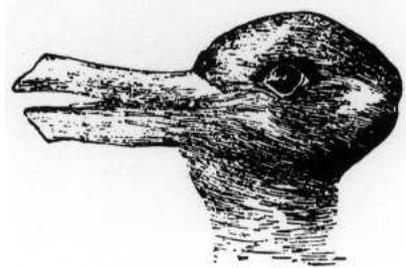


McDowell and Misperception

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Opening

There is a consensus within the philosophical community that perceptual experience has representational content. With regard to this representational content, there is debate concerning whether it is conceptual or non-conceptual in nature. In his book *Mind and World*, a product of his 1991 John Locke Lectures, John McDowell argues for *conceptualism*, the doctrine that perceptual experience is essentially conceptual in nature. According to conceptualism, the contents of perceptual experiences are exclusively constituted by concepts in the same way that the contents of beliefs are constituted by concepts. In order to have a perceptual experience, a subject must possess the relevant concepts and must deploy those concepts in the experience. An exemplification of this notion of conceptual perceptual engagement with the world would be perceptual experiences of the visually ambiguous duck-rabbit figure illustrated below.



The two distinct visual experiences a subject can have of the one illustration are dependent on the particular concepts they deploy; when they see a duck, they are deploying a ‘duck concept’ and when they see a rabbit, they are deploying a ‘rabbit concept’, roughly speaking. Conceptualism’s antithesis, *nonconceptualism*, broadly defined is the doctrine that to some extent perceptual experience is constituted by non-conceptual content that somehow differs from conceptual content. Perceptual experiences are not exclusively constituted by concepts so there are aspects of perceptual experiences for which the perceiving subject need not possess and deploy any relevant concept. McDowell advocates conceptualism as a viable position that can extricate us from the oscillation “between a pair of unsatisfying positions: on the one side a coherentism that threatens to disconnect thought from reality, and on the other side a vain appeal to the Given”.¹ Conceptualism is the answer for a theory of perception that delivers the long sought after empirical justification that perceptual experience provides for belief.

¹John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003, p.24.

So can the conceptualism which McDowell advocates provide a satisfactory account of misperception? In his preoccupation with building up a case for conceptualism, McDowell has little to say about misperception; indeed, in Lecture I of *Mind and World* he states “I shall not talk about [misperception] until my final lecture, and not much then”.² McDowell does not seem to be too concerned about providing a satisfactory account of misperception, as evidenced by his remark that “it does not matter much that one can be misled”.³ An account of this apparent apathy is perhaps suggested by his statement that “of course one can be misled into supposing that one takes in that things are thus and so when things are not thus and so. But when one is not misled, one takes in how things are.”⁴ As I construe things, McDowell’s prime focus is on cases of perceptual experience where one is not misled and consideration of cases of perceptual experience where one is misled need not detract from this focus; in fact the suggestion that he is warranted to disregard the fact that misperception does occur might be construed from certain quotes included above and in particular a passage in Lecture VI.⁵ Given his disjunctivist leanings⁶, McDowell might deny that it is necessary to provide a single, unified account of perceptual content, one that works in both veridical and non-veridical cases of perception. Therefore arguments against conceptualism based on its inadequacy to accommodate non-veridical perception do not pose a real threat.

Such consideration raises the question of whether or not McDowell needs to give a satisfactory account of misperception. I think that since misperception occasionally occurs and arises in a variety of interesting ways which can provide insight into the functioning of our perceptual system, it is reasonable to require that it be accommodated by any tenable account of perceptual experience. Furthermore, I think that a unified account of perception, one that works both in veridical and non-veridical cases is desirable.

For the remainder of this paper, it is my intention to discuss a few examples of misperception and show how these examples contribute to the contention that McDowell cannot give a satisfactory account of misperception. I do not intend to proffer an alternative account, although I suppose that my stab at McDowell is a shift towards a view endorsing pre-conceptual or non-conceptual content, a view which holds that at least some perceptual content differs from belief content.

Misperception and Conceptualism

McDowell provides little in the way of a definition of misperception and what he does provide is rather loose. When one misperceives, one is “misled into supposing that one takes in that

²Ibid., p. 9.

³Ibid., p. 9.

⁴Ibid., p. 9.

⁵Ibid., pp. 111-113.

⁶McDowell discusses disjunctivism in references #7 and #8

things are thus and so when things are not thus and so”.⁷ From a McDowellian perspective, when misperception does occur, the concepts which a subject deploys do not correctly correspond to how things are out there. Thus we have the Problem of Perception: perception seems intuitively to be openness to the world, but this fact of openness is threatened by reflection on misperception.⁸ The term misperception is used in reference to a variety of sensory phenomena, of which discussion in this paper will involve a few examples, so I shall now provide a brief clarification of misperception.

The first distinction to make is that of hallucinations and illusions. A hallucination is an experience which feels exactly like the perceptual experience of a real, mind-independent object, except there is no such object actually being perceived. An example would be the hallucinated visual patterns known to be associated with migraines. Hallucinations are distinct from illusions, which may be defined as ‘perceptual situations in which a physical object (matter/energy) is actually perceived, but in which that object (matter/energy) perceptually appears in a way other than it really is’. Strictly speaking, hallucination is not misperception, although it is still relevant to the Problem of Perception.

The second distinction is a top-level distinction between two types of illusion. To succinctly put it, “there are two clearly very different kinds of illusions: those with a physical cause and cognitive illusions due to misapplication of knowledge.”⁹

Expanding on a definition provided earlier, an illusion may be defined as a ‘perceptual situation in which a physical object (matter/energy) is actually perceived, but in which X or Y ’, where:

X = ‘that object perceptually appears under abnormal perceiving conditions and because of this the resulting perceptual experience represents the object in a way other than it really is’

Y = ‘that object perceptually appears under normal perceiving conditions yet gives rise to a perceptual experience that represents the object in a way other than it really is’

In cases where X is the correct substitution to make, we may say that the cognitive interpretation of perceptual information is correct yet does not represent the way things actually are. In cases where Y is the correct substitution to make, we may say that the cognitive interpretation of perceptual information is incorrect and does not represent the way things actually are.

⁷McDowell, op.cit., p. 9.

⁸Tim Crane, ‘The Problem of Perception’, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2005 Edition), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2005/entries/perception/problem/>>.

⁹Richard Gregory, ‘Knowledge in Perception and Illusion’, Accessed Sep-Oct 2005, <<http://www.richardgregory.org/papers/knowledge-in-perception.pdf>> (For a succinct yet comprehensive discussion and an elaboration of this distinction consult this article.)

Now, as touched upon earlier, whether or not McDowell can give a satisfactory account of perception irrespective of misperception is one thing. Whether or not he can give a satisfactory account of misperception that is compatible with two most important contentions of Mind and World - that (A) perceptual experience is essentially conceptual in nature, and that (B) perceptual content has to be conceptual, if we are to give a proper account of the rational relations between perception and belief - is another, and it is the latter question which I am addressing. I shall now elaborate upon and explicate this point.

Firstly, with regards to contention A, it is fair to claim that McDowellian conceptualism endorses the following two theses¹⁰

Experience conceptualism: For any object x and any property F , a subject has an experience as of x being F only if she has concepts of x and F , and deploys those concepts in the experience.

Same-content: For any experience as of an object x having a property F , if the experience has content p , then it is possible to have a belief with content p .

Secondly, with regard to contention B, if the biconditional relation of contention B were reduced to a conditional relation, such that 'perceptual content has to be conceptual, if we are to give a proper account of the rational relations between perception and belief' becomes (B1) 'perceptual content can be conceptual, if we are to give a proper account of the rational relations between perception and belief', and the former, stronger contention was false and the latter, weaker contention was true, McDowellian conceptualism would not be dealt a fatal blow. So if McDowell were committed to something in order to give a satisfactory account of misperception, that something would have to undermine contention B1 at the least to significantly undermine his account of perception.

I shall now discuss some aspects of misperception at odds with contentions A (experience conceptualism and same-content theses) and B1 hence B.

The Richness Argument and Demonstrative Concepts

It is firstly worth discussing an argument against conceptualism which has led one philosopher to expose a problematic aspect of conceptualism given a particular account of misperception attributed to it. The argument is the so called 'Richness Argument', which has been discussed by, among others, Richard Heck, who provides the following formulation of the argument.

¹⁰Susanna Siegel, 'The Contents of Perception', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2005 Edition), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2005/entries/perception-contents/#6>>.

Before me now, for example, are arranged various objects with various shapes and colours, of which, it might seem, I have no concept. My desk exhibits a whole host of shades of brown, for which I have no names. The speakers to the side of my computer are not quite flat, but have curved faces; I could not begin to describe their shape in anything like adequate terms. The leaves on the trees outside my window are fluttering back and forth, randomly, as it seems to me, as the wind passes over them. Yet my experience of these things represents them far more precisely than that, far more distinctively, it would seem, than any characterization I could hope to formulate, for myself or for others, in terms of the concepts I presently possess. The problem is, not lack of time, but lack of descriptive resources, that is, lack of the appropriate concepts.¹¹

The basic idea of this argument is that it cannot be the case that the content of perceptual experience is exclusively constituted by concepts because the content of perceptual experience is a good deal richer, such that the set of concepts which a perceiving subject possesses is generally insufficient to completely articulate their perceptual experience.

McDowell introduces his consideration of this argument in *Mind and World* via the work of Gareth Evans, who was impressed by “the determinacy of detail that the content of experience can have”.¹² As McDowell sees it, according to Evans, words and phrases express concepts of bands on the experience spectrum whereas experience can present properties that correspond to something more like lines on the spectrum, with no discernible width.¹³

Proponents of conceptualism, such as McDowell, have responded to the Richness Argument by employing the so called ‘Demonstrative Concept Strategy’. The basic idea of this strategy is that although a perceiving subject may not possess a set of specific concepts at their disposal adequate for the task of completely articulating each and every perceptual experience, they can employ general demonstrative concepts such as ‘this colour’ and ‘that shape’ to serve as conceptual content for perceptual experiences with no corresponding set of specific concepts. In the words of McDowell:

In the throes of an experience of the kind that putatively transcends one’s conceptual powers - an experience that *ex hypothesi* affords a suitable sample - one can give linguistic expression to a concept that is as exactly fine-grained as the experience, by uttering a phrase like ‘that shade’, in which the demonstrative *exploits the presence of the sample*.¹⁴ [italics mine]

The Richness Argument compels McDowell to employ the notion of demonstrative concepts. It is worth noting, for reasons which will become clearer, that this in turn commits

¹¹Richard G. Heck Jr, ‘Nonconceptual Content and the ‘Space of Reasons’’, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 109, 2000, pp. 489-490.

¹²McDowell, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

him to the view that perceptual content is singular rather than general in nature; singular content concerns a particular object and as such it cannot be the content of an intentional state unless that object exists whereas a general content is one whose ability to be the content of an intentional state is not dependent on the existence of any particular object.¹⁵

One forceful criticism of the demonstrative concept strategy, put forward by Heck and threatening McDowell's contention that conceptualism is a theory of perceptual warrant, starts with the assertion that experience is explanatorily prior to the possession of demonstrative concepts. As a conceptualist would surely agree, one comes to have demonstrative concepts only because they are undergoing or have recently undergone a perceptual experience containing something which the demonstrative concept refers to. But if a demonstrative concept is considered to be a constituent of a perceptual experience, "there would not seem to be sufficient distance between ... having the experience and ... possessing the concept" to leave room for an explanation of how one comes to possess the demonstrative concept via the experience that would not involve the concept itself. Heck writes:

If the content of my perceptual experience is to fix the content of my demonstrative concept of the colour experience presents to me, my concept of the colour cannot also be part of the content of that experience. If it were, the content of the demonstrative concept would be fixed by the content of the same concept.¹⁶

To avoid such vicious circularity, Heck contends that the content of perceptual experience should be regarded as non-conceptual. Although he finds this argument compelling, he admits that and outlines why it cannot be conclusive.¹⁷

Instead, the force of this criticism is best revealed by considering the issue of how the reference of a demonstrative concept is to be fixed in cases of misperception. Heck writes "McDowell claims not just that we can form concepts of the colour [or whatever it is we are forming a concept of] presented to us in experience, but that their references are fixed by a 'sample' of the colour in the world".¹⁸ For example, when I have a veridical perceptual experience of a sample of red fabric and exercise the demonstrative concept 'that red' to capture my experience, the demonstrative concept which I employ is fixed by the sample of redness instantiated in the fabric, and my veridical perceptual experience also happens to correctly represent this shade of red fabric.

This account is inapplicable though to cases of misperception, with the unsound implication being that demonstrative concepts need not represent content which is the same as the content of the perceptual experiences they supposedly constitute. For example, if for whatever reason, I misperceive a dark blue wall as a light blue wall and utter 'that blue', what does the demonstrative expression 'that blue' refer to? Presumably McDowell would

¹⁵Crane, *op.cit.* (2005)

¹⁶Heck, *op.cit.*, p. 496.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 492.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 495.

respond that it refers to (exploits the presence of) the shade of blue that the wall actually is. But if this is the case then my experience would not have the same content as that represented by the demonstrative concept, so the content of my experience could not be characterised in terms of the demonstrative concept. One manoeuvre which might be made to avoid this pitfall is to have it so that the demonstrative concept is not fixed by the actual colour of the wall. It seems though that one who makes this manoeuvre is left with no choice when it comes to fixing the reference of the demonstrative concept by a sample in the world, and if this is the case, then what is it fixed by?

An alternative, seemingly the only alternative, is to have it so that the demonstrative concept's reference is fixed by the shade of blue that the wall appears to me as having. That is, when I misperceive, the demonstrative concept's reference is fixed by the content of the experience itself. But once again this would lead to an unacceptable viciously circular account of demonstrative concepts, where demonstrative concepts would implicitly be fixed by themselves.

The Demonstrative Concept Strategy cannot work because it fails to provide a viable account of demonstrative reference in cases of misperception. We thus have one significant argument for the charge that McDowell cannot give cannot give a satisfactory account of misperception.

Belief-Independence and the Müller-Lyer Illusion

The Müller-Lyer illusion, an illusion where the cognitive interpretation of perceptual information is incorrect and does not represent the way things actually are, is relevant to a problem for conceptualism raised by Gareth Evans. The problem in general, is an affirmative answer to the question of whether or not perceptual experiences have any contents that cannot be believed, an affirmation at odds with contention *A* of Mind and World, in particular, the same-content thesis.

The Müller-Lyer illusion is a visual illusion resulting from the fact that outward pointing arrowheads at the end of a line increase its apparent length and inward pointing arrowheads at the end of a line decrease its apparent length, compared to a neutral line of the same length. Its effect comes to prominence when two lines of equal length, one with outward arrows at both ends and one with inward arrows at both ends, are placed so that one is just above the other as illustrated below. It will appear to a perceiving subject that the top line is of greater length than the bottom line, so the subject incorrectly interprets the visual information they correctly receive.

From a McDowellian perspective, the subject is deploying the relevant concepts (although they do not correctly correspond to how things are out there), the relevant “conceptual capacities are drawn on in [this] receptivity”¹⁹, (i.e. concept of lines, concept of relative

¹⁹McDowell, op.cit., p. 10.

length, etc.). The naïve subject would believe what they see, and the conceptual content that constitutes their experience would become the content of their belief that the top line is longer than the bottom line.

This account of the phenomenon is compatible with both the experience conceptualism thesis (the subject possesses the set of concepts relevant to the experience and deploys these concepts in the experience) and the same-content thesis (the content of the experience becomes the content of the belief, so it is possible to have a belief with the content of the experience).

Now, despite the fact that an informed observer may possess the piece of knowledge that the lines presented in the illusion are actually of the same length, they will continue to experience the illusion whilst observing the illustration. Evans exploits this ‘persistence of the illusion’, motivated not explicitly by an attack on conceptualism, but by his attempt to construct an ‘informational system’.

Perception is one of three constituents of Evans’ ‘informational system’, of which he believes it would be wrong to characterise (being in a state of the informational system) in terms of belief. One reason for this is that:

In the first place, such a characterization could not be simple, because of a fundamental (almost defining) property of the states in the informational system, which I shall call their ‘belief-independence’: the subject’s being in an informational state is independent of whether or not he believes that the state is veridical. It is a well-known fact about perceptual illusions that it will continue to appear to us as though, say, one line is longer than the other (in the Müller-Lyer illusion) even when we are quite sure that it is not²⁰.

McDowell mentions this consideration in Lecture III of *Mind and World*, stating that “the content of a perceptual experience cannot be explained as the content of an appropriate actual belief, since there may be no belief with a suitable content; a familiar visual illusion continues to present its illusory appearance even though the subject does not believe that things are as they look”.²¹

That the perceptual experience of a non-naïve observer has content representing two lines unequal in length, although there can no longer be a corresponding appropriate actual belief (with the associated belief being converse), reminds us that perception is not simply the acquisition of belief. To comply with the same-content thesis and preserve a link between perceptual content and belief content, one may rather opt to treat perception as potential belief. This is something which Evans mentions:

If we wish to define the states which the normal operation of the informational system produces in terms of belief, we shall have to adopt, quite generally, the

²⁰Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 123.

²¹McDowell, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

manoeuvre undertaken by several philosophers in the theory of perception, and make the connection via some such phrase as ‘prima facie’ inclination to believe.²²

Of course, it is an option Evans does not think much of; why go to such lengths when we can instead opt for his non-conceptual informational system and “reserve belief for the notion of a far more sophisticated cognitive state”.²³

McDowell mentions this preservation of a definitional connection between perceptual content and belief content, but is adamant that his position is not threatened:

But the point does not touch the position I am recommending. According to the position I am recommending, conceptual capacities are already operative in experience itself. It is not that actual operations of conceptual capacities first figure only in actualizations of dispositions to judge, with which experiences are identified - so that experience is connected with concepts only by way of potentiality. Having things appear to one in a certain way is already itself a mode of actual operations of conceptual capacities.²⁴

According to McDowell, one cannot control how their experience represents things to be, but they can accept or reject how things appear to be, “that [the top line is longer than the bottom line] is the content of the experience, .. .and it becomes the content of [the subject’s] judgement if the subject decides to take the experience at face value”.²⁵ This process of judgement does not introduce a new kind of content but simply endorses conceptual content possessed by the experience on which it is grounded. So when a non-naïve subject observes the Müller-Lyer illusion, the content of their perceptual experience *is* conceptual, although it is not going to be endorsed because it conflicts with an existing belief.

I think the point to make, with regard to the same-content thesis in particular, is that despite the fact that the Müller-Lyer and related illusions demonstrate the notion of belief-independence, the possibility that the contents of such perceptual experiences may or may have become the contents of actual beliefs is not precluded. This point is nicely captured by Robert Stalnaker who writes that “it seems at least prima facie reasonable to say that when something merely looks to me to be a certain way, even though I don’t really believe that it is that way, then there is perceptual state with a certain content that might have been, but is not the content of any of my beliefs.”²⁶

Another issue I wish to briefly raise with the Müller-Lyer illusion modestly feeds off Heck’s argument against the demonstrative concept strategy as discussed earlier. Christopher Peacocke has argued that contents of perceptual experiences can be unit-free and that

²²Evans, op.cit., p. 124.

²³Ibid., p. 124.

²⁴McDowell, op.cit., p. 62.

²⁵McDowell, op.cit., p. 26.

²⁶Robert Stalnaker, ‘What Might Nonconceptual Content Be?’, Accessed Sep-Oct 2005, <<http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/courses/concepts/Stalnaker.htm>>

it is difficult to see how such unit-free representations can be accommodated in conceptual terms:

It seems that there is a way of perceiving distance, and a way of thinking of distances based on perceptions of them, neither of which are captured by specifications of distance in feet and inches.²⁷

This thought can be interestingly applied to the Müller-Lyer illusion. When a subject observes the illusion, they do not represent the difference in line lengths they experience in terms of a particular unit of measurement, even though what they represent is a perfectly determinate distance. They simply represent it as being ‘that distance’, where the content of their perception specifies the distance. How can such unit-free representations be accommodated in conceptual terms?

Of course, it is precisely in instances such as these that the conceptualist will employ the Demonstrative Concept Strategy, but consequently such an approach is vulnerable to Heck’s argument. The difference in length between the lines is of course zero, so when a subject perceives a difference in length and utters ‘that length’ to express this difference, the reference of the demonstrative concept is supposedly fixed by a difference of zero whilst the difference in length represented in the experience is of a positive magnitude, so the experience does not have the same content as that represented by the demonstrative concept.

Contradictory Perceptual Content

I shall now discuss an illusion where the cognitive interpretation of perceptual information is correct yet does not represent the way things actually are. The illusion in question is the Partially Submerged Stick Illusion, formulated as follows: if I were to observe from a certain angle a stick partially submerged in a transparent glass of water it would appear to me that the stick was bent; if I were to remove the stick from the glass, it would appear to me that the stick was straight. I would judge that the former perceptual experience was non-veridical and the latter veridical, as I know that it was the latter observation which was made under normal observation conditions. Furthermore, I know that the illusion of a bent stick occurs because of refraction; the refracted light in this illusion is perceived correctly, yet incorrectly represents the stick as being bent. Now, the formulation of the illusion which I have just given does not threaten McDowell’s link between concepts and perceptual experience. Firstly, the condition of the experience conceptualism thesis can be satisfied - where the stick is the object and the property is that of being bent, I possess both these concepts and deploy them in my experience of the illusion. Secondly, the condition of the same-content thesis can be satisfied - my experience that the stick is bent is constituted

²⁷Christopher Peacocke, ‘Analogue Content’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 60, 1986, p. 1.

by certain conceptual content and it is also possible for me to have a belief constituted by this content.

Things become problematic for conceptualism when we expand upon the classic formulation of this illusion to a bi-sensory perceptual experience of the partially submerged stick involving both visual and tactile perception. Imagine a situation in which I see a partially submerged stick and then proceed to touch the stick at the region where I visually perceive it to be bent, whilst continuing to visually perceive the stick. I am now presented with a stick that visually appears to be bent yet my tactile experience indicates that the stick is straight. I am thus presented with contradictory representational content, one sense is indicating that the stick is straight and another sense is indicating that the stick is not straight. In attempting to fit this phenomenon with the experience conceptualism thesis, a peculiar consequence is that I would be concurrently deploying incompatible concepts. Furthermore, it is doubtful that this phenomenon can satisfy the same-content thesis. It seems impossible that the content of such a perceptual experience could become the content of a belief, for it is impossible that a belief could have contradictory content. A subject is never going to take the experience at face value and the actualisation of contradictory belief content is intrinsically inconceivable. This perhaps suggests that perceptual content should be treated as a primitive notion not to be characterised in terms of belief.

Tim Crane has similarly used the idea of contradictory perceptual experience in an argument against conceptualism²⁸, although the Waterfall Illusion he uses solely involves visual perception and is not as fundamentally contradictory as the example I have just been discussing.²⁹ Nonetheless, the crux of his argument can be applied to the contradictory Partially Submerged Stick Illusion I have been discussing. The basic idea of this argument is that the contents of beliefs are individuated by certain principles (which Crane calls ‘Fregean’ because of their origin in Frege’s theory of Sense and Reference) whereas the contents of perceptions are not; therefore belief content cannot be the same thing as perceptual content. The criteria of difference for concepts which Crane introduces (actually an adaptation from Frege’s use) are as follows:

- (I) F and G are different concepts if it is possible for a subject to rationally judge, of an object a , that a is F and that a is *not*- G .

It is fair to say that the conceptual contents of beliefs accord with the above criterion. Now if perceptual content is conceptual, hence individuated along the lines of the above criterion, then for all perceptual experiences:

²⁸Tim Crane, ‘The Waterfall Illusion’, *Analysis*, Vol. 48, 1988, pp. 142-147.

²⁹The Waterfall Illusion is achieved when a subject focuses for a period of time on a scene which contains movement (such as a waterfall, hence the illusion’s name) and then turns their attention to a stationary object in a scene which does not contain movement. Not only does the stationary object appear to move in the opposite direction to that of the original movement, it also does not appear to move relative to the background of the scene. So in a way the object appears to both move and not move.

(II) F and G are different perceptual concepts if it is possible for a subject to have (at the same time) an experience with the content that a is F and an experience with the content a is *not-G*.

In the visual-tactile Partially Submerged Stick Illusion that I have been discussing, the subject perceives the stick as being both bent and not bent. Substituting *bent* for F , *bent* for G and *stick* for a in criterion (II) we have:

If it is possible for a subject to have (at the same time) an experience with the content that the stick is bent and an experience with the content the stick is not bent then bent and bent are different perceptual concepts.

Remarkably the antecedent of this statement is true and since it is patent that ‘bent’ and ‘bent’ are not distinct concepts, the consequent is false, leading to the conclusion that the statement is invalid. The contents of perceptual experience must therefore not be universally individuated by this criterion, thus raising doubt that such content is conceptual.

D.H. Mellor disagrees that Crane’s argument shows that perceptual experience is non-conceptual³⁰. In order to explain the contradictory content of the Waterfall Illusion perceptual experience, he insists we need to credit the experience with conceptual content and maintains the notion that perceptual experience is an inclination to believe, that “experience has the content of the belief, but may not produce it”³¹, because it may conflict with an existing belief.

Adapting Mellor’s argument to the Partially Submerged Stick Illusion, the basic idea is that the perceiving subject is conscious of seeing that the stick is bent whilst also feeling that it is straight. One of these two perceptual experiences (feeling a straight stick) results in the corresponding belief that the stick is straight, which then suppresses the rival inclination to believe that the stick is bent. So the perceptual experience does contain conceptual content, constituted by the concepts of *bent* and *not bent (straight)* roughly speaking, both which the subject is inclined to believe, although since they are incompatible, only one ends up becoming the content of a corresponding belief, generally because of its support from other beliefs and perceptions.

I find some aspects of this outline appealing, aspects which I am in fact inclined to adopt, although for reasons contrary to Mellor’s, because I think that these aspects agree more with a non-conceptual rather than a conceptual account of perception. Firstly, Mellor’s account seems to treat such perceptual experience as being composed of two incompatible yet distinct contents, *bent* and *not bent*, rather than one contradictory content, *bent* & \sim *bent*. Although as yet neither of these two options are definitive, I think that the temporal concurrence and perceptual inseparability of the visual and tactile aspects of the experience are suggestive

³⁰D.H. Mellor, ‘Crane’s Waterfall Illusion’, *Analysis*, Vol. 48, 1988, pp. 147-150.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 149.

of a single content, *bent* $\mathcal{E} \sim bent$. It is preferable to postulate that the process of judgement ‘filters’ and conceptualises the contradictory *informational* content outputted from the perceptual system, so that the informational content *bent* $\mathcal{E} \sim bent$ is transformed into the conceptual content *bent* and *not bent* (*straight*). The culmination of this process is the endorsement of one of the two contents and the suppression of the other. Such an account would at least support the point that ‘perceptual experience revision’ does not occur. It is preferable to postulate one inherently contradictory and inseparable piece of informational content rather than two distinct pieces of conceptual content, because despite the subject’s experience history and beliefs, there is no chance that ‘one of the two’ perceptual contents (visual or tactile) will be ‘discarded’ or ‘readjust’ itself to conform to the other. Whereas given two incompatible yet distinct conceptualised contents a subject is able to endorse one and suppress/discard the other.

Closing

This paper has established that McDowell is faced with at least a few problems when it comes to giving a satisfactory account of misperception. His demonstrative concept strategy fails because it fails to give a satisfactory account of misperception. Attempts to characterise the content of non-veridical perception in terms of demonstrative concepts lead to one of two unacceptable implications; on the one hand the employment of demonstrative concepts that are not fixed and on the other hand, the employment of demonstrative concepts that are fixed circularly. The Müller-Lyer illusion presents a conflict between two different states; the state of believing that the lines are the same length, and the state of the lines looking to be different lengths. Although this provides an inducement to reject conceptualism, it by no means provides a conclusive argument against conceptualism, for it can be accommodated by a conceptualist account, in which the content of a perceptual experience of the Müller-Lyer illusion (itself a mode of actual operations of conceptual capacities), *could* become the content of a belief. In fact, for the naïve observer, this is what would happen. Nonetheless, the Müller-Lyer illusion is a good example of why the demonstrative concept strategy fails. The visual-tactile Partially Submerged Stick Illusion however, presents a contradiction in the one content of one perceptual state. Hence I have argued that the content of such perceptual experience cannot be conceptual, since conceptual content must be consistent. Furthermore, if conceptual content is individuated by Frege’s criterion then it is unlikely that perceptual experience is exclusively constituted by conceptual content.

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