere representationalist who endorses the representation thesis will face these objections. But I will show that if content is understood to be inherently relational, then we can defend the content thesis while avoiding the phenomenological and epistemological objections. In doing so, I will argue for a view of perceptual content that is more substantial than the association thesis while avoiding the pitfalls of the awareness thesis.

4. The Argument for Relational Content

In this section, I will qualify the notion of perceptual content established by the Master Argument with the aim of defending a view of perceptual content that does not fall prey to the phenomenological and epistemological

objections. I will argue that a view on which content is inherently relational not only avoids these objections, but moreover accommodates the phenomenological and epistemological insights of austere relationalism. So I will argue that if the content thesis is qualified, then we need not reject the thesis in order to adequately account for the epistemological and phenomenological role of perceptual experience.

4.1 *The Phenomenological Objection and Employing Concepts*

Austere relationalists argue that the phenomenology of experience is constituted by the very mind-independent objects and properties that one is aware of when perceiving. As Campbell puts it succinctly:

On a Relational View, the phenomenal character of your experience, as you look around the room, is constituted by the actual layout of the room itself: which particular objects are there, their intrinsic properties, such as colour and shape, and how they are arranged in relation to one another and to you (2002, p. 116; similarly Martin 2002a, p. 393 and Brewer 2007, p. 92f.).

Austere relationalist views about phenomenology differ along two parameters. The first parameter concerns whether phenomenology is constituted by mind-independent objects and properties *tout court* or by *awareness or acquaintance relations* to these objects and properties. The second parameter concerns whether or not phenomenal character is repeatable. If phenomenal character is repeatable, then perceptual relations to numerically distinct but qualitatively indistinguishable objects yield the same phenomenology. What the views have in common is that phenomenology is externally determined.

The phenomenological objection is that a view on which phenomenology is grounded in content rather than in the actual layout of the perceiver's surrounding will face the problem that what constitutes the phenomenology of the experience is distinct from what the perceiver is aware of—at least on representationalist views that deny that perceivers are aware of the content of their experience. Moreover, any view that accounts for phenomenology in terms of intentional objects, qualia, sense-data, or propositions faces the problem of why and how such peculiar entities bring about phenomenal states. In short the objection is that accounts which explain phenomenology in virtue of relations to anything other than the mind-independent objects, properties, and events that perceiving subjects are aware of sever phenomenology from what we are aware of.

Rather than pursue a discussion of just how big a problem the phenomenological objection raises for austere representationalism, I will grant the austere relationalist that an account of perceptual experience should explain phenomenology in terms of perceptual relations to the very mind-independent objects and property-instances that the experiencing subject is aware of.²⁷ I will argue that the phenomenological objection is an objection

only against the view that the phenomenology of an experience is determined by its content, if that content is understood as wholly independent of material objects and the properties they instantiate. It is not an objection against the view that phenomenology is grounded in content, if that content is understood in terms of perceptual relations to objects and the properties they instantiate. So I will argue that if perceptual content is understood as inherently relational, then the phenomenological objection can be circumvented and we can recognize the austere relationalist insight that phenomenology is grounded in perceptual relations to the very material and mind-independent objects and property-instances that the experience is of. Recognizing this insight will prove to require constraining the content thesis in two respects:

1. The content of an accurate perceptual experience is analyzed in terms of perceptual relations to the very mind-independent objects and property-instances that the experience is of.
2. The content of hallucination is derivative of the content of perception insofar as the concepts employed in hallucinations can only be specified with reference to their possible roles in accurate perceptual experiences.

While austere relationalists argue that *perceptual relations* to the world should be taken as primary in any explanation of what brings about perceptual awareness of the world, austere representationalists take the *content* of experience to be explanatorily primary. Against both I will argue that perceptual relations to the world and the content of experience should be recognized to be *mutually dependent* in any explanation of what brings about perceptual awareness of the world.

More specifically, I will argue that perceiving subjects employ concepts the possession of which depends on perceptual relations to the very objects or property-instances that the concepts pick out. Hallucinating subjects employ the same concepts that in a subjectively indistinguishable perceptual experience are employed as a consequence of the perceiving subject being perceptually related to the world. The concepts employed in perceptual experience are typically demonstrative concepts. We can understand the requirement for concept possession in the following way: to possess a concept is to have the ability to refer to the mind-independent objects or property-instances that the concept is of. This ability involves being able to discriminate between the things that fall under the concept and those that do not.²⁸ If concepts ground the ability to pick out the objects or property-instances that the concept is of, then a subject who possesses say the concept RED must be able to use it to pick out red things. This will involve discriminating red things from things that are not red. So on the notion of concepts in play, concepts cannot be analyzed independently of what it means to possess a concept, and possessing a concept cannot be analyzed independently of what it means to have the ability to pick out the objects and property-instances that the

concept is of. In this sense, possessing a perceptual concept is analyzed in terms of perceptual relations to the very external, mind-independent objects and property-instances that the concept is of.²⁹ Austere relationalists argue that perception should be understood to be fundamentally a matter of standing in an awareness or acquaintance relation to the mind-independent objects or property-instances in our environment. As I will argue in more detail in the next section, the ability to sensorily discriminate and thereby pick out an object or property-instance is based on such awareness or acquaintance relations.

If concepts are analyzed in terms of perceptual relations to the objects and property-instances that they are of, then we can accept that the token content of experience ensues from employing concepts while recognizing the empiricist insight that “[e]xperience is what explains our grasp of the concepts of objects” (Campbell 2002, p. 122). So we can recognize this insight without rejecting the content thesis. The very same concepts that are employed in perception can also be employed in illusion and hallucination: if one possesses a concept, then one can employ it while failing to refer to what the concept purports to refer to. Concepts ground the ability to refer to mind-independent objects and property-instances irrespective of whether these objects and property-instances are in fact present in the environment of the experiencing subject. If they are not present, one fails to refer. As a consequence the concepts employed remain empty. When a subject perceives, the objects or property-instances to which she is perceptually related are subsumed under the concepts employed. The content type is constituted by the concepts employed. The token content of experience ensues from employing concepts and it covaries with the environment of the experiencing subject. So the token content of a hallucination or illusion is deficient insofar as at least some of the concepts that constitute the content are empty. Moreover, the content of hallucination or illusion is derivative of the content of perception insofar as it *recombines* the concepts grounded in perception or insofar as the concepts employed in hallucination or illusion are *extrapolations* of concepts grounded in perception.³⁰

On the suggested view, any experience in which the same concepts are employed in the same sensory mode will have the same phenomenology. More specifically, the phenomenology of experience corresponds one-to-one with employing concepts in a sensory mode. The sensory modes in question are modes such as seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. Since phenomenology corresponds with *employing* concepts rather than with the concepts themselves, whether or not a concept is empty does not have any effect on phenomenology. As a consequence, the suggested view can give a positive explanation of what accounts for the possibility that a perception and a hallucination could be subjectively indistinguishable. In subjectively indistinguishable experiences, the very same concepts are employed in the same sensory mode.

By analyzing phenomenology in the way suggested, we can recognize the austere relationalist insight that the phenomenology of perceptual experience can and should be explained in terms of perceptual relations to the very external, mind-independent objects and property-instances that the experiencing subject is aware of. This insight demystifies the phenomenology of perceptual experience. However, by arguing for the radical thesis that all there is to having an experience with a certain phenomenology is to be perceptually related to the world, austere relationalists leave mysterious how one could be in a phenomenal state if one is not perceiving, but rather suffering an illusion or hallucination.³¹ By introducing concepts that ground our ability to refer to mind-independent objects and property-instances, we can reject this radical thesis. By rejecting the radical thesis, we can not only hold on to the content thesis, but moreover give a straightforward explanation of what accounts for the phenomenology of illusions and hallucinations.³²

I have presented a way of accounting for the phenomenology of perceptual experience in a way that recognizes both the content thesis and the austere relationalist insight that phenomenology is grounded in perceptual relations to mind-independent objects and the properties they instantiate. While I have argued that phenomenology corresponds one-to-one with employing concepts in a sensory mode, these concepts have in turn been analyzed in terms of perceptual relations to external, mind-independent objects and property-instances: possessing a concept is having the ability to pick out the objects or property-instances that the concept is of. So on the account presented, the phenomenology is explained in terms of perceptual relations to the objects and property-instances that the employed concepts pick out.

4.2 The Epistemological Objection and Relational Content

In the last section, I argued that austere relationalists may have an argument against the view that the phenomenology of perceptual experience is determined by its content, if content is understood to be independent of the material objects and property-instances that the experience is of. However, as I argued, the phenomenological insight of austere relationalism can be accommodated if the token content of experience ensues from employing concepts the possession of which is analyzed in terms of perceptual relations to the very mind-independent objects and property-instances that the perceptual experience is of.

In this section, I will show how the relational view of content that is implied by this way of thinking about phenomenology can circumvent the epistemological objection. Austere relationalists argue that only if the object of a perceptual experience makes a constitutive difference to individuating the experience, can perceptual experience provide us with knowledge of particular objects. I will argue that this epistemological objection does not support rejecting the content thesis. It does however provide a powerful reason for thinking that perceptual content is in part dependent on the environment of

the experiencing subject. Before I show why, it will be necessary to explain the epistemological objection in more detail.

In virtue of perceiving objects, a subject can gain knowledge of particular objects. Consider a subject, let's call her Anna, who sees a coffee cup. Anna sees the particular coffee cup in front of her and she gains perceptual knowledge of that particular cup. If she were perceiving a different cup than she actually is, she would gain knowledge of a different cup. Arguably, this is true even if the two cups are qualitatively indistinguishable. If her experience would be the same whether or not she were perceiving the particular coffee cup that she is in fact perceiving, it is not clear how her experience could ground knowledge of that particular coffee cup. Switching cases bring out the point particularly clearly. Imagine that Anna sees cup₁ at time t₁. Then she closes her eyes briefly and without her noticing cup₁ is replaced with the qualitatively indistinguishable cup₂. So when she reopens her eyes, she is causally related to a numerically distinct cup. Even though she cannot tell, her experiences before and after the cup was exchanged are of different objects. If she perceives cup₁ at t₁ and perceives cup₂ at t₂, then her claim that the cup she sees at t₂ is the same as the cup she saw at t₁ does not have the status of knowledge, since the claim is false. If the cup had not been replaced, then her claim could well have had the status of knowledge.³³

Another way of motivating the idea that perceptual experience grounds knowledge of particular objects is with regard to the role of perceptual experience in grounding knowledge of the referent of demonstratives. Perceptual experience grounds our ability to know which particular objects demonstrative terms refer to (Campbell 2002, ch. 2). If perceptual experiences are not individuated by their objects, it is not clear how they could play this cognitive role. If my experience would be exactly the same whether or not this particular cup is before me, then what is it about my experience that grounds my knowledge that "that" refers to that cup, and not some other cup? Campbell argues that only a view "on which experience of an object is a simple relation holding between perceiver and object, can characterize the kind of acquaintance with objects that provides knowledge of reference" (2002, p. 115). The idea is that when I say, "that cup of coffee is the one with sugar in it", your ability to know which cup I am referring to requires knowing which particular cup "that" refers to. This knowledge is grounded in being perceptually related to the particular cup to which "that" refers in the situation of perception.

The examples illustrate the point that experience can only ground knowledge of particular objects, if the particular object to which the subject is perceptually related makes a constitutive difference to the experience. For only if experiences are individuated by their objects, can perceptual experience be the evidential basis of knowledge of particular objects. The critical question is what counts as a constitutive difference. Consider again Anna, who sees coffee cup₁ at time t₁ and the qualitatively indistinguishable cup₂

at t_2 , but cannot tell that cup_1 and cup_2 are distinct. What is the difference between her experiences at t_1 and t_2 ? It is uncontroversial that the two experiences differ insofar as Anna is causally related to distinct cups. Austere representationalists suggest that this *causal* difference suffices to ground knowledge of particular objects (assuming they grant that perceptual experience yields such knowledge). By contrast, austere relationalists argue that the constitutive difference must be a difference in the *phenomenology* of the experiences. Against both I will argue that the constitutive difference should be understood in terms of a difference in the *content* of the experiences.

Austere relationalism is ideally structured to give an account of perceptual knowledge of particular objects insofar as the view posits that one can perceive o 's F ness if and only if one is perceptually related to o and o is F . By contrast, if the content and phenomenology of perceptual experience is altogether object-independent as the austere representationalist holds, then one's experience can have the same phenomenology and the same existentially quantified content $(\exists x)Fx$, regardless of what object if any one is perceptually related to. Austere representationalism has it that the content of an experience of cup_1 will be the very same as the content of an experience of the qualitatively indistinguishable cup_2 , since the view posits that two subjectively indistinguishable experiences do not differ in content. So if there must be a difference with regard to content or phenomenology for the relevant experience to ground knowledge of particular objects, then austere representationalism will fail to account for this epistemological role of perceptual experience. Another way of bringing out the contrast between austere relationalism and austere representationalism is to say that an object-independent representation that o is F does not entail that o is F . By contrast, austere relationalism has it that perceiving o 's F ness entails that o is F .

Now the austere representationalist could respond to the challenge of how to account for perceptual knowledge of particular objects by simply denying that perceptual experience grounds such knowledge. She could argue that perceptual experience does not give the perceiver information about *which* particular coffee cup is before her. It only provides information *that* there is a white coffee cup before her. If this is right and if lack of such information implies that perceptual experience does not ground knowledge of particular objects, then the epistemological objection loses its grip. But as switching cases show, perceptual experience does play this epistemological role. Anna is under the impression that she was perceptually related to the same cup at t_1 and at t_2 regardless of whether or not she is in fact perceiving the same cup at both times. An explanation is needed for what accounts for the fact that she could have knowledge of the cup being the same one if the cup she perceives at t_1 is the same as the one she perceives at t_2 .

The austere representationalist could accept that perceptual experience grounds knowledge of particular objects, but argue that it is the causal relation between subject and object that grounds such knowledge. The idea in

short is that if the subject is related to cup_1 , the content of her experience is caused by cup_1 . If she is related to cup_2 , the content of her experience is the very same, but it is caused by cup_2 . The brute external difference in causal relations accounts for any difference in knowledge. If this strategy would work, then there would be no reason to say that the causal difference between the experiences of cup_1 and cup_2 must bring about any constitutive difference to the experiences's content or phenomenology in order for experience to ground knowledge of particular objects. The problems with this causal strategy are the same as the ones that face any causal view of experience in general and any causal view of knowledge in particular. I will not rehearse these here, but will just mention that the most salient problem is that although causal relations may play an important role in transmitting information, it is far from clear that causal relations can be analyzed such that they play an epistemological role.³⁴

So far I have given support for the epistemological objection. In the rest of this section, I will assume that perceptual experience must be fundamentally relational to ground knowledge of particular objects. I will argue that a view on which perceptual experience is both fundamentally relational and representational is at least as well suited to account for the epistemological role of perceptual experience as austere relationalism. What accounts for the epistemological difference between Anna's perception of cup_1 at t_1 and her perception of cup_2 at t_2 ? We have already considered and rejected the idea that the difference is simply a difference in *causal* relations. There are at least two remaining ways of understanding the relevant difference: it can be analyzed in terms of a difference in the *phenomenology* or the *content* of the experiences.

The first option is motivated by the thesis that the phenomenology of one's experience is constituted by (awareness or acquaintance relations to) the mind-independent objects in one's environment and the properties that these objects instantiate. On one reading, this thesis implies that a difference in reference goes hand in hand with a phenomenological difference. Austere relationalists pursue this option. Campbell argues that the object of perception is a constituent of the perception insofar as attending to it brings about an unrepeatable phenomenal aspect of the experience. If phenomenology is not multiply realizable and if the phenomenology of experience is constituted by material objects, then it follows that the phenomenology of perceptions of numerically distinct objects necessarily differs, even if the objects are qualitatively indistinguishable. Campbell commits himself to this radical consequence of austere relationalism in his discussion of the following inference:

P1: That woman is running.

P2: That woman is jumping.

Conclusion: That woman is running and jumping.

As he argues, “[r]ecognizing the validity of the inference requires that your experience should make the sameness of the object phenomenally accessible to you” (2002, p. 129f.).³⁵ If the woman who is running were in fact the qualitatively indistinguishable twin of the woman who was jumping, then Campbell would have to say that one’s experience should make the difference of the objects phenomenally accessible to one, should one recognize the invalidity of the inference. It is however counterintuitive that the distinctness of the objects would be phenomenally accessible to one through perceptual experience—at least if the two women were indistinguishable to the perceiver and if she did not notice that there were two different women present.³⁶

Austere relationalists could avoid this counterintuitive consequence by arguing that phenomenology is multiply realizable. The idea is that the very same phenomenology could be realized by relations to numerically distinct but qualitatively indistinguishable objects. If phenomenology is multiply realizable, then a subject could have the very same phenomenology regardless of whether she is perceptually related to cup_1 or cup_2 . Martin accepts a version of this idea with his notion of phenomenal character. He argues that perceptions of numerically distinct but qualitatively indistinguishable objects have the same phenomenal character. Nonetheless, he denies that they have the same phenomenology in the full sense. By introducing a different kind of phenomenology, which he calls “phenomenal nature”, he argues that there is a phenomenal difference between the two perceptual experiences despite the sameness in phenomenal character:

Once we reflect on the way in which an experience has a subject matter . . . then we need a way of making room for the essentially or inherently particular aspects of this as well as the general attributes of experience. We need to contrast the unrepeatable aspect of its phenomenology, what we might call its phenomenal nature, with that it has in common with qualitatively the same experiential events, what we might call its phenomenal character. (2002b, p. 194)

The notion of a phenomenal nature captures an unrepeatable aspect of phenomenology that, according to Martin, cannot be specified without reference to the actual object of the experience.³⁷

Positing such object-dependent and unrepeatable phenomenal natures entails that any two experiences of distinct objects necessarily differ phenomenally, even if the relevant objects are qualitatively indistinguishable. This consequence is counterintuitive as a thesis about phenomenology. It is counterintuitive even if one acknowledges that two experiences can exhibit phenomenal differences while being subjectively indistinguishable. Let’s assume for the sake of argument that two experiences could be subjectively indistinguishable despite phenomenal differences between the experiences due to minute differences in perceived colors or shapes. Such differences are at

least *in principle subjectively accessible* since there is a qualitative difference between the perceived colors or shapes. Were our perceptual apparatus better, we would detect the differences in color or shape. The case of numerically distinct but qualitatively indistinguishable objects is different in kind, since in this case there is no qualitative difference between the perceived objects. So no matter how good our perceptual apparatus is, we could not detect a difference between the objects. Accepting the idea that there can be differences in phenomenology that are not subjectively accessible requires accepting that there can be aspects of phenomenology that are *in principle not subjectively accessible to consciousness*. So, an austere relationalist view on which perceptual relations to qualitatively indistinguishable, but numerically distinct objects necessarily yields distinct phenomenology must reject the idea that phenomenology is necessarily related to what is at the very minimum potentially subjectively accessible to consciousness. A view that rejects this idea has the counterintuitive consequence that phenomenology is detached from what is potentially available to consciousness.

Consider an austere relationalist who accepts that phenomenology is multiply realizable without endorsing Martin's thesis that the particular object perceived makes a difference to phenomenology. Such an austere relationalist has it that perceptions of numerically distinct but qualitatively indistinguishable objects have the very same phenomenology. While someone who takes this approach avoids the counterintuitive phenomenological consequences discussed above, he could not appeal to the phenomenology of perceptual experience to ground knowledge of particular objects. This brings out a dilemma for the austere relationalist. If he holds that two experiences of numerically distinct but qualitatively indistinguishable objects do not differ phenomenally, then he cannot appeal to the phenomenology of perceptual experience to play the epistemological role of grounding knowledge of particular objects. The alternative option for austere relationalists is to embrace the counterintuitive consequence that the two perceptual experiences of the cups differ phenomenally. On this option, the phenomenology can play the epistemological role of grounding knowledge of particular objects, but only at the cost of detaching phenomenology from what is potentially subjectively available to consciousness.

The obvious solution to the problem is to argue that it is not the *phenomenology*, but rather the *content* of perceptual experience that accounts for the epistemological difference between perceptions of numerically distinct but qualitatively indistinguishable objects. Since austere relationalists deny that perceptual experience has content, this solution is not open to them. If we accept that perceptions of distinct objects differ in content, then we can accept that Anna's perception of cup₁ at t₁ and her perception of cup₂ at t₂ are phenomenally the very same, while acknowledging a difference with regard to the experiences that accounts for the experiences yielding knowledge of distinct objects.

In the last section, I argued that when we perceive we employ concepts the possession of which can be analyzed in terms of perceptual relations to external, mind-independent objects and the properties that these objects instantiate. A hallucinating subject employs the same concepts that she would employ in a subjectively indistinguishable perception to refer to the perceived objects and property-instances. Since a hallucinating subject does not stand in an awareness relation to objects or property-instances, the concepts she employs remain empty. If the token content of experience ensues from employing concepts, and possessing a concept is a matter of being able to pick out its referent, then perceptual relations to objects and property-instances are implicated in the very nature of the content of experience. More specifically, if the fact that concepts pick out objects and property-instances in some situations and not in others has any semantic significance, then the token content ensuing from employing concepts will depend in part on the environment in which they are employed. I will argue that the token content of experience is inherently relational. As I am using the term, content is *inherently relational* if and only if it depends at least in part on the mind-independent objects and property-instances that the content is of. We can call a content that is inherently relational a *relational content* and any content that is not inherently relational a *non-relational content*.

There are many different ways of understanding non-relational contents. They can be thought of as *de dicto* modes of presentation, general descriptive Russellian propositions, or phenomenal contents. What these contents have in common is that the content is the very same regardless of what (if anything) the experiencing subject is related to. A non-relational content lays down a condition that something must satisfy to be the object determined by the content. The condition to be satisfied does not depend on the object that satisfies it. So the relation between content and object is simply the semantic relation of satisfaction. By contrast, for something to be the object of the relational content, the content must constitutively depend at least in part on that very object. So while non-relational contents are the very same regardless of the environment in which the subject experiences, relational contents differ depending on the environment (if any) that the subject is related to. The token relational content covaries with the environment in which the subject experiences. In the case of a successful perceptual experience, the token content determines a referent. Insofar as the token relational content is individuated in part by the environment perceived, it is at least in part dependent on this environment.

The thesis that content ensues from employing concepts that pick out objects and property-instances—rather than being constituted by the naked objects and properties themselves—implies that the content of experience is not just inherently relational, but moreover Fregean. Paralleling the distinction between relational and non-relational contents, there are two standard ways of thinking about Fregean modes of presentation, which correspond to

Frege's use of senses as accounting for both the cognitive significance of an expression and for a way of referring to an object. If one focuses mainly on the role of modes of presentation as accounting for cognitive significance, then it is natural to think of them as *de dicto*. Insofar as a *de dicto* mode of presentation can be the very same regardless of what (if anything) the experiencing subject is related to, this way of thinking about content amounts to a version of austere representationalism. To the extent that austere representationalism falls prey to the phenomenological and epistemological objections, any view on which perceptual content is understood as constituted by *de dicto* modes of presentations will do so as well.

If perceptual content is understood to be constituted by *de re* modes of presentation rather than *de dicto* modes of presentation, then this danger can be avoided. If the reference-determining role of modes of presentation is taken seriously, then it is natural to think of modes of presentations as *de re*. This way of thinking about the content of experience recognizes that the mental act of representing an object or property-instance is not independent of determining the external particular that is the referent of the sense. *De re* modes of presentation are inherently relational in that what object (if any) the subject is related to makes a constitutive difference to the nature of the ensuing content.

Now, there are at least two ways of understanding relational contents and consequently two ways of understanding *de re* modes of presentation. On one view, a subject can only have a contentful experience if she is related to the very object that her experience purports to be of. This view has it that relational contents are *wholly* object-dependent and it implies a disjunctive view of the content of experience. Content disjunctivists accept the austere relationalist idea that the structure of perception is fundamentally different from the structure of hallucination, but in contrast to austere relationalists, they hold that a perceiving subject represents the objects and property-instances that she is related to. In the case of a hallucination it only seems to her that she is representing. So content disjunctivism has it that hallucinations do not have content. There is only an illusion of content.³⁸ The notion of content in play in such a disjunctivist account is very different from the one I am defending since it does not recognize the seems-content link. When a subject hallucinates, the world seems a certain way to her. As I argued in §2.1 the world seeming a certain way to the experiencing subject is sufficient to establish that the experience has content on the understanding of content that I am propagating. Since content disjunctivism does not recognize the seems-content link, the view will not serve our purposes. Indeed, if the seems-content link holds, then content disjunctivism cannot be right.

We can recognize the seems-content link while circumventing the epistemological objection, if we understand the content of experience to be *partly* rather than *wholly* dependent on objects, property-instances, and other particulars in the experiencer's environment. Given that a hallucinating subject

employs the very same concepts that she would be employing were she perceptually related to objects and property-instances, there is no reason to think that her experience does not have content. There is however reason to think that the content of her experience is *partly* dependent on her environment.³⁹ I will call such partly environment-dependent modes of presentations *potentially gappy Fregean contents*.

A *de re* mode of presentation is such a potentially gappy Fregean contents if and only if the content of any two subjectively indistinguishable perceptions e_1 and e_1^* in which a subject s is perceptually related to the same object o_1 in the same way will include $MOP_r(o_1)$, where $MOP_r(o_1)$ is a token content that ensues from employing the relevant concept. The token content of a perceptual experience e_2 that is subjectively indistinguishable from e_1 , but in which a subject is perceptually related to the numerically distinct object o_2 , will ensue from employing the same concepts. However, since the subject is perceptually related to a distinct object in e_1 and e_2 , the token content $MOP_r(o_2)$ of e_2 is different even if o_1 and o_2 are qualitatively indistinguishable. Modes of presentation of properties can be specified in an analogous way. So if I perceive the white cup o_1 , the token content of my perceptual experience will be: $\langle MOP_r(o_1), MOP_r(P) \rangle$, where $MOP_r(o_1)$ is a *de re* mode of presentation of the cup o_1 and $MOP_r(P)$ is a *de re* mode of presentation of the property P that this object instantiates. When I perceive the white cup o_2 , the token content of my perceptual experience will be distinct although the same concepts are employed: $\langle MOP_r(o_2), MOP_r(P) \rangle$. A hallucination that is subjectively indistinguishable from e_1 is a matter of employing the same concept, but since there is no object present the concept remains empty. The ensuing token content is gappy. So if I hallucinate a white cup, the token content of my hallucination will be: $\langle MOP_r(_), MOP_r(_) \rangle$, where $MOP_r(_)$ is an empty object-concept and $MOP_r(_)$ is an empty property-concept.⁴⁰ The empty concept in the object-place specifies the kind of object that has to be present for the experience to be accurate. It accounts for the intentional directedness of the experience to a (seeming) particular object. The empty concept in the property-place specifies the properties that this object would instantiate, if the experience were accurate. Since the hallucinating subject is not related to the object or property-instances that the concepts employed purport to pick out, the token modes of presentation are gappy. The gaps mark that the subject fails to refer.⁴¹

Insofar as an experiencing subject can employ a concept even if she is not in an environment that contains the object or property-instance that the concept purports to pick out, *employing* concepts is independent of objects and property-instances. As a consequence, subjectively indistinguishable experiences share a content element (namely mode of presentation types) that is independent of objects and property-instances. The token content of a hallucination is a token of the same content type as the token content of a subjectively indistinguishable perception. The content types are constituted

by the concepts employed. As I argued in the last section, the phenomenology of the experience corresponds one-to-one with the concepts employed in a sensory mode. So, the correspondence between the way the world seems to an experiencing subject and the token content of her experience should be understood as a one-many correspondence. While experiences in which one's surroundings seem the very same way have the same content type, the token content covaries with the environment of the experiencing subject. So the very same content-type can be either accurate or inaccurate. By contrast, a content-token is guaranteed to be accurate as long as it is not gappy. If a content-token is gappy, then it thereby fails to be accurate insofar as it fails to make an accurate claim of the world.

Austere relationalism has it that for perceptual experience to ground knowledge of particular objects, there must be a phenomenal difference between experiences of qualitatively indistinguishable but numerically distinct objects. On the view of content developed, we can avoid this unfortunate consequence, while recognizing the austere relationalist insight that relations to objects are essential for grounding knowledge of particular objects. I have argued that the content of experience is in part dependent on the experiencer's environment. By arguing that only the part of the experience that is not environment-dependent grounds the phenomenology of the experience, the provided view allows that experiences of numerically distinct but qualitatively indistinguishable objects differ in content, while having the same phenomenology. Any epistemological reason there is to hold that perception is fundamentally a matter of being perceptually related to objects can be accommodated if perceptual content is understood to be at least in part object-dependent or more generally environment-dependent. I have not argued that this is the only or the best way to account for perceptual knowledge. My aim was more modest. It was to show that a view which endorses the content thesis while recognizing the content of experience to be inherently relational can account for the epistemological role of perceptual experience in much the same way as austere relationalists.

5. Conclusion

I have defended the view that perceptual experience has content by critically discussing what I have identified as the four main austere relationalist objections against the content thesis and by articulating the Master Argument for perceptual content. I showed that the notion of content established by this argument is neutral between three ways of understanding the relation between the experiencing subject and the content of her experience. On one of these ways, content is merely associated with the relevant experience. In the last section, I qualified the notion of perceptual content established by the Master Argument with the aim of showing that content is not merely associated with the relevant experience, but that experience has content in

that experiencing subjects represent and misrepresent. By arguing that the phenomenology of perceptual experience is best explained in terms of employing concepts in a sensory mode, I showed that it is part of the fundamental nature of perceptual experience to employ concepts. I argued moreover that the content of experience ensues from employing concepts. If it is part of the fundamental nature of perceptual experience to employ concepts and if the content of experience ensues from employing concepts, then experience has content insofar as subjects represents or misrepresent their environment. So perceptual experience has representational content.

While austere relationalists have good reasons to criticize many views that rely on the content thesis, I aim to have shown that any reason there is to argue that perception is fundamentally relational can be accommodated by understanding the content of experience to be inherently relational. So I have argued that perceptual experience is fundamentally both relational and representational. More specifically, I have argued that if perceptual content is understood to be inherently relational, then we can take on board the phenomenological and epistemological insights of austere relationalists without giving up the thesis that perceptual experience has content. While austere relationalists argue that perceptual relations to the world should be taken as primary in any explanation of what brings about perceptual awareness of the world, austere representationalists take the content of experience to be explanatorily primary. Against both I have argued that perceptual relations to the world and the content of experience are mutually dependent in any explanation of what brings about perceptual awareness of the world.⁴²

Notes

¹ In his famous Stufenleiter passage of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant categorizes different kinds of representations: “The genus is representation in general (*representatio*). Subordinate to it stands representation with consciousness (*perceptio*). A perception which relates solely to the subjects as the modification of its state is sensation (*sensatio*), an objective perception is knowledge (*cognitio*)” (A320/B377).

² Martin (2002a, 2004) argues against any view on which experience can be analyzed in terms of a propositional attitude and a content, leaving open the possibility that experience could have content without the subject standing in a propositional attitude to that content. Since he does not outright deny that experience has content, I will discuss his view only to the extent that his positive view of perceptual experience is structurally similar to that of austere relationalists. Campbell (2002) calls his view the “relational view”, Martin (2002a, 2004) calls his “naïve realism”, while Brewer (2006) calls his the “object view”. I will refer to the view with the label “austere relationalism” since the most distinctive features of the view are arguably the central role of relations between perceiving subjects and the world as well as its austerity: the view is austere insofar as it denies that experience has any representational component.

³ This commitment does not entail that perceptual experience has accuracy conditions. As I will show in §2.2, additional commitments need to be made to establish this further claim.

⁴ The accounts that Travis targets are committed to “first, that a perceptual experience has a particular representational content . . . second, that the perceiver can recognize this feature of it . . . third, that this is a content the perceiver may accept or reject” (2004, p. 82f.). Brewer

specifies the views he targets as committed to the following principles: “The first is that contents admit the possibility of falsity, and that genuine perception is therefore to be construed as a success, in which the way things experientially seem to the subject to be is determined as true by the way things actually are in the world around him . . . The second is that contents involve a certain kind of generality, representing some object or objects as being determinate ways that such things in general may be” (2006, p. 166).

⁵ Naturally, different austere relationalists emphasize different objections. For example Travis emphasizes the indeterminacy objection, while Martin emphasizes the phenomenological objection. A further reason that austere relationalists cite for denying that experience has content is that only if experience is not an exercising of conceptual skills can it explain our ability to exercise conceptual skills. Campbell argues that “[t]he fundamental objection to the common factor approach is that on the common factor approach, experience cannot play its explanatory role; we cannot understand how experience, so conceived, could be what provides us with our concepts of the objects around us” (2002, p. 123). The idea in short is that if perception provides us with concepts, then it cannot consist in employing concepts. I will not here treat this as a separate objection, but will rather discuss it under the heading of the phenomenological objection. As I will argue in §4.1, we need not choose between perception providing us with concepts and perception being a matter of employing concepts as long as the very concepts that are employed in perception are understood to be grounded in perception.

⁶ For a defense of situation-dependent properties, see my 2008.

⁷ Byrne argues that austere relationalists face the problem of what binds the relevant objects with the relevant properties: “Take an ordinary situation in which one sees a yellow lemon and a red tomato. One is ‘simply presented’ with the lemon, the tomato, yellowness, and redness—perhaps that amounts to the fact that one sees the lemon and the tomato and sees yellow and red. But that is not all: the lemon is ‘simply presented’ as yellow, not as red . . . How does the fact that the lemon is yellow get into the perceptual story?” (2009, p. 436f.). This problem of what unifies the relevant objects and properties can be dealt with in an austere relationalist account by arguing that the properties that an object instantiates are necessarily (roughly) collocated with the object. The qualification “roughly” leaves room for the color of the object being only a surface property of the object, rather than a property that encompasses the three-dimensional shape of the object. This strategy of collocation deals with another criticism of austere relationalism. Siegel (2010) argues that the thesis that subjects are related to objects and the properties these objects instantiate implies that subjects are related to facts such as that *o* is *F*, which in turn implies that subjects are related to propositions. So she argues that austere relationalists are committed to treating perception as factive and thus as propositionally structured. If the thesis that subjects are related to objects and the properties these objects instantiate is analyzed in terms of collocation of the relevant objects and property-instances, then no appeal to facts is necessary to make sense of the austere relationalist thesis.

⁸ Recently this state of affairs has started to be rectified: Byrne (2009) and Siegel (2010) have put forth different defenses of the thesis that perceptual experience has content. In contrast to Byrne and Siegel, the defense of the content thesis presented here takes into account the phenomenological and epistemological objections of austere relationalism and moreover attempts to accommodate some of the insights of austere relationalism.

⁹ For arguments highlighting the relation between the phenomenology, accuracy conditions, and content of perceptual experience, see also Byrne 2001, Pautz 2009, and Siegel 2010.

¹⁰ As Travis puts it: “If perception is representational, then for any perceptual experience, there must be a way things are according to it . . . things looking as they do on a given occasion must fix what representational content experience then has” (2004, p. 71).

¹¹ See Chisholm 1957 and also Jackson 1977. Travis focuses on the case of visual perception and therefore focuses on looks-locutions, but his point arguably generalizes to other sensory modes. In the interest of generality, I will talk of the world seeming a certain way in one or more

sensory modes, rather than the world looking a certain way. This section draws on Byrne 2009, which provides a detailed discussion of Travis's argument against the thesis that experience is looks-indexed.

¹² This distinction between epistemic and comparative use of appearance words was first introduced by Chisholm (1957, pp. 43–52) and later taken up by Jackson 1977, pp. 30ff.

¹³ One might object that this notion of content simply amounts to what Travis calls autorepresentation, which he understands in the following way: “To take things to be thus and so just is to represent them to oneself as that way. Such representing is all in the attitude . . . one might find such [auto]representation in embedded propositions, ‘mock speech’.” He contrasts auto- with allorepresentation which “represents such-and-such as *so*”. Travis argues that, in contrast to autorepresentation, allorepresentation is “*committed* representation” (2004, p. 60f). Allorepresentation is the notion of representation that Travis targets with his criticism. The notion of content that falls out of the seems-content link amounts to allorepresentation given that how one's environment seems to one does not simply amount to taking it to be some way, but moreover to be committed to it being that way. While autorepresentation may be the kind of representation in play in “mock speech”, I do not take it to be a kind of representation that plays any role in perceptual experience. Travis admits as much (p. 65). For the purposes of this paper, we can safely assume that what is at stake is whether experience involves what Travis calls allorepresentation, not what he calls autorepresentation.

¹⁴ I discuss the implications of restricting *P2* to noncomparative seemings as well as the implications of dropping this restriction shortly.

¹⁵ One may argue that even these cases are based on sensory experience. If they are, then the content of the experience can be said to correspond to how the world seems without qualifications. The point of the qualification is to allow that there may be cases of seeming that are not sensory. If there are no such cases, then the qualification can safely be dropped.

¹⁶ For a recent defense of this thesis, see for instance Price 2005.

¹⁷ For a discussion of reasons to reject Travis's argument, see Byrne 2009.

¹⁸ There are a number of ways to understand the content to be as fine-grained as the phenomenology. One way is to argue that the content is constituted by demonstrative concepts that are individuated by the very objects and property-instances perceived (McDowell 1994). This approach is compatible with arguing that the experiencing subject is in a nonconceptual state insofar as the subject may not have the tools required to perceptually report the conceptual content of her experience. A second way is to argue that the content of experience is constituted at least in part by nonconceptual content (Peacocke 1992). My argument is neutral on these two options.

¹⁹ The clause “where *C* corresponds to the way the world seems to the experiencing subject” makes explicit that the relevant notion of content in play is the one specified by the seems-content link.

²⁰ The thesis that perceiving *o*'s *F*ness implies that *o* is *F* should not be understood as implying that perception is factive. My argument is neutral on whether perception is factive. However, while perceiving *o*'s *F*ness implies that *o* is *F*, perceiving *o*'s *F*ness does not imply that one perceives that *o* is *F*. As I discussed in fn. 7, one can analyze *o*'s *F*ness in terms of *o* and *F* being collocated.

²¹ For a detailed discussion of this set of issues, see Pautz 2009 and Siegel 2010.

²² Alternative views have it that the content and phenomenology of perceptual experience stand in a one-to-many or a many-to-one correspondence. In §4, I will argue that the content and phenomenology of perceptual experience are best understood as standing in a many-to-one correspondence.

²³ McGinn (1982), Davies (1992), Tye (1995), Lycan (1996), and Byrne (2001) among others have defended views that are committed to perceptual content being phenomenal content.

²⁴ For a detailed discussion of the relation between the content of pictures and the content of experiences and mental states more generally, see Crane 2009.

²⁵ In the context of this paper, I will assume that the content of experience is conceptually structured. It is important to note that the content can be conceptually structured, while the state of experience is nonconceptual insofar as it is possible to be in a state with content *C* without being able to fully articulate *C*. I take the state of experience to be nonconceptual in this way, however one can accept my argument even if one takes the state of experience to be conceptual. For a defense of the (non)conceptual state/(non)conceptual content distinction, see Heck 2002, 484f. and Byrne 2004. It should be noted that Byrne formulates the notion of being in a nonconceptual state in terms of not possessing the concepts that constitute the state. Given how I am understanding content, it is necessary to possess the concepts that constitute the content of one's experience, however possessing concepts that constitute the content of the experience is compatible with not being able to articulate this content. So for my purposes, it is important that the notion of nonconceptual states be understood in terms of not being able to articulate the content of the experience rather than not possessing the concepts that constitute the content.

The idea that one can fail to be able to articulate the content of one's experience despite possessing the concepts that constitute this content is best explained by example. Given the notion of concept in play it is for instance unproblematic to attribute basic spatial concepts to cats insofar as cats have the ability to distinguish between one object being above rather than below a second object or one object being to one rather than the other side of a second object. If this is right, then it is plausible to say that cats possess such basic spatial concepts despite the fact that they do not have the tools to articulate the content of their perceptions. Similarly, it is plausible that we possess perceptual demonstrative concepts that ground our ability to pick out features of our environment, such as the particular vivid and varied color play of a lush forest, without having the tools to fully articulate the content of our perception when we see such a lush forest. The view of content defended in this paper could be modified to include nonconceptual content while leaving the basic structure intact as long as content is at least in part constituted by concepts in ways that I have argued.

²⁶ See for instance Byrne 2009.

²⁷ For a discussion of the problems that arise if phenomenology is explained in terms of awareness relations to property-clusters, propositions, sense-data, intentional objects, or any other peculiar entities, see my forthcoming.

²⁸ For a developed view of concepts as analyzed in terms of their possession conditions that in turn are analyzed in terms of abilities, see Peacocke 1992. See also Sosa 1993. To avoid terminological confusion, the notion of concepts in play must be distinguished from any notion on which concepts are mental representations (Fodor 1975, Prinz 2002) or prototypes (Rosch 1978).

²⁹ For a detailed development of this idea, see my forthcoming. Analyzing concepts in terms of their possession conditions does not imply that concepts are behaviorally reduced. As I am understanding it, the thesis does not even imply that one needs to have successfully applied a concept to count as possessing it. The thesis is rather that one needs to have the *ability* to successfully apply a concept to count as possessing it. This allows for the possibility that a subject can have hallucinations of properties or objects even if she has not had past perceptual experiences of instances of the same property or the same type of object. Accepting this is compatible with the thesis that any perceptual concept is necessarily grounded in perception, for one can accept that a concept must be grounded in perception, but not necessarily in the subject's own perceptions. A subject could acquire a concept through testimony from someone who has acquired the concept on the basis of perceptual relations to the objects or property-instances that the concept is of. An alternative way of developing the view that experience is a matter of employing concepts the possession of which depends on perceptual relations to the objects or property-instances that the concept is of is to say that one can only possess concepts acquired through past perceptions. This alternative strategy would require restricting possible

hallucinations to one's in which concepts acquired through past perceptions are recombined or extrapolated.

³⁰ It would lead too far afield to discuss the details of what it takes to extrapolate a concept here. For a discussion, see Browne 2002. The suggested way of thinking about experience makes it possible to acknowledge that a hallucinating subject does not stand in an awareness relation to anything despite enjoying a phenomenology that purports to be of mind-independent objects and property-instances. For an account of the intensional notion of awareness in play and an analysis of how to account for hallucinations as of uninstantiated properties within the suggested framework, see my forthcoming.

³¹ For a defense of this radical austere relationalist thesis, see Campbell 2002, Brewer 2006, and Fish 2009. Martin (2004) argues for a more moderate version of austere relationalism.

³² One may object that the account presented overly assimilates experience with thought. The difference between experience and thought can be accounted for in a number of ways within the framework provided. One way is with regard to differences in the mode in which the concepts are employed. In experience but not in thought, concepts are employed in a sensory mode. For a discussion of how to account for aspects of phenomenology that are not a matter of the world seeming a certain way (e.g. blurriness) within the framework provided, see my forthcoming.

³³ The qualification "could well" leaves room for the possibility that there might have been epistemic defects.

³⁴ For a detailed criticism of causal theories of perception, see Hyman 1992.

³⁵ It should be noted that the inference is in fact only valid if "That" refers to the same woman in all three instances.

³⁶ Campbell acknowledges that "it may be impossible to tell, simply by having the experience, which sort of experience it is—whether it is one that involves a single object, or if it is, rather, an experience that involves a multiplicity of objects" (2002, p. 130). The question is how acknowledging this is compatible with positing that "[r]ecognizing the validity of the inference [cited above] requires that your experience should make the sameness of the object phenomenally accessible to you".

³⁷ Assuming that there is such an unrepeatable aspect of phenomenology, it is not obvious why it must be due to the particular *object* perceived, rather than the particular *event* in which the particular object is perceived. On a sufficiently holistic view of experience, every experience may be understood as necessarily phenomenally distinct insofar as it is a distinct and unique event of experiencing. On such a holistic view, one could say that the phenomenology of every experience is distinct regardless of what object if any the experiencing subject is related to.

³⁸ For a defense of such a view, see Evans 1982 and McDowell 1984. McDowell insists that the perceiving and the hallucinating subject do not share anything that could count as "an *aspect* or *ingredient* of content" (1984, p. 103n).

³⁹ For an earlier version of this way of understanding perceptual content, see my 2006. I develop this way of understanding perceptual content in detail in my 2010. Peacocke (1981), Bach (1987/1994), and Recanati (1993) develop different ways of understanding *de re* modes of presentation that are only partly object-dependent. The understanding of perceptual content developed here turns out to partly parallel their work as well as the work of so-called latitudinarians, according to which *de re* attitudes (or contents) are a special case of *de dicto* attitudes (or contents); see in particular Sosa 1970, 1995 and Jeshion 2002.

⁴⁰ I am assuming that the *res* of a *de re* mode of presentation can be an object or a property that this object instantiates. Depending on whether one understands the nature of properties that subjects experience as tropes or as universals, one might argue alternatively that the content of hallucination is $\langle \text{MOP}_r(_), \text{MOP}_r(\text{P}) \rangle$.

⁴¹ Burge has been read as defending a gappy content view. However, as Burge writes of his view "I have heard interpretations . . . according to which there is a 'hole' in the representational

aspects of the proposition, where the hole corresponds to the object (which completes the proposition). I regard these interpretations as rather silly” (1977/2007, p. 75). Burge argues that there are demonstrative elements in the content of experience that are in place regardless of whether they refer to the object of experience. As he puts it “I do not think that a physical *re* in the empirical world . . . is itself ‘part of’ the belief. . . . In my view, the Intentional side of a belief is its only side. In many cases, in my view, a belief that is in fact *de re* might not have been successfully referential (could have failed to be *de re*) and still would have remained the same belief. Moreover, the belief itself can always be individuated, or completely characterized, in terms of the Intentional content” (1991, p. 209). Insofar as on Burge’s view the intentional content of two experiences can be the very same regardless of the environment, the content is not relational and does not covary with the environment of the perceiving subject.

⁴² I am indebted to John Campbell, David Chalmers, Jonathan Cohen, Bill Fish, Hanjo Glock, Matthew Kennedy, Adam Pautz, Jonathan Schaffer, and a *Noûs* referee for detailed written comments on an early version of this paper. Thanks are due also to Ned Block, Bill Brower, Tim Crane, Kathrin Glüer, John Maier, and M.G.T. Martin for helpful comments and discussions. Finally, I am grateful to audiences at the AAP, the ANU, the Arché Research Centre, St. Andrews, as well as the workshop on Knowledge and Perception at the University of Stockholm.

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