

Empirical concepts and the content of experience

Hannah Ginsborg

European Journal of Philosophy, forthcoming

Abstract: The view that the content of experience is conceptual is often felt to conflict with the empiricist intuition that experience precedes thought, rather than vice versa. This concern is explicitly articulated by Ayers as an objection both to McDowell and Davidson, and to the conceptualist view more generally. The paper aims to defuse the objection in its general form by presenting a version of conceptualism which is compatible with empiricism. It proposes an account of observational concepts on which possession of such a concept involves more than the ability for perceptual discrimination, but less than the capacity to employ the concept in inferences: it consists in the capacity to perceptually discriminate objects with the awareness that one is discriminating as one ought. This understanding of concept-possession allows us make sense of experiences' having conceptual content without supposing that the subject must grasp the relevant concepts prior to having those experiences.

The issue of the nonconceptual content of experience has been a subject of lively debate in recent philosophy of mind and epistemology.¹ Is the content of a perceptual experience the same kind of content that is typically ascribed to beliefs and thoughts, that is, conceptual content? Or do perceptual experiences have a different kind of content, namely content that is nonconceptual? Much of this debate has been inspired by John McDowell's (1994) defence of the first alternative. McDowell argues that the content of experience must be conceptual if experiences are to be capable of serving as rational grounds for beliefs, something which is in turn required if beliefs and thoughts are to be intentionally directed towards the world. He supplements this argument by addressing a variety of considerations which appear, on the face of it, to undermine the claim that the content of experience is exclusively conceptual. These include the apparent 'repleteness' or 'fineness or grain' possessed by experience in contrast to thought, the independence of experience from belief, and the plausibility of ascribing contentful experience to animals and infants.

Among the many challenges raised against McDowell in the course of this debate, one of the deepest and most interesting has been developed by Michael Ayers in some of his latest work.² Ayers formulates his challenge in the context of a broader attack on conceptualism which is directed against the views of Quine, Sellars, Strawson, and Davidson, as well as the more recent versions of conceptualism defended by McDowell and by Bill Brewer, whose position is in many respects close to McDowell's. Ayers agrees with McDowell that experiences must be able to serve as rational grounds for, and not merely causes of, belief. Indeed, like McDowell, he takes this to be crucial if we are to do justice to the perspicuity of perceptual beliefs in contrast, say, to hunches, guesses, the beliefs of blindsighted subjects, and so on (2004: 245-246).³ But he denies that this requires that the content of experiences be conceptual: a nonconceptual representation can also serve as a reason for belief. Moreover, he develops a vigorous line of argument to the effect that experiential content is in fact exclusively nonconceptual.

Some of this line of argument draws on considerations which are by now fairly standard in the literature on nonconceptual content. In particular, he appeals to the 'aesthetic' character of perception (2004: 250; 2002: 9; 2000: 119), which, as he notes, is closely related to its so-called 'repleteness' or 'fineness of grain'. A further point in common with other nonconceptualists is his appeal to the experience of animals and infants, which is plausibly understood as having content even though animals and infants are not usually viewed as possessing concepts. But there is also much that is distinctive about the line of argument, both in many of its details and in its overall impetus. Two features in particular deserve emphasis. First, it is grounded in a deeply thought-out and historically informed picture of the nature of experience and of its relation to thought and the world: a picture which derives both coherence and plausibility from

its roots in the early modern tradition. Central to this picture is the idea that intentionality and conceptuality can be separated from each other, and in particular that experience can have intentional content without presupposing conceptual abilities. Second, it gives pride of place to the fundamental empiricist principle that experience precedes thought, and, more specifically, that 'our way of thinking of the world is comprehensively indebted to, or rooted in, the way we experience it' (2000: 119). Even though there are some cases in which the nature of our experience is influenced by the concepts we possess (2004: 251n23; 2000: 12; 1991: I, 175), the relation of concepts to experience must for the most part be the other way around: '[i]n general, experience comes before concepts, and it is because we experience the world as we do that we are in a position to acquire the concepts appropriate to any account of things in the world' (2004: 255). Empiricist commitments along these lines figure to some degree in the work of other nonconceptualists,⁴ but it is only in Ayers's work that we find such a forthright and clearly articulated characterization of what is fundamentally at stake in the debate over nonconceptual content.

I find much of Ayers's discussion persuasive, and I agree, in particular, with his assertion that experience precedes thought, rather than the other way around. However I am not convinced by his argument that experiences do not need to have conceptual content in order to stand in a rational relation to belief, at least the kind of rational relation demanded by McDowell. And I am also not convinced that intentionality and conceptuality can be separated in the way that he proposes. So I do not believe that he has succeeded in undermining the *prima facie* case for conceptualism offered by McDowell. My main aim in this article, then, is to reconcile the case for conceptualism with those considerations raised by Ayers which I do find convincing. I shall try to do this by presenting a

version of conceptualism which goes some way towards meeting his criticisms, and which, in particular, respects the empiricist intuitions which he rightly emphasizes. In other words, I shall try to challenge his claim that 'one cannot consistently be both a Conceptualist and an Empiricist' (2000: 119).⁵ I shall begin by discussing the two points on which I find Ayers's view unconvincing: first, in section I of the paper, his argument that experience does not have to have conceptual content in order to serve as a reason for belief; and second, in section II, his argument that experience does not to have conceptual content in order to be intentional or object-directed. The discussion of this second difficulty will pave the way for the positive view which I shall present and defend in sections III - V.

I

Ayers offers two closely related arguments for the claim that an experience lacking conceptual content can still be a rational ground or justification for belief. The first is presented by way of a challenge to Donald Davidson's view that, to cite an often-quoted remark, 'nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief' (1986: 310). McDowell's own view on the question of reasons for belief is weaker than Davidson's, in that he allows reasons for belief to include not only other beliefs but also states with unasserted propositional contents, which is what he takes experiences to be. But Davidson and McDowell agree that a reason for belief must at least have conceptual content, and it is against this point that Ayers's argument is directed. According to Davidson, when I have the sensation of a green light flashing and I come to believe that there is a green light flashing, the sensation itself does no justificatory work. What justifies or rationalizes the belief, if anything, is the belief that I am

having the corresponding sensation (1986: 311). Ayers objects that this 'radically misrepresents a basic kind of reason-giving' (2004: 243). If I see a green light flashing and I correspondingly come to believe that a green light is flashing, I may 'meet demands for a reason' by appealing to my experience, that is, by saying that I saw a green light flashing. But when I make that appeal I am citing as my justification not my *belief* that I saw a green light flashing, but rather the experience itself, or what was presented to me in experience (that is, the green light flashing). As Ayers puts it, '[what] I say in justification in saying that I saw a green light's flashing certainly expresses a belief, but it is a thought worthy of Lewis Carroll that I here justify my belief by another belief, as if it was my *believing* that I saw it happen, rather than my having seen it happen, which supplies my justification or ground' (ibid.).

The argument continues by invoking a comparison between perceptual experiences and pictures, in particular photographs. If someone comes to believe, from studying an appropriately authenticated photograph, that Kennedy was shot at from the ground, she will cite as evidence for her belief the photograph itself, or the visual content of the photograph. Even though she believes, say, that the photograph depicts a man aiming a rifle, it is not that belief, but rather the photograph itself, that she will appeal to in justifying her belief about the circumstances of Kennedy's assassination. Relatedly, it is not her belief about the photograph, but the photograph itself, that will come under scrutiny when the rest of us attempt to determine whether her belief about the assassination is justified. There are of course disanalogies between perceptual experiences and photographs; but, Ayers concludes, 'the analogy with pictures does...allow us to see how a belief with conceptual content can be based on a representation...with nonconceptual content; and how it can be an appropriate and sufficient

response to a request for a reason or justification simply to indicate that representation' (244).

The prima facie plausibility of this line of argument, however, seems to me to rest on an equivocation between two different senses in which something can be a reason for belief. In one sense, a subject's reason for a belief is whatever she herself will appeal to in answering the question of what justifies her belief: and this is typically a fact about the world, and not itself a belief. This sense of 'reason' is well illustrated by an example of Dennis Stampe's: 'If I believe that it has rained because the streets are wet, it is the fact that the streets are wet, not the fact that I believe them to be, that comprises my reason for believing that it has rained' (1987: 343). It is possible for my belief that the streets are wet to comprise my reason, in this same sense, for believing that it has rained: as Stampe notes, I might cite it as my reason if I know that things have been arranged in such a way that I will not be allowed to acquire the belief that the streets are wet unless it has, in fact, rained. But 'this would not be the normal state of affairs... ordinarily it is the fact itself that comprises evidence for the conclusion, not the fact that it is believed to be a fact' (343n.9).

In another sense, however, we say that a subject's reason for her belief is whatever it is which -- from a third-person point of view -- makes it rational for her to have that belief. In this sense of 'reason', the reason for the subject's belief is, at least typically, another belief that she has. If I believe that it has rained, and someone else is wondering whether this is a rational thing for me to believe given my circumstances, the right thing for them to do is to find out what else I believe, for example whether I believe that the streets are wet. Now supposing I do in fact believe that the streets are wet, I myself will cite, as my reason for

my belief that it rained, not my *belief* that the streets are wet, but rather the *fact* that the streets are wet. This corresponds to the first sense of 'reason'. But to the onlooker wondering about my rationality it will be neither here nor there whether the streets are wet or not. All that will matter from her point of view is whether or not I *believe* that the streets are wet, and if I do, she will cite that belief as rationalizing or rationally grounding my belief that it rained. The fact itself -- the wetness of the street -- is neither necessary nor sufficient to rationalize my belief from this perspective.⁶

Now Ayers is quite right to point out that I can appeal to my experience to justify my belief that there is a green light flashing, or to a photograph to justify my belief that Kennedy was shot at from the ground. But this shows the experience and the photograph to be reasons only in the first of the two senses which I distinguished. The experience and the photograph are reasons in the same way that the wet streets, or the fact of the streets' being wet, are a reason: they are what I myself point to as a justification for my belief. Even though others too may seek to determine whether my belief is justified by examining the photograph or verifying whether or not I had the experience of a flashing light, that is only in a context where they themselves are considering whether or not to adopt the belief and thus are adopting a first-person perspective on what counts as a reason. When you look at the photograph to determine whether my belief about Kennedy's assassination is justified, your concern is not whether I was rational to form that belief, that is, whether the belief is a rational one for *me* to adopt, but whether *you* ought to adopt the belief. But when Davidson says that nothing can count as a reason for belief except another belief, he has in mind the other way of talking about reasons. His claim is that from the perspective of a third person, nothing can serve as a criterion for whether

it is rational for a subject to form a given belief except some other belief possessed by the same subject. And even though I think McDowell himself is guilty of the same equivocation which I am ascribing to Ayers,⁷ it is hard to understand his position except on the assumption that he shares Davidson's conception of reasons and rational grounding. For in claiming that experiences can be reasons for belief, he presumably wants to hold that they can be reasons in the same sense in which other beliefs can be reasons for belief, and that seems to demand that he thinks of them as reasons in the second rather than the first of the two senses I distinguished.⁸ To put the point another way, it is the second rather than the first sense of 'reason' which is required if experiences -- and not just beliefs about experiences -- are to figure, as McDowell wants them to, in what Sellars calls 'the logical space of reasons'.

It might reasonably be complained that there is something unnatural about this second way of talking about reasons. This, I think, is part of what lies behind Ayers's argument, in particular his accusation that Davidson 'radically misrepresents a basic kind of reason-giving'. But talk of reasons or rational grounds figures not only in our own reason-giving practice but also in our assessments of others' rationality, even if it is parasitic on the more fundamental notion of a reason as something to which the subject herself appeals in justification of her beliefs. If I cite the fact that *p* as reason for my belief that *q*, my situation can be described by others as one in which my belief that *p* is a reason for my belief that *q*. There is thus a legitimate sense in which Davidson can claim that only a belief can count as a reason for another belief, although the sense is a limited one and needs to be distinguished from the primary sense in which a reason is something that we *give* and not something which we can be described as *having*. Ayers's discussion fosters confusion on this point in so far as he

describes the photograph analogy as showing that 'a belief with conceptual content can be based on a representation... with nonconceptual content' (2004: 244). This suggests that he takes the belief to be based on the photograph in the same way that Davidson takes a belief to be based on another belief; it is as if the argument is intended to broaden the class of intentional states or representations which can rationalize beliefs so as to include states with nonconceptual or aesthetic content as well as states with conceptual content. But in fact the fundamental insight to which the argument appeals has nothing to do with representational content or intentionality. The role played by the photograph in justifying my belief in a second gunman is no different from the role that would be played by a bullet found on the scene, or from the role played by the wet streets in justifying my belief that it has rained.⁹

In the second and related argument, this time directed against McDowell rather than Davidson, Ayers seems to acknowledge this last point.¹⁰ Here he appeals to the fact that something propositional -- a belief or judgment or description -- can be based on something that is not only not propositional, but also could not possibly be propositional. He says by way of example, that 'my description of a zebra... may be based on perceived zebras, living or stuffed, or on photographs, models or drawings of zebras' (247). His inclusion of actual zebras in this list suggests that he is not trying to make a point about the kinds of grounding relations which we take to hold among intentional or representational states, that is, about relations which are rational in a way corresponding to the second way of talking about reasons. Rather, his point is about the admittedly more fundamental kind of grounding relation between the subject's belief and whatever she appeals to as a reason for that belief. And he is quite correct that what she appeals to need not be factual or propositional in form; to defend her description of

a given zebra as striped she need not point to a fact about the zebra, she can simply point to the zebra. However, as I suggested in connection with the argument against Davidson, this does not speak to McDowell's requirement that experience be propositional in form if it is to be a rational ground of belief. In order for that requirement to be satisfied, a subject's experience must rationalize her belief not in so far as she herself can appeal to it as a reason for her belief, but in in so far as it relates appropriately to her belief within the 'space of reasons'.¹¹

II

I now want to turn to the second of the two points on which I find Ayers's view unconvincing. This has to do with his attempt to drive a wedge between the intentional character of experience and its supposed conceptuality. My concern here, in a nutshell, is that Ayers's own conception of experience as having intentional content appears on the face of it to imply that its content is conceptual. To summarize his view very crudely, Ayers takes experience to have intentional content by virtue of the fact that it presents us with objects: that is to say, ordinary medium-sized objects arranged in space and persisting over time. He contrasts this picture with a very different picture associated with at least some forms of conceptualism, in particular McDowell's: namely a picture in which experience presents us not with objects, but with facts, properties or states of affairs. 'The world, on the scale at which we experience it, is to an extent broken up into unitary material objects, and that is *how* we experience it. It is not broken up into properties, tropes, states of affairs or facts, nor do we so experience it' (2004: 255). The suggestion here is that experience can be object-directed without presenting us with items that are conceptual

or propositional in shape, so that its content is intentional without being conceptual.

However it is hard to suppose that experience can present us with objects unless those objects are also presented to us as having features or properties: whether so-called sensible qualities like colours, shapes and textures, or properties that are less immediately bound to sensation, such as the property of being an apple, or a mountain, or liquid.¹² And indeed Ayers seems to concede this, at least as regards the sensible qualities: we are presented with objects which are 'variously qualified' such as a green light flashing, or a cube which is red, hard, and heavy (2004: 241). Moreover, and this is the crucial point, he makes clear that we are given the objects as having those properties: thus he gives as an example our seeing a shape as a trapezium (1991: I, 177). So he seems not only to be committed to, but also to acknowledge, that a red cube is given to us as red and as a cube.

Now on the face of it, it looks as though experience, so conceived, should count as having conceptual, rather than nonconceptual, content. The main reason is that perceiving an object as red or as a cube involves representing it as having a quality that is common, or at least potentially common, to other objects. So the experience of the cube which we have when we perceive it as red, or as a cube, involves not only a representation of that particular cube, but also a representation of various general features which the cube possesses: notably, its being red and its being a cube. And, at least in one influential tradition, namely that deriving from Kant, this is precisely to say that our experience involves concepts. For a concept, according to Kant, just is a representation which is general, that is a representation which is common to several objects.¹³ A related but perhaps more controversial reason for taking experience of this kind to be conceptual has to do with the close relation between seeing something as having a

certain feature, and taking it to have that feature. When a person sees a cube as red, she typically, in so doing, takes it to be red; that is to say, she judges it or believes it to be red. In fact, since we typically perceive things veridically, her seeing it as red amounts in most cases to her knowing it to be red. It is only in relatively rare cases that we see something as red without *eo ipso* judging it to be red, and it is plausible to suppose that these cases are parasitic on the primary case in which seeing is believing, and, for the most part, knowing.¹⁴ But conceptual content is generally thought of as the kind of content that is possessed by judgments and beliefs: to cite Kant again, concepts are predicates of possible judgments (A69/B94). So this suggests, again, that the content of such an experience is conceptual.¹⁵

To anyone familiar with the recent literature, this objection will not seem to cut very deep. For it is a fairly standard move for nonconceptualists to concede that perceptual experience is experience of objects as having features, but to deny the implication that the content of the experience is conceptual.¹⁶ A natural way to defend this move is to appeal to an understanding of concepts which is more demanding than the Kantian notion invoked above. Some nonconceptualists have taken this route by identifying conceptual capacities with capacities for inference or reasoning. Crane, for example, identifies concepts as the 'inferentially relevant constituents of intentional states,' and concludes from this that the possession of concepts entails being disposed to make certain inferences (1992: 147). Taking a similar tack, Martin glosses conceptual content as 'that content which figures in one's reasoning' (1992: 763), and contrasts such content with a more general notion of intentional content which applies to perceptual states independently of one's capacity to reason about their content. Once this more demanding notion of conceptuality has been

established, then it becomes more plausible to hold that a thing can appear to one as F without one's having the concept F. For as Martin puts it, 'what can be perceptually apparent to a perceiver is not limited solely to what she can reason about... there is no immediately obvious link between having states that represent the world as being some way and having the ability to reason about the world being that way' (759, 762).

Ayers adopts a related strategy, but one that involves a potentially even stronger notion of conceptuality: the possession of a concept is either the same as, or extremely closely related to, the possession of a linguistic capacity.¹⁷ So he understands McDowell's thesis that the content of experience is conceptual as the thesis that this content is 'dependent on language and culture' (2004: 239), or that it is 'shaped by the systematically structured set of capacities that underlie the perceiver's linguistic competence' (2002: 5). Given this understanding of conceptuality, it would be extremely counter-intuitive to insist that seeing something as F requires possession of the concept F. For, as Ayers notes, I can see something as a trapezium without knowing the meaning either of the term 'trapezium', or of any of its synonyms (1991: I, 177).

Could the conceptualist respond to this type of approach by insisting on a less demanding notion of what it is to be a concept, one on which concept-possession requires neither linguistic nor inferential capacities? Ayers considers this possibility, but rules it out. While he is not completely explicit about this aspect of his argument, he seems to assume that the only alternative to the more demanding notion would be one which identifies concepts with capacities for perceptual discrimination.¹⁸ And, as he rightly points out, a conceptualism based on such a construal would be vacuous. As an example of such a vacuous view, he cites the conceptualist position defended in Peacocke 1983 (but recanted in later work). Peacocke

characterizes a concept as a 'way of thinking' or a 'mode of presentation', but he allows that thinking includes the having of experiences and that modes of presentation may be perceptual (Ayers 1991: I, 177).¹⁹ So a concept is, among other things, a way of experiencing. Against this, Ayers makes the reasonable complaint that conceptualism, on this construal of concepts, is trivial: 'we need hardly be told that only those capable of experiencing or perceiving a sphere can have an experience as of a sphere in front of them' (176-177).²⁰

If it is granted that there is no alternative to these two construals, then the conceptualist is presented with a dilemma. If she adopts a demanding view of concepts as linguistic or (we might add) inferential capacities, then her position is implausible. For it is obvious both that, as Ayers puts it, 'seeing comes before saying' (2000: 122), and that perception must precede the capacity to recognize inferential relations between propositions. But if she chooses to adopt a less demanding view of concepts which identifies them instead with perceptual capacities or ways of perceiving, then her position becomes trivial.

It is in the context of this dilemma that I want to propose the view that I promised at the outset: a view which takes the content of experience to be conceptual while respecting the empiricist principle that experience precedes thought. For I want to motivate this view by showing that it offers a middle way between the two accounts of concepts which Ayers takes to be available. To avoid the dilemma we need an account of concepts which is strong enough to save the conceptualist thesis from triviality but not so strong as to make it implausible. In what follows I will try to sketch such an account and to show how the corresponding version of conceptualism addresses the challenges raised by Ayers and other nonconceptualists.

III

The account of concepts which I want to propose derives from Kant.²¹ But it differs from a commonly invoked stereotype of Kantianism in that, rather than drawing on Kant's account of the categories and their relation to experience, it appeals to his account of empirical concepts. This means, as we will see, that it does not commit us to a view on which experience is shaped by a set of concepts which we possess antecedently to any experience. Rather it makes room for the idea that empirical concepts are possible only in, and through, experience. I will draw on two ideas which I take to be central to Kant's view of empirical concepts. The first is the idea that a concept is a rule for the synthesis of imagination. We find this idea in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in particular in the first edition Transcendental Deduction and in the Schematism.²² The second is the idea that our imaginative activity can be, and be recognized by us, as rule-governed, without our having any awareness of the relevant rules prior to engaging in that activity. This idea is not explicitly articulated by Kant, but I take it to be a consequence of the account of aesthetic experience which he gives in the *Critique of Judgment*.²³ I mention these ideas only to give a sense of the historical antecedents of the view I am proposing; in what follows I shall characterize the view without relying on Kantian terminology or on anything else about Kant's framework.

I want to begin by focussing on a notion which will play a central role in my account, that is the notion of a way of perceiving something, or of a way in which something is perceived. We can get an intuitive handle on this notion by thinking about sorting behaviour, that is the behaviour whereby a creature sorts things into kinds: at its most primitive, this can be any behaviour involving a systematic pattern of differential responses to things.

If a sentient creature exhibits dispositions to sort things into kinds, or, more primitively, to respond differentially to them, then it is natural to think of its dispositions as expressing something about the character of its conscious perceptual states. More specifically, it is natural to describe the various ways in which it sorts the things, or the various patterns of responses which it exhibits, as reflecting 'how it is perceiving' the things. It is in this sense that I want to understand the notion of a way of perceiving things. Perceiving something in a certain way is not equivalent to being disposed to sort it in a certain way, but it can be characterized as what it is about a creature's conscious state which accounts for its sorting it in that way.

For a highly simplified example of how the notion might be used, consider a case where two animals are being trained to respond differentially to objects of various shapes and colours. One of the animals is capable of producing a certain behavioural response to things that are red in contrast to things of other colours, but it never responds differentially to shapes. The other animal's patterns of response are the reverse: it shows no difference in its responses to different colours, but it reliably 'picks out', as we might put it, spheres as opposed to cubes. It is plausible on the basis of this to claim that, presented with a red sphere, the two animals perceive it in different ways. One perceives it in such a way as to sort it with other red things, or in a way which involves sensitivity to its colour; the other perceives it such a way as to sort it with other spheres, or in a way which involves sensitivity to its shape.

Now it is also possible to characterize ways of perceiving more informatively, in terms of the kinds of imaginative activities and processes that are typically involved in experience. For example, in the case of the animal that can discriminate things of different shapes, we might say that

its way of perceiving a sphere on some particular occasion involves anticipating in imagination the rolling of the sphere when it is pushed. But the notion of a way of perceiving, as I am understanding it, does not depend on any particular assumptions about how imagination is involved in experience. And I also take it that in many contexts the most natural criterion for individuating ways of perceiving is in terms of the sorting behaviour to which they give rise. So for example we are likely to say that two creatures perceive a sphere the same way if they treat it alike in all sorting experiments, even if, say, one imaginatively anticipates its rolling when pushed, and the other imagines how it would feel to put it in its mouth.²⁴

The notion of a way of perceiving something, or equivalently, of a way in which something is perceived, can easily be confused with another notion which I take to be distinct: that of a way in which something is perceived as *being*. It is important for my purposes to make a clear separation between these two. A way of perceiving an object is a way things are with a subject in her dealings with the object. But a way in which an object is perceived as *being* is, at least potentially, a way things are with the object; it is a feature of an object which the subject perceives this particular object as having. So the fact that a subject perceives an object in a particular way does not, of itself, imply that there is any particular way she perceives it as being. A subject can have a characteristic way of perceiving red things, one that enables her to discriminate them from things of other colours, without perceiving them as red, or indeed as having any features at all. My point in insisting on the distinction is to leave room for just that possibility. I want to understand the notion of a 'way of perceiving' so as to leave open that a subject can perceive something in a certain way, and indeed a way which involves sensitivity to one of its features, without for

all that perceiving it as having that feature. It is for this reason that, in giving the initial example of the two animals and the red sphere, I characterized the difference between their ways of perceiving only by saying that one was sensitive to the sphere's colour and the other to its shape. I did not say, as might have been expected, that one perceives it as red and the other perceives it as a sphere.²⁵

Now it should be clear that we will not arrive at a satisfactory account of concepts if we simply identify them with ways of perceiving. For that would just be to embrace the first horn of the dilemma: it would make the conceptualist thesis trivial in just the way Ayers criticizes. But nor will it help us to identify them with ways in which things are perceived as being. For we have not yet established that there is any substantive difference between perceiving something a certain way (e.g. in a way sensitive to its redness) and perceiving it as *being* a corresponding way (e.g. as red). All we have seen so far is that there is a semantic difference between the expressions 'perceiving something a certain way' and 'perceiving something as being a certain way', in that the term 'way' in each case refers to something different. But it is open to the nonconceptualist to deny that it is in fact possible for a creature to perceive something a certain way without perceiving it as being a certain way. There may be no more to seeing an object as red, than seeing it in a way which is sensitive to its redness, or which puts one in a position to sort it with other red things.

But once the notion of a way of perceiving something is in place, we are in a position to introduce a related notion which is more promising as a basis for an account of concepts: that of a way in which one *ought* to perceive something. Rather than construing the possession of a concept as a matter merely of being able to perceive things in a certain way -- which

leads, as we have seen, to a form of conceptualism which is trivial -- we can take it to involve, in addition, the consciousness that they ought to be perceived in that way. The idea is that for experience to have conceptual content, what is needed is not merely that the subject experience things in certain ways, but that she take it, in so doing, that this is how she (and all other relevantly similar subjects) ought to experience them: in other words, she must take it that her ways of perceiving them are *appropriate* to those things. This is to propose a stronger or more demanding construal of concepts than one which simply identifies them with ways of perceiving or perceptual capacities. It limits concept-possession to creatures that are capable of regarding their mental lives in normative terms, for example, of appreciating the possibility of perceiving things wrongly. Thus it appears to avoid the first horn of the dilemma. At the same time, it is not -- or at least not obviously -- so strong as to be caught on the second. For the possibility of regarding one's ways of perceiving things as appropriate to those things does not, at least on the face of it, seem to demand that one has mastered a language, or that one is capable of recognizing inferential relations between propositions.

Another way to formulate this construal, which makes clear its indebtedness to Kant, is to say that concepts are rules for perceiving objects. We can bring out the force of this by contrasting humans with animals, assuming with Kant that animals do not possess concepts.²⁶ For Kant, both humans and animals form perceptual images of the world through imaginative processes which are governed by laws of association of a roughly Humean kind. The difference is that for humans this imaginative processing carries with it a normative element: in engaging in these processes, human beings take them as exemplifying normative standards or rules. So while we might say of the animals in the sorting experiments that they discriminate

'blindly' -- they produce their differential responses to say, cubes and spheres, but without any sense that these responses are appropriate -- humans in the same situation do not. In seeing a cube in the kind of way which leads them to sort it with the other cubes and not with the spheres, they take themselves (at least by and large) to be seeing it as it ought to be seen, and thus to be according with a rule for the perception of the cube.²⁷

Moreover, I would suggest that it is precisely this normative element which makes the difference between the two notions I distinguished earlier: that of a way of perceiving something, and a way something is perceived as being. It is in virtue of my consciousness that the way I see the cube is the way it ought to be seen, that I can be said to see it as a cube. To put the point in more general terms: perceiving something as having a certain feature, as opposed to merely perceiving it in a way which is sensitive to that feature, is a matter precisely of recognizing one's perception of it as conforming to a normative rule. Thus we can, if we like, identify the possession of an observational concept like *red* with the capacity to perceive things as being red. But this can be seen to avoid the first horn of the dilemma only because we now have a substantive account of how this capacity differs from the mere capacity to respond differentially to red things: namely, in so far as its exercise involves the subject's consciousness that she is responding as she ought.

IV

Probably the most pressing question that arises for this proposal is that of how to understand the normativity on which it relies. More pointedly: how can we invoke the subject's consciousness of herself as perceiving the object the way she ought, without presupposing that she already possesses concepts corresponding to her ways of perceiving? For it may seem obvious on the face

of it that she cannot take herself to be perceiving the object as she ought, unless she can antecedently specify an applicable norm or rule to which she takes herself to be conforming. If, say, her way of perceiving it is responsive to its being a cube, she cannot take herself to be perceiving as she ought unless she first recognizes that she ought to perceive it in a way responsive to its being a cube. But this in turn seems to require that she is already in possession of the concept *cube*. The apparent upshot is that we cannot appeal to the normativity in human perception in order to explain concept-possession: on the contrary, that normativity presupposes the possession of concepts. Another way to press the same objection is to ask what the normativity in question could be, if not that associated with truth. How can the subject take herself to be perceiving the object as she ought, if not by recognizing that it is in fact a cube, and thus that in perceiving it as a cube she is making, or at least putting herself in a position to make, a true perceptual judgment about it?

In reply to this, I want to invoke the second of the two Kantian ideas I mentioned, namely that a subject can be aware of her imaginative activity as rule-governed without antecedently grasping the rules to which she takes it to conform. I want to suggest, that is, that she can take herself to be perceiving the object as she ought, without supposing that she has any grasp of *how* she ought to be perceiving it over and above the idea that she ought to be perceiving it *this* way. This implies that the normativity involved is not the normativity associated with truth, but a normativity which is prior to truth in so far as it makes concepts, and hence truth, possible.

To get clearer about this suggestion, it is helpful to think about what goes on in simple cases of concept-acquisition, especially in children with limited linguistic resources. One paradigmatic way in which a child comes to acquire concepts like *cube* or *sphere* is by being given sorting exercises.

Children are presented with groups of objects or pictures of objects and asked to say which ones go with which. (In a common version of this kind of exercise, the child is given pictures of various objects and asked to say which object is the 'odd one out'). A 5- or 6-year-old given this kind of task will sort the objects she is given in full consciousness that there are right and wrong ways to do it. And, if the task is simple enough that the sorting comes naturally to her, she will take however she is doing it to be the right way. When she puts a cube together with the other cubes rather than with the spheres, her action, even if unhesitating, is not 'blind': she does it with a sense that it is the appropriate thing to do, that this is where the cube belongs, that this is what she ought to be doing with the cube. And while she herself will not put it this way, it is reasonable to take this awareness of normativity as extending to the way of perceiving that is reflected in her sorting behaviour. Her awareness that the cube should be sorted this way is also an awareness that it should be perceived this way: and if on reflection she decides that she sorted something wrongly because she didn't look at it carefully enough, that is tantamount to recognition that she perceived it wrongly.

If we assume, as the objector does, that all awareness of normativity must presuppose an antecedent grasp of specific norms, then we cannot make sense of this kind of exercise. For on this assumption, the child cannot engage in the exercise unless she already has a grasp, either of the concept *cube*, or of some other concept which she can use as a basis for discriminating between cubes and other things: for example the concept of *having six square faces* or that of *having equal faces meeting at right angles*. But if we assume she has a grasp of the concept *cube* then the exercise obviously cannot contribute to her acquiring that concept. And the other concepts I mentioned seem to be more sophisticated than the concept

cube, so it is not plausible to suppose that she could grasp them before grasping what a cube is. So the assumption seems to commit us to rejecting the idea that we acquire concepts through activities of this kind. But then it is hard to see how we could acquire concepts at all.²⁸ For even though the exercise I have described is artificial, it highlights a kind of activity that appears on the face of it to be essential to almost all language-acquisition and empirical concept-formation. Learning general terms would be impossible if we did not have an intuitive, prelinguistic sense of what belongs together with what, that is, of how things ought to be sorted. The moral I want to draw, then, is that we should reject the assumption, and so make room for the idea of an awareness of normativity which does not depend on an antecedent grasp of norms.²⁹

The approach which I am suggesting reverses a certain traditional conception of how a grasp of rules is related to an activity's being, and being recognized as, governed by rules. On the traditional conception, we cannot engage in a rule-governed activity without first grasping a linguistically articulable set of rules which then are available to guide us in the performance of the activity. We assess the correctness or incorrectness of our performances of the activity in terms of how successful we are in conforming to the rules which guide us. But on the conception that I am suggesting, we can learn to engage in a rule-governed activity without antecedently grasping the rules that govern it. We acquire a grasp of the rules simply by virtue of becoming competent in the activity, as long as the performance of the activity itself involves the awareness that, in performing it, we are by and large performing it as we ought. This grasp is, in the first instance, demonstrative: we grasp the rules insofar as, in engaging in the activity, we take it that it ought to be performed *this* way. It is only after fairly sophisticated reflection on the activity that we come to be able

to characterize those rules non-demonstratively, by describing in general terms how it is that the activity should be performed.³⁰

This is how it is in the case of the child who is acquiring the concept *cube*. In order to be able to discriminate cubes, that is to be able to respond to them differentially, she does not need an antecedent set of criteria which tell her when something does or does not count as a cube. Rather, her capacity for discrimination is acquired before any explicit understanding of what a cube is. And she acquires the concept *cube* simply in virtue of acquiring a capacity for discriminating cubes from non-cubes, provided, that is, that she discriminates them in a way that involves awareness that she is doing it as she ought, or that her discriminations are appropriate to the objects with which she is presented. If these conditions are satisfied, she can then be said to have the concept *cube*, even if she lacks the linguistic and conceptual resources to say what a cube is. The ability to define a cube will come later, after she has the linguistic resources to reason about her ways of discriminating and in particular to articulate how they relate to one another. But her acquisition of that ability is not the acquisition of the concept itself, but rather of an ability to make explicit a concept which she already possesses in demonstrative form.

My proposal should be distinguished from one on which concept-possession is identified with a grasp of 'implicit' rules which serve to guide the subject's imaginative activity, and hence her perceptual discriminations.³¹ Even though the child in the example can be said to grasp the concept 'implicitly' in that she possesses it without being able to articulate what it is to be a cube, her grasp of the concept does not consist in her having access to some kind of inner representation which directs her to sort a given item with the cubes rather than the spheres. Rather, I am

suggesting, what it is for her to grasp the concept *cube just is* for her to have the capacity to discriminate cubes, as long as her exercises of that capacity involve the awareness that she is sorting the presented object, and hence perceiving it, as she ought. The awareness that she is sorting, or perceiving, as she ought is not mediated by any prior appreciation (implicit or explicit) of a rule telling her what she ought to do. While she is aware of a rule governing her activity, her awareness of it consists in, rather than preceding, the awareness that what she is doing is appropriate to the object. To put the same point in other terms, I am not suggesting that the child who successfully discriminates cubes does so because she implicitly judges or recognizes, on each occasion, that the object presented to her is a cube. She does, as I claimed at the end of part III, see the object as a cube, and because of this may be described as seeing, and indeed recognizing, *that* it is a cube. But her seeing it as a cube is not *responsible* for her successfully sorting it with other cubes. Rather, she sees it as a cube *in virtue of* having the capacity to sort it in a way sensitive to its being a cube, where her exercise of that capacity involves the awareness that her way of sorting, or perceiving, is appropriate to the object presented to her.

This point is important in appreciating why the normativity which I am invoking is not the normativity associated with truth. On an account which explains perceptual discrimination in terms of guidance by implicit concepts, or implicit recognition that the object has certain relevant features, the subject's taking herself to perceive as she ought is indeed a matter of her taking her perception to be veridical. The child, say, takes herself to be perceiving the cube as she ought because she implicitly recognizes both that it is a cube, and that she is perceiving it as a cube. She thus takes herself to be perceiving as she ought in the sense of perceiving veridically: she recognizes that the thing *ought* to be perceived as a *cube* and hence that,

in so far as she *is* perceiving it as a cube, she is perceiving it as she ought to perceive it. But on my proposal, the child's taking herself to perceive the cube as she ought does not depend on her taking it that she ought to perceive it as a *cube*. Rather, she takes it that she ought to perceive it *this way*, where 'this way' picks out the very way she is perceiving it, and where her taking it that she ought to perceive the object in this way does not depend on any prior appreciation -- implicit or explicit -- of how it ought to be perceived. Her awareness of normativity is not itself the awareness that her perception is veridical, since such an awareness would presuppose that she already takes the object to be a certain way, or to have a certain feature, such that her perception can be assessed as correct or incorrect in relation to that feature. While she may indeed take her perception to be veridical, her being able to do so depends on her awareness of normativity in the more primitive sense under discussion, since that awareness of normativity is required in order for her to perceive the object as having a feature, or as being a certain way, in the first place.³²

V

I want to conclude by saying something briefly about how the view I have presented addresses the objections to conceptualism raised by Ayers and by other nonconceptualists. A natural place to begin is with the objection about the 'repleteness' of experience. For the appeal to demonstratives in my account represents a point of contact with McDowell's response to that objection, a response which Ayers and others have found to be inadequate. As we saw, the objection here is that the content of experience is too fine-grained to be captured in thought; and it derives its force from the fact that we do not have a word for every gradation of colour, say, that may be

presented in experience. McDowell responds to this objection by pointing out that every shade that is perceived can be captured under a concept expressible by a demonstrative expression '*this shade*' or '*coloured thus*' (1994: 56-57).³³ The view I have suggested is similar to McDowell's in that I also take the concepts which figure in experience to be expressible in demonstrative terms. One possesses a concept, on my view, in so far as one has a capacity to perceive things in a certain way and, in so perceiving them, to take it that one ought to be perceiving them in just *this* way.

Against McDowell's approach, more specifically as formulated by Brewer (1999), Ayers asks rhetorically 'how there can be demonstrative reference to something of which we are not *already* aware' (2002: 9). In order for us to form the demonstrative concept *this shade* it would seem that the shade must antecedently be presented to us in an experience which is, correspondingly, preconceptual. So it would seem that the demonstrative concept cannot itself figure in the content of experience, but must instead be acquired subsequently to it. As Ayers puts it, 'the "demonstrative concept," so far from constituting an element in the content of our present perceptual state, is employed parasitically on that content' (2002: 12).³⁴ Whether or not this is a legitimate objection to McDowell's and Brewer's view, it is, I think, avoided by the view I have presented. For on my view, the demonstrative refers not to a feature presented in the experience but to rather to the subject's way of experiencing. To invoke the distinction which I made earlier, it refers to a way in which an object is perceived, not to a way in which the object is perceived as *being*. For this reason we do not have to be aware of the feature as such before being able to form the corresponding concept. So there is no bar to saying that the concept -- even with its demonstrative component -- is part of the content of experience as opposed to presupposing that content.

The distinction I just invoked, between ways of perceiving and ways things are perceived as being, also helps to make clear how my view can address concerns about the experience of animals.³⁵ I have followed McDowell in claiming that animals are perceptually sensitive to features of the world, without perceiving objects in the world as *having* those features. But I have tried to say more about what is involved in this kind of nonconceptual 'sensitivity' by saying that it involves characteristic ways of perceiving. These ways of perceiving may involve, as in the case of humans, characteristic patterns of imaginative associations, as when an animal anticipates how something of a certain shape will move, or how it will taste. In some respects these ways of perceiving are just like those of humans. The most obvious respect is that they result in similar sorting behaviour, that is, similar patterns of discrimination; but there is no reason not to suppose that this reflects similarities in phenomenology which belong to the perceiving itself, not just the behaviour which results. However, I do not think that animal experience is slighted if we insist on a crucial difference: that is, in the case of animals, their ways of perceiving do not carry with them a sense of their own conformity to normative constraints.³⁶ And it is this difference, I am suggesting, that is most fundamental in marking the contrast between experience that does, and experience that does not, have conceptual content.

Third, and very briefly, the view that I have presented respects the empiricist principle that our ways of thinking about the world are indebted to our ways of perceiving it, rather than the reverse. It is true that, in contrast to pre-Kantian empiricism, it does not take experience to present us with content from which concepts can subsequently be derived, by abstraction or some other quasi-rational procedure. But it still holds that our concepts are determined by the ways in which we experience things rather than the

other way around. Even though concepts are rules, they govern our experience without guiding it. So there is no requirement that we grasp them in thought antecedently to experiencing things in accordance with them. On the contrary, they do not become available for use in non-experiential thought or judgment except through reflection on the experiences in which they figure. The view that the content of experience is conceptual is often described as one on which the content of experience is limited or constrained by the perceiver's stock of concepts. For example, Martin poses the question of whether appearances are conceptual by asking whether 'the appearance of things... is restricted by one's conceptual capacities' (1992: 745). And Schumacher describes the conceptualist as holding that 'what is perceived by the senses is limited by the stock of concepts available to the perceiving person for sorting and organizing the flux of stimulation' (2004: 8). More generally, it is often taken to imply that possession of the relevant concepts must precede the experience. Thus Peacocke describes the anti-conceptualist as holding that 'there is such a thing as having an experience of something as pyramid shaped that does not involve *already* having the concept of being pyramid shaped' (2001: 252, my emphasis). In the light of such characterizations, it might seem as though my view does not count as a form of conceptualism after all. For on this view, as I just indicated, concepts do not precede experience but are, we might say, coeval with it.³⁷ However, if the view that I have presented is coherent, it shows that these characterizations are too narrow. For it remains true, on my view, that experiencing something as F requires possession of the concept F, where this is not just a trivial consequence of identifying the concept F with the capacity for perceptually discriminating things that are F. And, as on more familiar versions of conceptualism, there is no more to the content of a perceptual experience than can be specified by citing the concepts under

which the relevant object is perceived as falling. The fact that this view does not require the possession of concepts antecedent to experience is not, then, a reason for denying that it is a form of conceptualism. Rather, it is a reason for allowing that conceptualism can coexist with the empiricist intuitions which Ayers so convincingly articulates.³⁸

Hannah Ginsborg

University of California, Berkeley,

Department of Philosophy

Berkeley, CA 94720-2390

U.S.A.

ginsborg@berkeley.edu

¹ For the nonconceptualist view see for example Evans 1982, Crane 1992, Martin 1992, Peacocke 1992, Heck 2000 and Schantz 2001, as well as the writings by Michael Ayers discussed below. For explicit defences of the conceptualist view see McDowell 1994, Brewer 1999, and Noë 2005. A conceptualist view is also defended in Peacocke 1983, although Peacocke's more recent work takes a nonconceptualist position. It should be noted that some positions which are generally viewed as nonconceptualist allow that some of the content of experience is conceptual: for example Peacocke 1992 adopts this position in contrast to the view in Evans 1982 that the content of experience is exclusively nonconceptual.

² 2000, 2002 and 2004. See also 1991, especially at I 176-177.

³ See also 1991: I 140ff., 171-2, 196-197.

⁴ See for example Peacocke 2001: 252-253.

⁵ It should be noted that I am not here trying to provide a full-scale defence of conceptualism. There are many considerations that have been raised in favour of the claim that experience has nonconceptual intentional content: I attempt here only to address the considerations raised by Ayers, and more specifically the claim that conceptualism is incompatible with empiricism.

⁶ The considerations raised in the last two paragraphs are developed in more detail in Ginsborg (forthcoming b).

⁷ This is because he tries to defend the view that experiences can be reasons for belief by appealing to the possibility of my citing, as a reason for my belief that *p*, the fact that it appears to me that *p*. If the distinction I am drawing here is correct, this possibility establishes only that experiences can be reasons in the first of the two senses I distinguish, whereas McDowell wants to argue that experiences are reasons in the second.

⁸ McDowell might well disclaim this; see his rejection of the sideways-on picture at 1994 34-35. But I think this reflects the equivocation mentioned above.

⁹ Another objection that might be raised bears on Ayers's assumption that visual and pictorial content are of the same kind. For example, Noë (2005) argues on the basis of psychological evidence that we should reject the 'Machian' view of a picture-like manifold of visual experience. If the line of argument I just gave in the text is correct, then this objection would be irrelevant in the present context. But Ayers also invokes the analogy between perceptual and pictorial content as part of his more direct anti-conceptualist argument that the experiential content is 'aesthetic' rather than propositional (2002: 10 and 2004: 250), and the considerations raised by Noë clearly remain relevant in that context. See chapter 6 of Noë (2005) for a discussion of how these considerations apply to the related 'fineness-of-grain' argument.

¹⁰ He might be thought also to concede the possibility of what I called the second sense of reason, when he says that '[w]e can allow both [Davidson and McDowell]... an easy victory on the question whether something not of judgemental form can, in some strictly logical sense of terms, imply, entail, proabilify, or be a reason for a judgement. Strictly logical relations very likely only hold between conceptualized contents' (2004: 248). But the relations of rational grounding implied in the second way of talking about reasons are not strictly logical: its being the case that the streets are wet does not logically imply that it has rained, even though the belief that the streets are wet can nonetheless be regarded as entitling me, at least in typical situations, to the belief that it is raining. So they cannot be dismissed as marginal in the way that Ayers appears to dismiss 'strictly logical' relations.

¹¹ It has been pointed out to me, by an anonymous referee for this journal, that many philosophers take experiences to rationalize beliefs in a sense different from either of those mentioned here, that is, in virtue of a special phenomenology with an intrinsically belief-producing character. On this approach, experiences have an intrinsic phenomenological character which triggers belief in a way which is non-discursive yet still rational. Might not this approach be available to Ayers, or indeed, might it not be precisely what he and other nonconceptualists have in mind in arguing that experiences with nonconceptual content can be reasons for belief? I agree that many philosophers have adopted this approach, but I take it to face a formidable challenge in the form of the considerations raised by Sellars, and partly taken up by McDowell, against what Sellars called the 'Myth of the Given.' These considerations, at least on the face of it, suggest that there is something incoherent about the idea of non-discursive rational triggering, and that this incoherence arises from a conflation of the idea of experience as having a distinctive phenomenological character, with the idea of experience as providing non-inferential knowledge (see in particular section I of Sellars 1956). I am not here assuming that the challenge cannot be met. But it is not clear to me that Ayers's arguments are intended to meet it, and, even if they are, the line of criticism I have offered suggests that they are not successful in doing so.

¹² Perhaps part of what Ayers has in mind is the idea that we do not need to conceptualize or classify objects in order to individuate them: 'discrete, unitary material things can be picked out without our knowing their nature, or what kind of thing they are, or indeed without their falling, as objects, into any specific kind at all' (2000: 124). But even if we can individuate objects without having to pick them out *qua* member of this or that kind, or *qua* bearer of this or that property, it does not follow that we might not

need to represent objects as belonging to kinds or as having properties in order for them to be given to us perceptually in the first place.

¹³ In §1 of his *Logic*, Kant says that a concept is 'a universal [allgemein] representation, or a representation of that which is common [gemein] to several objects' (1902-: 9:91). See also *Critique of Pure Reason* A320/B377.

¹⁴ Here I am in agreement with Stroud (2002).

¹⁵ Ayers addresses a related point when he considers the apparently close connection between perception and belief that is suggested by the idiom 'seeing *that*...': 'because we normally trust our senses, to say without qualification that X sees that p carries the conversational (but not logical) implication that X believes that p' (1991: I, 178). I agree that the implication is not logical, but I think it is stronger than merely conversational.

¹⁶ Crane takes the conceptualist to hold that 'one cannot see something as an F unless one has the concept F' (1992: 136) and Martin sets up the issue along similar lines as that of whether 'it appears to S as if p' entails that 'S possesses those concepts necessary for believing that p' (1992: 747). Along similar lines Peacocke's defence of nonconceptual content involves the assertion that that 'there is such a thing as having an experience of something as being pyramid shaped that does not involve already having the concept of being pyramid shaped' (2001: 252). Schantz, however, takes a different line, defending nonconceptualism by claiming that 'not all perceiving is perceiving as' (2001: 174); he mentions, as an example of a state with nonconceptual content, an experience in which 'an object appears redly to me' (178) but this is presumably to be differentiated from its appearing to me as red.

¹⁷ Ayers adopts this view in part because he sees a potential ambiguity in the notion of reasoning (2004: 239); what I think he has in mind is the ambiguity

between a sense in which animals are capable of reasoning or inference, and a sense in which they are not (see 2002: 6). In what follows I will ignore this possibility and treat the inferential and linguistic approaches to concept-possession as examples of the same strategy.

¹⁸ See for example 2004: 257-8 and 1991: I 176-177. While not explicit on the point, both passages suggest that there are only two construals of the notion of a concept, one linked to language and one not.

¹⁹ The reference is to Peacocke 1983, 100 and 89. Ayers quotes Peacocke as holding that a concept is a 'mode of presentation of an object' (89), whereas Peacocke specifies that concepts are modes of presentation, not of objects, but of properties. I do not think that this matters for the present point. The notion of a 'way of perceiving' is invoked again by Peacocke in explaining his more recent, nonconceptualist view: see below.

²⁰ See also 2004: 258, where he criticizes views like that of the psychologist Elizabeth Spelke, which identify a child's advances in perceptual discrimination as conceptual. While I am sympathetic to Noë's criticisms of nonconceptualism (see note 9), his own conceptualist alternative seems to me to be vulnerable to a similar criticism.

²¹ The account I go on to give applies only to those concepts which are obvious candidates for figuring in the content of experience: for example, concepts like *red*, *cube*, *rabbit*, and *chair*, in contrast to concepts like *electron*, *mortgage*, and *bachelor*. (Many conceptualists would claim that concepts of the latter kind also figure in the content of experience, but this claim is controversial even granted the truth of some form of conceptualism.) There are many questions to be raised about the rationale for making this kind of distinction (see for example Ayers's discussion in chapters 20 and 21 of volume I of 1991), but here I want simply to appeal to a rough and intuitive contrast between concepts which can be learned to a

large extent through ostension, and those concepts which cannot be learned except through verbal explanations. I do not think that anything in my discussion turns on the possibility of articulating this distinction clearly. I believe that the account I give here of the ostensibly learnable concepts can be extended to cover concepts that are not ostensibly learnable, but I am not able to defend the point here.

²² Here I am drawing on a number of passages in which Kant explicitly identifies concepts with rules, for example A106 where he says that the concept of body 'serves as a rule for our cognition of outer appearances', and then refers to the concept as a 'rule of intuitions', and A108 where he glosses the unity of synthesis 'according to concepts' with its unity 'according to rules'. It is sometimes claimed that it is not concepts, but rather their associated 'schemata', which Kant identifies as rules. However I do not think that the distinction between concepts and schemata is one which Kant consistently upholds, and especially not in the case of empirical concepts. The view that concepts are rules for synthesis has been defended in Wolff 1963 (121-131), Ginsborg 1997 (48-59) and Longuenesse 1998 (48-52).

²³ For this idea, and also its relevance to the case of cognition, see Ginsborg 1997, forthcoming a, and forthcoming b.

²⁴ Complications with regard to the notion of a way of perceiving arise when we consider pairs of perceptible properties which are necessarily coextensive: for example the property of being a square and the property of being a regular diamond. Are there two different ways of perceiving associated with these two properties -- that is, a way of perceiving sensitive to something's being a square and a way of perceiving sensitive to its being a regular diamond -- or just one? As I am understanding the notion of a way of perceiving, we can distinguish different ways of perceiving corresponding to these properties, but we will have grounds for making the

distinction in particular cases only if the perceiving subject responds differently in sorting tests depending on which property is salient. If a creature responds in exactly the same way to squares regardless of whether they are in the typical 'square' orientation, say with sides parallel to the frame in which they are presented, or in the 'diamond' orientation, say rotated 45 degrees in relation to the frame, then we will have no grounds for saying on any given occasion that it is perceiving a figure in one way rather than the other. In our own case, however, we do have grounds for making the distinction, since even if we know that every square is also a regular diamond, we are capable of responding differently to squares depending on how they are oriented, as shown by the fact that we find it more natural to describe to them as 'square' in one orientation and 'diamond' in another. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for prompting this clarification.

²⁵ As an example of the confusion I am trying to avert, consider the following passage from Peacocke: 'The idea that a nonlinguistic creature sees a shape as a diamond rather than as square does not seem to me to be philosophically objectionable. One can envisage sorting experiments, or forced-choice tests sensitive to perceived similarity relations, which give empirical evidence that the creature has seen the shape one way rather than another' (1998: 384). The first sentence invokes ways in which something (in this case a shape) is perceived as *being*; the second, ways in which it is perceived. As the preceding discussion in the text makes clear, I agree that sorting experiments can show that the creature has seen something one way rather than another. But I do not think that that amounts to their showing that it has seen it as being one way rather than another, e.g. as a diamond rather than a square. This criticism of Peacocke is further discussed in Ginsborg forthcoming a. Part of the reason for the confusion may be that for creatures who do perceive objects as *being* certain ways, and who are not limited to

merely perceiving them *in* certain ways, it is natural to describe the ways in which they perceive things in terms of how they perceive them *as being*. It is because I see certain things as (being) red that I am disposed to discriminate red things from things which are not red. So my way of perceiving red things -- that is, what it is about my perceptual state which is responsible for my discriminating the red things from the not-red things -- is, precisely, my perceiving them as red. But this kind of description is not obligatory: my way of perceiving can also be characterized, like that of an animal, by appeal to my sorting dispositions, and without appeal to how the object is perceived as being. Moreover, the fact that, in adult human beings, ways of perceiving things can be described in terms of ways in which things are perceived as being, does not entail that that the same is true of animals; so it does not rule out that there could be creatures, for example animals, who have ways of perceiving things, yet without ever perceiving things as being some way or another.

²⁶ I should note here that the account I am proposing is not committed to this assumption. It leaves open the possibility of ascribing concepts to animals; all it requires is that if animals possess concepts, then they must be capable of regarding their mental activity in normative terms. While I am, myself, inclined to adopt a Kantian line in taking the awareness of normativity to mark a dividing line between humans and animals, it might well be maintained, compatibly with my account, that some of the 'higher' animals should also be credited with the awareness of a normative dimension to their perceptual activity, and hence with the possession of concepts.

²⁷ For more discussion, see Ginsborg forthcoming and forthcoming a.

²⁸ It is reasoning of this kind which leads Fodor to the notorious conclusion that all concepts are innate (Fodor 1981; for a partial recantation of that conclusion see Fodor 1998).

²⁹ It might be objected that this example is irrelevant to the point I am trying to establish, since a child of this age already has substantial linguistic resources and, relatedly, already grasps a range of conceptual norms. But the point of the example is that, whatever concepts the child already possesses, her grasp of these concepts is insufficient to account for the acquisition of the new concept *cube*: the example is meant to suggest that what is needed in addition is a sense, not itself presupposing a grasp of concepts, that the cube 'belongs with' the other cubes, rather than with the spheres. The point could also be made through the example of a younger child at an earlier stage of language- and concept-acquisition: she will not come to grasp a concept like *ball* or *red* unless she not only is capable of picking out a ball from her other toys, or sorting her blocks into piles of different colours, but also has a sense of what she is doing as appropriate to the objects she is dealing with.

³⁰ In Ginsborg 1997, part III, I illustrate this point in connection with the example of learning to speak one's native language. One does not need to grasp the rules of language prior to being able to become a competent language user, but insofar as one *is* a competent language user one can be said to possess the relevant rules, even though the rules cannot be explicitly articulated except through the kind of reflection typical of grammarians and lexicographers.

³¹In particular, I am not identifying concepts with the kind of 'implicit conceptions' which Peacocke describes (1998a) as 'causally' influential on, or as 'guiding' our classifications. The crucial difference, as I try to make clear in the text, is that concepts do not play a guiding, or any other causal, role in the subject's discriminations.

³² I discuss this point further in forthcoming b.

³³ For the second of these two formulations, see McDowell's (1998) reply to Peacocke (416-417).

³⁴ Similar objections are made by Martin (1992: 758-759) and by Heck (2000: 490-491).

³⁵ Animals and infants are usually bracketed together in discussions of this point, but I am confining the point here to animals because it seems to me that their case is very different from that of animals. In particular human infants seem to be much more limited than animals in their capacities for discriminating physical objects (e.g. they tend to be unable to discriminate things which can safely be eaten from things that cannot), but to have much broader abilities to respond to, and communicate with, members of their species. (As an anonymous referee has pointed out to me, human infants do indeed have substantial powers of discrimination with regard to the phonemes of the language they are learning. But it is noteworthy that these powers are specifically associated with the ability to communicate.)

³⁶ This is not to say that I *am* insisting on the difference. See note 26.

³⁷ In his (2001), McDowell hints that this is -- at least to some extent -- how he sees his own view. He says that at least some of the conceptual capacities that figure in the content of experience can be 'initiated in and by the very experiences in which they are actualized' (182). This implies that one and the same concept can both be 'initiated by' and 'actualized in' a given experience, which in turn suggests a view like the one suggested here, on which experience and concepts are coeval. But in the light of the objection mentioned at the end of the previous section, it is questionable whether his account of demonstrative concepts (which is at issue in the passage) is in fact one on which these concepts are 'actualized' in the experience, as opposed to being acquired on the basis of it.

³⁸ An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference in honour of Michael Ayers which was held at Wadham College, Oxford, in June 2003. I was extremely fortunate to have had Michael as my first teacher in philosophy, and I would like to register here my deep indebtedness to him. I am grateful to participants at the conference, and to two anonymous referees for this Journal, for comments. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the American Council of Learned Societies and of the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science during the time I was preparing the final version.

References

- Ayers, M. (1991), *Locke*. London and New York: Routledge.
- (2000), 'Can There Be a New Empiricism?', in M. D. Gedney (eds.) *The Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy 7*. Bowling Green: Philosophy Documentation Center, Bowling Green State University.
- (2002), 'Is Perceptual Content Ever Conceptual?' *Philosophical Books* 43: 5-17
- (2004), 'Sense Experience, Concepts and Content', in Schumacher 2004.
- Brewer, B. (1999), *Perception and Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crane, T. (1992), 'The nonconceptual content of experience', in T. Crane (ed.) *The Contents of Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davidson, D. (1986), 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', in E. LePore (ed.) *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Evans, G. (1982), *The Varieties of Reference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fodor, J. (1981), 'The Present Status of the Innateness Controversy'. In *Representations*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

--- (1998), *Concepts*. Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press.

Ginsborg, H. (1997), 'Lawfulness Without a Law'. *Philosophical Topics* 25: 36-81

--- (forthcoming), 'Thinking the Particular as Contained Under the Universal'. In R. Kukla (ed.) *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

--- (forthcoming a), 'Aesthetic Judgment and Perceptual Normativity'. *Inquiry*.

--- (forthcoming b), 'Reasons for Belief'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

Heck, Richard (2000), 'Nonconceptual Content and the 'Space of Reasons''. *The Philosophical Review* 109: 483-523

Kant, I. (1902-), *Gesammelte Schriften*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Longuenesse, B. (1998), *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Martin, M. (1992), 'Perception, Concepts and Memory'. *The Philosophical Review* 101: 745-763

McDowell, J. (1994), *Mind and World*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

--- (1998), 'Reply to Commentators'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58: 403-431

--- (2001), 'Comment on Richard Schantz'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62: 181-185

Noë, A. (2005), *Action in Perception*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Peacocke, C. (1992), *A Study of Concepts*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

--- (1996), 'Can possession conditions individuate concepts?' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56: 433-460

--- (1998), 'Nonconceptual Content Defended'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58: 381-388

--- (1998a), 'Implicit conceptions, understanding and rationality'. In E. Villanueva (ed.) *Concepts (Philosophical Issues, 9)*. Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview Press.

--- (2001), 'Does perception have a nonconceptual content?' *Journal of Philosophy* 98: 239-263

Schantz, R. (2001), 'The Given Regained'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62: 167-180

Sellars, W. (1956), 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind'. Reprinted in

Science, Perception and Reality. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.

Schumacher, R. (ed.) (2004), *Perception and Reality*. Paderborn: Mentis.

Stampe, D. (1987), 'The Authority of Desire'. *The Philosophical Review* 96:
335-381

Stroud, Barry. (2002), 'Sense-experience and the grounding of thought'. In N.
H. Smith (ed.) *Reading McDowell*. London and New York: Routledge.

Wolff, R. P. (1963), *Kant's Theory of Mental Activity*. Cambridge, Mass:
Harvard University Press.