

Relativizing the Opposition between Content and State Nonconceptualism

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Abstract

Content nonconceptualism and State conceptualism are motivated by different readings of what I want to call here Bermúdez's conditions on content-attribution (2007). In one reading, what is required is a neo-Fregean content to solve problems of cognitive significance at the nonconceptual level (Toribio, 2008; Duhau, 2011). In the other reading, what is required is a neo-Russellian or possible-world content to account for how conspecifics join attention and cooperate, contemplating the same things from different perspectives in the same perceptual field. The solution to this apparent contradiction is the rejection of the real content view and the adherence to what I call here Content-pragmatism: there is no such thing as *the* content of experience. According to content-pragmatism, "proposition" is not as real as a mental state, but rather it is a term of art that semanticists use, as a matter of theoretical convenience, to classify mental states. What follows from Content-pragmatism is Content-pluralism: there are so many contents that are required to meet Bermúdez's condition on content-attribution. Because both criticism and the defense of State conceptualism overlook the real scope of Bermúdez's condition on content-attribution, they are ineffective. In this paper, I will argue that the opposition between State and Content nonconceptualism is a real one, but only a relative one, that is, relative to the opposite constraints to be met. If we want to solve the problems of cognitive significance, the best we can do is to let the content of experience be modeled as neo-Fregean content, namely, a compound of nonconceptual modes of presentation of objects and properties. In this case, Content-nonconceptualism prevails. In contrast, if we want to account for how conspecifics join attention to the same entities in the same perceptual field from different perspectives, the best we can do is let the content of experience be modeled either as a structured Russellian proposition or as a function from possible worlds to truth-values. In this case, State-nonconceptualism prevails.

Introduction

Nonconceptualism can be traced back to British Empiricism. Hume famously holds that impressions were *prior* to concepts in order of perceptual processing and in order of acquisition. In the same vein, Kant claims that sensible intuition is *prior to* and independent of concepts and thoughts both in order of perceptual processing and in order of acquisition. According to Kant's famous dictum, without concepts, sensible intuitions are blind, and conversely, without sensible intuitions, concepts are empty. In contemporary terms, the key idea behind nonconceptualism is that *some mental states* can represent the world even though the bearer of those mental states need not possess the concepts required to specify correctly what those states represent, their so-called representational content.

This basic idea has been developed in different ways and applied to different kinds of mental states according to many contemporary philosophers. However, not all of these developments

and applications are consistent with each other (Byrne, 2005; Crowther, 2006; Heck, 2000, 2007; Speaks, 2005). The main discrepancy I want to focus on in this paper is between what Heck has called the *state view* and the *content view* (2000). According to the *state view*, nonconceptualism is characterized in terms of *kinds of states*: nonconceptualism is a property of mental states, that is, a view about the relation between the subject undergoing a mental state and the content of that state. A mental state is state-nonconceptual when it is a concept-independent state. Conversely, a mental state is state-conceptual when the subject cannot be in the mental state in question without possessing the concepts involved in the correct specification of its contents:

State-Nonconceptualism: For any perceptual state *PS* with representational content *C*, *PS* is nonconceptual if any subject *S* need not possess the concepts required for the correct characterization of *C*.

One of the key features of State-nonconceptualism is that quite different mental states, such as experiences and propositional attitudes, might share the same content. Now, when we look back to the philosophical tradition and even to the recent contemporary debate, it seems undeniable that the main purpose of introducing the notion of nonconceptual content in the literature is just to identify a form of representation or mental state (rather than a form of representational content) that is prior to and independent of concept. For example, when Hume and Kant speak about impressions or sensible intuitions that are prior to and independent of concepts, what they have in mind are perceptual states rather than the contents of experiences.

Even so, according to Content-nonconceptualism, nonconceptualism is better characterized in terms of *the kind of content* that experiences possess, as opposed to the content of beliefs and other propositional attitudes. A mental state is content-nonconceptual when the representational content of the state is of a particular type, namely, it is not composed of concepts. Conversely, a mental state is content-conceptual when it is a structured complex compounded of concepts. Now, while according to State-nonconceptualism, experiences and propositional attitudes might share the same content even when the subject is in quite different kinds of mental states, according to Content-nonconceptualism they could not possibly share the same content. Content-nonconceptualism can be couched as follows:

Content-Nonconceptualism: For any perceptual state *PS* with representational content *C*, *PS* is nonconceptual if *C* is not a structured complex compounded of concepts (Fregean senses).

According to Speak (2005), however, most arguments in favor of Content-nonconceptualism only support State-nonconceptualism. Take, for instance, the so-called fineness of grain argument, based on the well-known idea that our experiences outstrip any conceptual abilities. The problem with this type of argument, Speak claims, is that even if we grant that the content of experience is far finer-grained than the content of corresponding beliefs, that argument itself does not support Content-nonconceptualism. The only conclusion that we can draw from this is that we do not possess the concepts required for the correct specification of everything we can and do experience.

Still, State-nonconceptualism recently has come under attack. Bermúdez (2007: 67) disregards State-nonconceptualism by arguing that it is “unmotivated and fails to address the issues that the theory of nonconceptual content is intended to address”. In the same vein, Toribio (2008: 351) goes further by arguing that without assuming that State-nonconceptualism entails Content-nonconceptualism. State-nonconceptualism is untenable, since it leaves content-

attribution unsupported. According to the criticisms of Bermúdez and Toribio, either State-nonconceptualism entails Content-nonconceptualism or is inconsistent.

In both cases, criticisms of State-nonconceptualism are motivated by the general requirement that content must capture how things appear to the subject. Let us call it Bermúdez's condition of content-attribution. According to Toribio (2008) and Duhau (2011), Bermúdez's condition is required to solve problems of cognitive significance at the nonconceptual level. That is the reason why in her recent defense of State-nonconceptualism against Bermúdez's and Toribio's criticisms, Duhau (2011) holds that the *form* of mental states can solve problems of cognitive significance without appealing to any Fregean content.

In this paper, I will first argue against Duhau that the mere syntactic form cannot meet the cognitive significance requirement but only a neo-Fregean conception of content. However, I will also argue on behalf of State-nonconceptualism that Bermúdez's constraint has a further dimension that has been overlooked by both Bermúdez and Toribio. Beyond considering the way things appear to the creature, a reasonable constraint on content-attribution must also take into account how the creature interacts with their conspecifics. This requires us to assume that on several occasions, creatures from different perspectives are representing the same content, individuated either as a structured sequence of particulars, properties, and relations (Russellian proposition) or as a set-theoretical proposition, that is, a function from possible worlds to truth-values.

The claim I support in this paper is the following. The solution to this apparent contradiction is the rejection of what I call the Real-content view and the adherence to what I would like to call here Content-pragmatism: there is no such thing as *the* content of experience. In this view, "proposition" is not as real as a mental state, but rather is a term of art that semanticists use, as a matter of theoretical convenience, to classify mental states. What follows from Content-pragmatism is Content-pluralism: there are so many contents that are required to meet Bermúdez's requirement, that any attribution of content must be justified.

Because both criticisms and the defense of State conceptualism overlook the real scope of Bermúdez's condition on content-attribution, they are ineffective. In this paper, I will argue that the opposition between State and Content nonconceptualism is a real one, but only a relative one, that is, relative to the opposite constraints to be met. If we want to solve the problems of cognitive significance, the best we can do is let the content of experience be modeled as neo-Fregean content, namely, a compound of nonconceptual modes of presentation of objects and properties. In this case, Content-nonconceptualism prevails. In contrast, if we want to account for how conspecifics join attention to the same entities in the same perceptual field from different perspectives, the best we can do is let the content of experience be modeled either as a structured Russellian proposition or as an unstructured set-theoretical proposition (a function from possible worlds to truth-values). In this case, State-nonconceptualism prevails.

Nonconceptual Content and the Way the Subject grasps the World

According to Bermúdez (2007), State-nonconceptualism is unmotivated. He gives us at least three reasons for not taking it seriously. His first source of dissatisfaction emerges from the alleged difficulty of State-nonconceptualism to meet what I want to call here Bermúdez's condition of content-attribution under the key assumption that propositional attitudes and experiences might share the same content. Let me put Bermúdez's condition of content-attribution in the simplest way:

Bermúdez's condition: content-attribution has to capture how things appear to the subject or how the subject represents the world as being.

Bermúdez invite us, first, to assume that both propositional attitudes and experiences possess Fregean content, that is, a structured compound of concepts (senses). By such a view, Bermúdez's condition is easily met in the case of propositional attitudes. It is perfectly comprehensible how the subject of any propositional attitude might represent a structured compound of concepts, since she possesses the corresponding conceptual abilities that reflect how she represents the world. In contrast, under the assumption that the content is Fregean, it is hard to see how Bermúdez's condition could be met in the case of experiences. If the perceptual content has to capture how things perceptually appear to the perceiving subject, the subject could not possibly represent a structured compound of concepts, if by definition (of nonconceptual content) she does not possess any of the conceptual abilities required to specify correctly the content.

According to Duhau (2011), Bermúdez's endorsement of Bermúdez's condition relies on a neo-Fregean view of the content of both propositional attitudes and experiences. For one thing, only a fine-grained notion of content seems to be able to capture the way the subject captures the world as being. Yet, she argues, State-nonconceptualism relies on a different coarse-grained view of content, understood either as a structured Russellian proposition (consisting of structured compounds of objects and properties) or as unstructured propositions (functions from possible worlds to truth-values).

However, this does not seem completely right. First, Bermúdez's condition puts reasonable general constraint on content-attribution that everyone should accept, regardless of how one understands the representational content of propositional attitudes and experiences; indeed, regardless of one's adherence to content-externalism. Thus, Bermúdez's endorsement of his own condition on content-attribution cannot be seen as a direct consequence of his adherence to a neo-Fregean view of content. Nonetheless, under this assumption, it is hard to see how Bermúdez's condition could be met. For one thing, it is hard to see how a coarse-grained notion of content could possibly capture the peculiar way things perceptually appear to the perceiving subject.

Bermúdez's second reason for not taking State-nonconceptualism seriously is this. According to him, one of the main reasons for introducing the very notion of nonconceptual content is to account for discriminative abilities of objects, properties, and relations in the distal world in a way that both constitutes a precondition for the acquisition of conceptual abilities of observational concepts. As before, the accusation is that this requirement relies on his Fregean view on the content of experience (as picture-like, or as a *positioned scenario* in the way suggested by Peacocke, 1992). Yet, Bermúdez's point is that no matter how we understand the content of experience, we cannot account for discriminative abilities in a way that is independent of conceptual abilities under the key assumption of State-nonconceptualism, according to which the subject merely stands in relation to the same content of propositional attitudes.

Bermúdez's last reason for rejecting State-nonconceptualism is the claim that without assuming Content-conceptualism, we cannot account for the individuation of nonconceptual states. The idea here is that proponents of State-nonconceptualism owe us an explanation of what constitutes nonconceptual states. The natural suggestion is to assume that nonconceptual states are those individuated by appealing to a *distinctive type of content*, namely, the content that is not composed of concepts (Content-nonconceptualism). This answer is obviously not available to State-nonconceptualism since, under this assumption, nonconceptual

states are not individuated, nor entail nonconceptual contents. One alternative is to appeal to the functional role of the nonconceptual state in question. However, since the functional role of a propositional attitude is concept-dependent while the functional role of experiences is concept-independent, any appeal to functional roles restates the problem, rather than providing an explanation for it.

Nonconceptual Content and Cognitive Significance

Like Bermúdez, Toribio explicitly endorses Bermúdez's condition on content-attribution. In her own formulation, content must reflect the way the subject grasps the world as being. According to her, the only way of endorsing the logical independence of Content-nonconceptualism and State-nonconceptualism is by adopting a coarse-grained notion of content, modeled either as a Russellian proposition (consisting of a structured compound of objects and properties) or as an unstructured set-theoretical proposition (a function from possible worlds to truth-values). In other words, proponents of the logical independence of State-nonconceptualism and Content-nonconceptualism have to endorse a coarse-grained notion of content.

This is not completely true. Crane explicitly endorses the independence of State-nonconceptualism and Content-nonconceptualism and assumes a neo-Fregean view of the content of experience (Crane, 2009). In one way or the other, according to Toribio, those coarse-grained views of content are unsuitable for accounting for the subject's intentional behavior in a way that reflects how the subject grasps the world as being. It is hard to see how n -tuples of objects and properties (Russellian propositions) or a set of worlds could capture the different ways the subject believes something.

Likewise, if we let the content of experience be modeled either as a Russellian proposition or as an unstructured set-theoretical proposition, it can hardly meet Bermúdez's condition. As before, it is difficult to see how compounds of objects and properties or any set of possible worlds could possibly capture the different ways the subject experiences the world. Moreover, the assumption that experiences and propositional attitudes might share the same coarse-grained content blocks the natural way of understanding the process of conceptualization as consisting in subsuming entities under concepts (by picking out referents by Fregean senses).

Now, while Bermúdez raises the question of whether the representational content of experience is Fregean or a function from possible worlds to truth-values, Toribio (2008) clearly endorses a neo-Fregean fine-grained notion of content. She does so by going a step further and connecting the satisfaction of Bermúdez's condition to the solution of problems of cognitive significance:

The content of propositional attitudes must account for (i) the fact that a rational subject can believe Fa while disbelieving Fb even when a is b , and (ii) the fact that a rational subject can believe Fa even when a lacks reference.

A classic example is the famous case of Tybalt in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Tybalt believes that Romeo loves Juliet but disbelieves that the son of Montague loves Juliet, for the simple reason that he (Tybalt) ignores the fact that Romeo and the son of Montague are the same person. Tybalt's problem is easily solved when we assume that he has two ways (two concepts or modes of presentation) of representing the same person without realizing it. This is what makes reasonable his belief and disbelief that the same person loves Juliet. Thus, according to Toribio, Bermúdez's condition is entailed as a solution to problems of cognitive significance; additionally, the only way to address those problems is to adhere to a neo-Fregean view of

content, according to which the content of beliefs and other propositional attitudes must be seen as structured compounds of concepts or modes of presentations of the referents.

Even though it is an open question as to how we can or must understand the nonconceptual analogue of Fregean senses, we can easily formulate the same requirement for the content of experience in the following terms:

The representational content of experience must account for the fact that, (i) under normal conditions, a subject may perceive *a* as *F* but not *b* as *F* even when *a* is *b*, and for the fact that, (ii) under abnormal conditions, a subject can experience *a* as *F* even when *a* lacks reference.

In the case of experience, we might say in an equally loose sense that a Fregean case is one in which a subject has two experiences of the same object without realizing it. Thus, there will of course be countless cases in this sense: seeing the same object from two sides in a mirror, and so on. Now, since State-nonconceptualism assumes a coarse-grained notion of content, it certainly cannot address the problems of cognitive significance. Thus, the only remaining alternative is Content-nonconceptualism: nonconceptual mental states are those whose contents are not complex compounds of concepts. The moral is that, under the requirement of solving problems of cognitive significance, the only notion of content relevant in this debate is neo-Fregean one. Thus, State-nonconceptualism is not logically independent of Content-nonconceptualism, but rather entails it.

Nonconceptual Content and the Constraint of Same-Representing

There is no doubt that both Bermúdez and Toribio are right in endorsing Bermúdez's condition and claiming that Bermúdez's condition is entailed as a solution to the problems of cognitive significance. Moreover, as I will argue in sequence, they are also right when they claim that only a neo-Fregean fine-grained notion of content can address those problems. However, I believe that Bermúdez's condition on content-attribution is not required only to solve problems of cognitive significance (which is what leads them directly to claim that State-nonconceptualism either presupposes Content-nonconceptualism or is an inconsistent view). In other words, I reject the shared view that there is one way (a single proposition) of expressing how the subject grasps the world as being or how the world perceptually appears to the perceiving subject.

First, let me defend the claim that only a neo-Fregean fine-grained notion of content can address the problems of cognitive significance. In a recent paper, Duhau (2011) has argued in support of State-nonconceptualism by holding that solutions to the problems of cognitive significance can also be found at the level of mental representation (rather than at the level of content). According to her, what State-nonconceptualism does is account for the way the subject grasps the world as being by holding that the same content might be represented in different ways. Although she does not, she could appeal here to the linguistic meaning of sentences and terms to make her point. Indeed, according to Kaplan (1989) and the older view of Perry (1979), mental states are individuated by their "character" or their "role" (linguistic meaning) rather than by their content ("what is said"). According to Kaplan's famous example, what accounts for the difference in behavior of a person seeing her pants on fire in the mirror without realizing she is the one whose pants are on fire, and the same person thinking to herself in the first person that her pants are on fire, is not the content (what is said) of respective utterances of thoughts, but rather the "character" or linguistic meaning of the sentences and terms involved. Thus, even though the subject's utterances might represent the

very same propositional content, the subject's being in different states of mind (accounted for by the different linguistic meaning of her two utterances) is what accounts for the difference in cognitive significance of her behavior. In this way, we find an answer to Bermúdez's challenge (the last of his arguments) that State-nonconceptualism cannot account for the individuation of nonconceptual mental states.

However, following Fodor (1998), Duhau endorses a further alternative: mental states are not individuated by meaning but rather by form or syntactic structure. Thus, problems of cognitive significance could be addressed at the level of mental representation in the following way. A rational person might simultaneously believe *Fa* and disbelieve *Fb*, even when *a* is *b*, provided she fails to realize that she is representing the same object but under the different syntactic representations of *a* and *b* (Duhau, 2011: 9).

The difficulty here is in understanding how the subject could fail to realize that she is referring to the same object under different modes of presentation *if the difference of those modes of presentation lies in the form of her representation*. The syntactic form of a mental representation (or even its linguistic meaning, if you will) is certainly not processed at the level of consciousness or at the so-called personal level. In contrast, problems of cognitive significance are raised at the personal or conscious level. To address those problems in a way that accounts for how a rational subject could fail to realize that she is undergoing different experiences of the same object, we have to assume that certain identifying properties of the object in those experiences come to the foreground and are represented as part of the representational content of experience; otherwise, the explanation is empty. It is only in assuming that the subject is somehow consciously representing identifying features of the object that sense can be made of the fact that the subject fails to realize that she is experiencing the very same object under two different modes of presentation.

However, as I anticipated, I also reject Bermúdez and Toribio's view that Bermúdez's condition on content-attribution is required only to solve problems of cognitive significance. I reject the view that there is one way (a single proposition) of expressing how the subject grasps the world as being. To capture how things perceptually appear to the perceiving subject, we also need a coarse-grained notion of the representational content of experience.

To begin with, we need coarse-grained content to account for the fact that the subject experiences the same compound of objects and properties under quite different perceptual conditions such as luminosity, distance, angle, and the perceiver's perspective in general. This is what is known in psychological literature under the label of "perceptual constancy." For example, regardless of whether the sun is shining or it is a cloudy day, intuitively, what I see in both cases is the same greenness of the grass rather than some mode of presentation of it (roughly the color that is causing the color experience in me here and now). Thus, the natural suggestion here is to assume that the greenness of the London gardens is part of the coarse-grained content rather than any mode of presentation of it.

The main reason that militates in favor of my claim is this. Any conscious perception has a *cognitive impact* on a system of thoughts and beliefs. Let us suppose that I see the same greenness of the London gardens under quite different weather conditions: I see it first on a sunny day and then on a cloudy day. Let us assume further, for the sake of argument, that by means of my perceptual experiences I acquire different *de dicto* thoughts or beliefs about the greenness of the London garden (roughly the color that caused in me the experience of light green on a sunny day and the color that caused in me the experience of dark green on a cloudy day). My point is that it is certainly much harder to account for how I can come to the conclusion, for example, that the color of the London gardens are dark green if I am not

thinking *de re of that* greenness but rather *de dicto* under the different modes of presentation: the color that caused in me the experience of light green on a sunny day and the color that caused in me the experience of dark green on a cloudy day. By all accounts, I am thinking *of that* greenness rather than any mode of presentation of it. Thus, the natural suggestion is that my thought is *de re* of *that same* greenness. Moreover, the further natural assumption here is that that same greenness belongs to some representational content of our perceptual experiences (coarse-grained individuated) that is best modeled either as a structured Russellian proposition or as an unstructured set-theoretical proposition.

Thus, by perceiving the greenness of the London gardens on a sunny day or on a cloudy day, what I naturally do is acquire a *de re* thought *of that* greenness rather than the *de dicto* belief or thought. All I need now to support my claim is a further natural assumption, namely, that the content of *de re* thought is inherited from the content of the original perception. Under this assumption, the conclusion is that the content of perception is also coarse-grained individuated, modeled either as a Russellian proposition or as a set-theoretical proposition.

Bermúdez's condition on content-attribution also requires a coarse-grained notion of the content of experience to account for the way different subjects capture the world from different vantage points when they have joint attention. Joint attention is the ability to share a common focus on something with someone else (objects, properties, people, etc.). As such, it can be seen as the most primitive form of nonverbal communication. Joint attention skills can be a predictor of future language development. Joint attention starts in infancy between a child and a caregiver. Early skills can include reaching to be picked up by a caregiver, pointing to a stuffed animal, or looking at the same page in a book, etc.

Now, as the children and adults involved have different perspectives on the same object or property, we can only meet Bermúdez's condition by letting the content of experience be modeled as either a Russellian proposition or a set-theoretical proposition (consisting of the very same entities rather than modes of presentations of them). For example, when a child and its caregiver apply joint attention to the same color on a book's page, what their visual experiences represent from their own different perspectives is the color itself painted on the book, rather than any mode of presentations of it. If each of them were representing an identifying property of that color (roughly the color that is causing the color experience in each of them) rather than the color itself, it would be difficult to understand how they could communicate.

Now, the argument behind my claim is similar to the previous one. Any conscious perception has a *cognitive impact* on a system of thoughts and beliefs. Let us suppose that two children are attending to the same object or property (for example, the same toy) from their own perceptual perspectives. Let us suppose now that by means of their own perspectives they both acquire different *de dicto* thoughts about the same toy, roughly the toy that caused in one of them the toy experience from her perspective, and the toy that caused in the other the toy experience from her different perspective. My point, as before, is that it is much harder to account for the possibility of a cogent agreement and disagreement between them when, for example, one of them asks the other about their favorite toy. By all accounts, we are talking *of that* toy rather than any mode of presentation of it. Indeed, it is hard to see how there could be any cooperation or dispute between them when, for example, one of them asks the other to give her *that* toy. In cases like this, the natural assumption is that agreement and disagreement, cooperation and dispute, require *de re* thought of the *same* toy. And, as before, the natural assumption here is that *that same* toy belongs to some coarse-grained content of their perceptual

experiences of a toy that is best modeled either as a Russellian proposition or as a set-theoretical proposition.

Thus, by perceiving the same toy, both children naturally acquire a *de re* thought *of* that toy rather than a *de dicto* belief or thought consisting of the object that is causing in one of them her toy experience (mode of presentation). Now, assuming also that the content of such a *de re* thought is best modeled as a coarse-grained proposition (consisting of the very property of greenness rather than the mode of presentation of it) and, further, that this content of a *de re* thought is naturally inherited from the content of the original perception, the natural conclusion here is to assume that the content of perception is also a coarse-grained proposition, modeled either as a Russellian proposition or as a set-theoretical proposition.

Moreover, the assumption that the content of experience is best modeled as either a Russellian proposition or a set-theoretical proposition is the best available account for the fact that joint attention is a condition for future language development. In a wide variety of cases, we can only make sense of *what is said* from different utterances if we assume that the truth of falsity turns on the same objects having the same properties. For example, if I say to you “that food is poisoned” and you disagree, what really matters in our communicative exchange, and what is really said, is that that object possesses the property of being poisoned.

Disclaimer: my complaint here is not that there is no possibility of agreement and disagreement over Fregean content or any other kind of content; what I mean is that in a wide variety of cases, identifying properties that you and I might have used to identify the object in question, or that you and I might have associated with the phrase “that food,” do not really matter.

To be sure, Bermúdez and Toribio are right when they claim that Bermúdez’s condition is required to solve problems of cognitive significance. Still, they seem to overlook that the same condition on content-attribution also requires what I would like to call here same-representing:

The content must account for the fact that the same individual might represent the same entities under changing conditions of experience, as well as account for the fact that different individuals might apply joint attention to the same entities from their own viewpoints.

Nonconceptual Content: Content-Pragmatism versus Content-Realism

Now, if Bermúdez (2007) is right by proposing a condition on content attribution and Toribio is also right by claiming that such a condition is required to solve problems of cognitive significance, the intriguing question is how they both overlook that Bermúdez’s conditions also requires same-representing. My explanatory hypothesis is that they both rely on what I want to call here a Content-realist view on the content of mental states:

For every experience or propositional attitude, there is one and only one real content or proposition by means of which the mental state of the subject is individuated or constituted.

Bermúdez tacitly relies on the Content-realist view when he claims that: “appealing to a content is not a *matter of theoretical convenience*. We must also make sense of the idea of the subject being related to the relevant abstract object” (2007: 67, my emphasis). Toribio is even more explicit when she promises to prove that State-nonconceptualism does entail Content-nonconceptualism “on the only notion of content that is relevant for this debate”

(Toribio, 2008: 355). Now, the Realist view directly opposes what I would like to call Content-pragmatism.

Propositions are just tools we use, as a matter of theoretical convenience, to classify mental states.

I would like now to defend Content-pragmatism against Content-realism, showing that Content-realism relativizes the debate between State and Content-nonconceptualism. Let me begin with Bermúdez's claim:

Fregean contents are *abstract objects*, but appealing to contents *is not a matter solely of theoretical convenience*. We must be able to make sense of the idea of the subject being related to the relevant abstract object. And, of course, we want the subject's being so related to explain how she represents the world. In the case of beliefs and other propositional attitudes with conceptual content, this is perfectly comprehensible, because we assume that the subject possesses all the relevant concepts. In fact, talk of conceptual contents is in some respects just a complicated way of talking about which subset of the subject's conceptual abilities is currently being deployed. So the connection between the content of belief and the way the subject represents the world is immediate. But this obvious way of bridging the gap between subject and content is closed to us if there is no requirement that the subject possesses the relevant concepts. It is hard to know what it means to say that being in a perceptual state with a particular content is a matter of standing in relation to a complex of concepts, none of which is possessed by the perceiver. This makes the idea that perception is related to a complex of concepts completely mysterious (2007: 67, Emphases are mine).

In this passage, Bermúdez characterizes the core of Content-realism by making two related claims. The first is the claim that contents are not a matter of theoretical convenience. The second is the traditional view that propositional attitudes are a *sui generis* relation between the subject, as a concrete entity in space and time, and a proposition, as an abstract entity. Therefore, by entertaining a propositional attitude, we are actually related to some abstract entity.

I begin by remarking that there is something quite amiss with the traditional idea of propositional attitudes as subjects standing in relation to propositions as abstract entities, regardless of whether the subject possesses the concepts required to specify that proposition or not. Nevertheless, even more amiss is the suggestion that conscious experience is constituted by a "sensing relation to a proposition" as held by Papineau: "There seems something quite amiss with the suggestion that my here-and-now conscious feelings are constituted by my bearing any kind of relation to abstract entities" (2014: 6).

As we have seen, there are different ways of understanding propositions. We may understand them as unstructured set-theoretic propositions (functions from possible worlds to truth-values), or as Russellian structured sequences of objects and properties, or finally as Fregean structured complexes of concepts. Even though there are interesting differences between these views, the point I want to make here is that propositional attitudes can hardly be seen as relations between a concrete subject in space and time and propositions as abstract entities.

However, if propositional attitudes are not *real* relations between subjects, as concrete entities in space and time, and propositions as abstract entities, the natural question that emerges is about the role of a proposition in the specification of the content of experience. My suggestion

here is to give up Content-realism and embrace Content-pragmatism. My complaint is not that perceptual states or even propositions are illusory. It must be clear that I am not endorsing either an eliminativism about consciousness or an eliminativism about propositions. The idea is rather that propositions are different ways of classifying states as a matter of theoretical convenience (to put it in Bermúdez’s words).

As I understand it, Content-pragmatism is not a new view, but rather a view shared by different philosophers of mind and language, such as Perry, Chalmers, and Crane, among others. The key idea is that neither propositional attitudes nor experiences are relations to propositions. “Proposition” is just a term of art, created by semanticists to classify subjects’ states. I subscribe here to Crane’s analogy between the role of propositions and the role of “models” in science: we let some aspect of a subject’s mental state be *modeled* on a proposition in the same way that we let a cognitive process be *modeled* on a computer (2011: 34). Likewise, I also subscribe to Perry’s analogy between propositions with lengths and weights (2009: 21): we classify mental states using propositions in the same way we classify someone’s weight using pounds or someone’s length using meters.

The natural consequence is Content-pluralism:

There is no such thing as *the* representational content of experience: we are free to use different kinds of propositional and non-propositional contents (say, picture-like contents) to model the subject’s perceptual states, taking into account the different constraints on content-attribution.

Thus, whenever we want to satisfy Bermúdez’s condition by solving problems of cognitive significance, the best we can do is let the subject’s perceptual state be modeled as neo-Fregean content consisting of a structured compound either of concepts (in the case of propositional attitudes) or of nonconceptual modes of presentation (in the case of experiences). In contrast, whenever we want to satisfy Bermúdez’s condition by accounting for same-representing, the best we can do is let the subject’s perceptual state be modeled either as a structured sequence of objects and properties or as an unstructured set of possible worlds.

Now, if Bermúdez (2007) is right by proposing a condition on content attribution and Toribio is also right by claiming that such a condition is required to solve problems of cognitive significance, the intriguing question is how they both overlook that Bermúdez’s conditions also requires same-representing. My explanatory hypothesis is that they both rely on what I want to call here a Content-realist view on the content of mental states:

For every experience or propositional attitude, there is one and only one real content or proposition by means of which the mental state of the subject is individuated or constituted.

Bermúdez tacitly relies on the Content-realist view when he claims that: “appealing to a content is not a *matter of theoretical convenience*. We must also make sense of the idea of the subject being related to the relevant abstract object” (2007: 67, my emphasis). Toribio is even more explicit when she promises to prove that State-nonconceptualism does entail Content-nonconceptualism “on the only notion of content that is relevant for this debate” (Toribio, 2008: 355). Now, the Realist view directly opposes what I would like to call Content-pragmatism.

Propositions are just tools we use, as a matter of theoretical convenience, to classify mental states.

I would like now to defend Content-pragmatism against Content-realism, showing that Content-realism relativizes the debate between State and Content-nonconceptualism. Let me begin with Bermúdez's claim:

Fregean contents are *abstract objects*, but appealing to contents *is not a matter solely of theoretical convenience. We must be able to make sense of the idea of the subject being related to the relevant abstract object.* And, of course, we want the subject's being so related to explain how she represents the world. In the case of beliefs and other propositional attitudes with conceptual content, this is perfectly comprehensible, because we assume that the subject possesses all the relevant concepts. In fact, talk of conceptual contents is in some respects just a complicated way of talking about which subset of the subject's conceptual abilities is currently being deployed. So the connection between the content of belief and the way the subject represents the world is immediate. But this obvious way of bridging the gap between subject and content is closed to us if there is no requirement that the subject possesses the relevant concepts. It is hard to know what it means to say that being in a perceptual state with a particular content is a matter of standing in relation to a complex of concepts, none of which is possessed by the perceiver. This makes the idea that perception is related to a complex of concepts completely mysterious (2007: 67, Emphases are mine).

In this passage, Bermúdez characterizes the core of Content-realism by making two related claims. The first is the claim that contents are not a matter of theoretical convenience. The second is the traditional view that propositional attitudes are a *sui generis* relation between the subject, as a concrete entity in space and time, and a proposition, as an abstract entity. Therefore, by entertaining a propositional attitude, we are actually related to some abstract entity.

I begin by remarking that there is something quite amiss with the traditional idea of propositional attitudes as subjects standing in relation to propositions as abstract entities, regardless of whether the subject possesses the concepts required to specify that proposition or not. Nevertheless, even more amiss is the suggestion that conscious experience is constituted by a "sensing relation to a proposition" as held by Papineau: "There seems something quite amiss with the suggestion that my here-and-now conscious feelings are constituted by my bearing any kind of relation to abstract entities" (2014: 6).

As we have seen, there are different ways of understanding propositions. We may understand them as unstructured set-theoretic propositions (functions from possible worlds to truth-values), or as Russellian structured sequences of objects and properties, or finally as Fregean structured complexes of concepts. Even though there are interesting differences between these views, the point I want to make here is that propositional attitudes can hardly be seen as relations between a concrete subject in space and time and propositions as abstract entities.

However, if propositional attitudes are not *real* relations between subjects, as concrete entities in space and time, and propositions as abstract entities, the natural question that emerges is about the role of a proposition in the specification of the content of experience. My suggestion here is to give up Content-realism and embrace Content-pragmatism. My complaint is not that perceptual states or even propositions are illusory. It must be clear that I am not endorsing either an eliminativism about consciousness or an eliminativism about propositions. The

idea is rather that propositions are different ways of classifying states as a matter of theoretical convenience (to put it in Bermúdez's words).

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The natural consequence is Content-pluralism:

There is no such thing as *the* representational content of experience: we are free to use different kinds of propositional and non-propositional contents (say, picture-like contents) to model the subject's perceptual states, taking into account the different constraints on content-attribution.

Thus, whenever we want to satisfy Bermúdez's condition by solving problems of cognitive significance, the best we can do is let the subject's perceptual state be modeled as neo-Fregean content consisting of a structured compound either of concepts (in the case of propositional attitudes) or of nonconceptual modes of presentation (in the case of experiences). In contrast, whenever we want to satisfy Bermúdez's condition by accounting for same-representing, the best we can do is let the subject's perceptual state be modeled either as a structured sequence of objects and properties or as an unstructured set of possible worlds.

Conclusion

We have seen that the main reason for favoring Content-nonconceptualism and disregarding State-nonconceptualism is the assumption that a coarse-grained notion of content cannot account for the cognitive significance of a subject's beliefs and experiences. We have also seen that the main line of defense for State-nonconceptualism against such criticism is the mistaken assumption that the syntactic form of representations can solve problems of cognitive significance (Duhau, 2011). Against this last view, I have argued that only a neo-Fregean notion of content of attitudes and experiences can solve problems of cognitive significance. Identifying properties must come to the foreground and be represented as part of the representational content.

Still, I have argued that Bermúdez's condition on content-attribution also entails the satisfaction of an opposite constraint: same-representing. Moreover, I have argued that only a coarse-grained notion of content of experience can meet that constraint. Now, considering that solving problems of cognitive significance and meeting the requirement of same-representing clearly pull in opposite directions, my next step was to argue in favor of Content-pragmatism and against Content-realism. Once we recognize both constraints and endorse Content-pragmatism, both Bermúdez and Toribio's reasons against State-nonconceptualism, and Duhau's defense of State-nonconceptualism against Bermúdez and Toribio's criticism become ineffective: Content-nonconceptualism and State-nonconceptualism are simultaneously logically independent and consistent because they are based on opposite constraints on content-attribution.

The moral to be drawn is that the opposition between Content-nonconceptualism and State-nonconceptualism is a real one, but it is only relative, that is, relative to the opposite con-

straints on content-attribution to be met. If we want to make sense of the perceiver's behavior that perceives that a is F , while misperceiving b as not being F , even when a is b , the best we can do, *as a matter of theoretical convenience*, is let the content of both experiences be modeled as neo-Fregean content, compounded of different (non-conceptual) modes of presentation of the same object, associated with a and associated with b (whatever these are). In this sense, Content-nonconceptualism prevails: the representational content of experience is nonconceptual in the relevant sense of not being composed of concepts, but rather of nonconceptual modes of presentations.

In contrast, if we want to make sense of joint attention or non-verbal communication between perceivers experiencing the object from different vantage points, the best we can do, *as a matter of theoretical convenience*, is let the content be modeled either as a Russellian proposition or as a set-theoretical proposition composed of objects and their properties, rather than of modes of presentations of them. In this sense, State-nonconceptualism prevails: the perceptual state is nonconceptual in the relevant sense that the subject does not need to possess the concepts required to specify correctly the content of her experiences.

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