

Representation, Presentation and the Epistemic Role of Perceptual Experience

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The senses do not *tell* us anything, true or false.

(Austin,1962: p.11)

...the idea of conscious access to objects, of a sort that can enable knowledge about them, positively requires us to conceive the consciousness in question as contentful.

(McDowell, 2008, in Lindgaard (ed.): p.200)

1.

In this paper I argue that the representational theory of perception (RP), on which the world is represented as being a certain way in perceptual experience, cannot explain how there can be a genuinely epistemic connection between experience and belief. I try to show that we are positively required to deny that perceptual consciousness is contentful if we want to make its fitness for epistemic duties intelligible. (So versions of RP on which experience has a merely causal purchase on belief are not considered). But my aim is not just negative. I try to defeat RP in such a way as to motivate a robustly presentational theory of perception (PP). According to such a theory, perceptions are not relations between a

subject and a content but between a subject and an ordinary object (such that if the relation holds at t , an appropriate subject and object must exist at t , and the object must be presented to the subject). I will end by sketching an account of perceptual experience that is meant to show that, contrary to a very popular misconception, there is a way to conceive perceptual consciousness as relational and presentational that does not succumb to the celebrated 'myth of the Given'.

2.

I take it that to have a perceptual experience is to seem to be presented with ordinary objects and their features; I also take it that to have a perceptual experience is to be provided with a reason to make a perceptual judgement. An intuitively plausible account of the epistemic role of perception would be one on which the truth of the second of these propositions is explained in terms of the truth of the first. When a perceiving subject makes a perceptual judgement it seems to them that the experience they are having is apt to put them in a position to make that judgement precisely because, in having the experience, the very thing that the perceptual judgement is about seems to be presented to them. On reflection, I take it to be obvious that it is only because I seem, in having the perceptual experience I am now having, to be confronted with a pink muddy pig, that I now have – simply in virtue of having this experience - a reason to judge that there is a pink muddy pig before me. If I were asked 'Why do you think there is a pink muddy pig before you?' I might answer 'because I am perceiving it right now!', and I would take this to be a perfectly appropriate and even a perfectly conclusive answer, precisely because for me to perceive the thing about which I make the relevant perceptual judgement just consists in my seeming to be confronted with that very thing.

It is because these things seem obvious from the point of view of perceptual judgement that if an account of how perceptual experiences give us reasons for judgement is to be intuitively plausible it must make a direct explanatory appeal to these facts – facts about what I will call the presentational phenomenology of perceptual experience.¹ It will say that there can be a direct rational connection between experience and belief, or that experience can perform the epistemically significant function of directly fixing a subject's beliefs about their surroundings, only because it seems to present to the perceiving and judging subject the very subject matter of their perceptual beliefs and judgements; and it will thus rule out accounts of the epistemic role of experience on which it might play that role even if it entirely lacked this presentational phenomenology.

It may be useful to use the following abbreviations in the discussion that follows:

1. PT – The Presentation Thesis — for a perceiving subject to have an experience is for her to seem to be presented with ordinary objects and their features etc.²
2. DJT – The Direct Justification Thesis – if a perceiving subject has a perceptual experience at *t* she is thereby provided with at least a *prima facie* reason to make a perceptual judgement about her surroundings at *t*.
3. CT – The Consequence Thesis – the truth of DJT is a consequence of the truth of PT.
4. NCT – The Non-Contingency Thesis – perceptual experiences can have a direct epistemic bearing on a subject's beliefs about her surroundings *only* because PT is true.

3.

The first thing to do is to point out that the representationalist cannot accommodate CT and NCT if they offer nothing but a functional account of what distinguishes perceptual experience, as an allegedly contentful mental phenomenon, from other allegedly contentful mental phenomena like judgement, idle thought and imagination. A representational account of perceptual experience cannot be completed with the claim that a perceptual experience with content that p is like the judgement, the idle thought and the imagining with content that p in respect of its representational content, but differs from these (and all other possible psychological phenomena with the same content) in having its own distinctive epistemic function (say, of providing defeasible reasons for belief).

Such a strategy would represent the connection between the presentational phenomenology of perceptual experience and its fitness to play the relevant epistemic role as strictly external and contingent. It would leave open the possibility that contentful mental phenomena entirely devoid of this distinctive presentational character might nevertheless play just that role. To say merely that experiences are those psychological phenomena that have representational content and that play a certain role, is to leave unanswered one of the most important questions we want an account of perceptual experience to answer, namely, what is it exactly about experiences that makes them apt to play this role – such that nothing that lacked those properties could possibly play it?

It is not only the strong phenomenological intuitions supporting CT and NCT that make us want an answer to this question – epistemological intuitions are in play too. It is very hard to see how, without appeal to a strong notion of presentation, the distinctive directness of the epistemic connection between experience and belief could be accommodated. For what else could explain why *all that is needed* for a subject to have a

prima facie reason for a belief about an ordinary object, p , is that she have an appropriate perceptual experience? If Sam seems to be presented with p itself at t then it will be intelligible why she needs no other justified beliefs about p (or anything else) at t to find herself with at least a *prima facie* reason to make a judgement about p at t .³ In sharp contrast, if she acquires a belief about p at t , or receives some testimony about p at t , none of these events could *all on their own* give her a *prima facie* reason to make a judgement about p at t . To do that they would need epistemic support from other justified beliefs.

More or less mindful of this problem perhaps, many representationalists like to characterize perceptual experience in such a way as to insinuate that RP is consistent with PT. There is much talk of experience ‘bringing objects into view’ or of a subject ‘facing’ objects in experience etc. This language strongly suggests that whilst perceptual experiences *are* representations (paradigmatically) of ordinary objects like pink muddy pigs, they *seem* to be presentations of them.⁴ If this language is more than merely decorative, and RP really is consistent with PT, then representationalists would be able to accommodate DJT, CT and NCT by grounding the fitness of experience to play its distinctive epistemic role in its distinctive presentational phenomenology. Then they would have explained in a coherent and plausible way how perceptual experience can have a direct epistemic bearing on belief, because they would have a view on which, if Finn has a perceptual experience at t as of a pink muddy pig before him, and judges at t that this is a pink muddy pig, his perceptual experience and his judgement have, in virtue of their respective representational contents, a direct representational bearing on one and the same fact or state of affairs. That seems able to explain how the experience can have some sort of epistemic purchase or bearing on the judgement. Now if, on RP, to have such an experience is to seem to be *presented* with the very pink muddy thing that is a constituent of this fact or state of affairs, this promising

account can be completed. Accommodating PT would complete this account because it would both allow for our general epistemic intuitions about the connection between apparent presentation and direct justification, and for the strong phenomenological intuition that supports CT and NCT.

The question then is whether the representationalist can complete their account in this way. On the face of it, phenomenological considerations make it seem unlikely that she can. Beliefs and judgements, we may grant, have a direct bearing on what they are about in virtue of having representational content, and if experiences have representational content too, the same can be said for them; but for a subject to have a belief or a judgement about an ordinary object p is precisely not for p itself to seem to present itself to her. How then can a representationalist develop their account of what it is for experiences to have representational content so as to accommodate this cardinal phenomenological distinction between apparently presentational and apparently non-presentational ways of having ordinary objects 'in mind'?

4.

It has recently been suggested that a representationalist can accommodate the idea that experience has a presentational phenomenology, and that there is an internal link between its having this phenomenology and its fitness to play the relevant epistemic role, if they distinguish between mental phenomena like belief and judgement in which something is 'put forward as so' from those, like idle thought or desire, in which nothing is 'put forward as so' (Martin, 2002: pp. 376-425). Desires and idle thoughts involve reference to the world, and so count as representational (or intentional), but, as we might put it, they are not

'assertoric' or 'assertive' in the way that judgements are. Martin proposes that the representationalist can accommodate this distinction by appealing to a contrast between what he calls 'stative' and 'semantic' conceptions of representation. On this proposal, the representationalist must say of experience not just that it is representational in the semantic sense (which would be to group it together not only with judgements and beliefs but also with idle thoughts and desires) but that it is representational in the narrower stative sense (which involves grouping it together with beliefs and judgements and distinguishing it from idle thoughts and desires).

But there is a fundamental problem with this proposal. The distinction Martin draws on the representationalist's behalf elides a contrast between judgement and belief on the one hand and perceptual experience on the other that must be crucial in providing an account of the distinctive presentational phenomenology of perceptual experience (and so of its epistemic role). The contrast is this. What makes it the case that a judgement or a belief is a case of stative representation is that for a judgement to occur at *t* is just for a thinker to take things to be a certain way at *t*. Similarly what makes a desire or idle thought a case of semantic rather than stative representation is that for a desire or idle thought to occur at *t* is for a subject to make a kind of reference to things or properties or events at *t* – but not to take anything to be so at *t*. But, nothing like this account can be given on RP of what makes perceptual experiences cases of stative rather than semantic representation, because, on RP, it cannot be the subject of experience that represents something as so in having an experience.

Martin alludes to one reason that this is so, and rightly points out that it rules out reductive or eliminativist accounts of perceptual experience that might otherwise have provided a neat, though implausible, explanation of how experience is fit to influence

belief;⁵ but he does not appreciate the bearing it has on his distinction between two types of representation. The reason is this. For a subject to have a perceptual experience with content that p at t cannot be for her to take it to be the case that p , or to represent it as being the case that p , because it is possible for a subject to have an experience with content that p at t , but not take it to be the case or come to believe that p at t . On RP then, if it is not the perceiving subject that represents in having an experience, it must be the perceptual experience that represents in being had by the perceiving subject.

5.

Now this dramatic difference between what it is for something to be put forward as so in judgement and belief on the one hand (the paradigm cases of stative representation) and in perceptual experience on the other, sets a challenge to the representationalist that Martin is by no means alone in failing to notice.

In the case of judgement and belief, it is natural to suppose, we can explain what it is for something to be put forward as so 'in' them by appeal to the distinction between propositions and attitudes, and to the idea of a particular kind of 'committed' or 'assertoric' attitude. We explain what it is for judgements and beliefs to be cases of stative and not just semantic representation by saying that they *are* assertoric propositional attitudes. For a subject to make a judgement at t , we say, just is for them to adopt an *assertoric* attitude towards a certain proposition at t (for a subject to have a belief at t just is for them to be disposed to adopt an *assertoric* attitude towards a certain proposition at t). That it is possible for a subject to have an experience with content that p without taking it to be the case that p shows that we cannot explain what it is for perceptual experiences to be cases of

stative and not just of semantic representation in this way: perceptual experiences cannot be assertoric propositional attitudes.⁶ So how are we to explain what it is for perceptual experiences to be cases of stative and not just of semantic representation? Can we say that experiences are assertoric attitudes in the sense that for an experience to have the content that p is for it to adopt an assertoric attitude towards its own content; or can we say that the content of experience is somehow intrinsically assertoric? It is not obvious that either of these views is intelligible let alone plausible.

6.

The issue just raised challenges the representationalist to make sense of the idea that something is put forward as so 'in' experience in a way that is consistent with the denial that the perceiving subject puts something forward as so in having an experience. (It challenges Martin to refine the notion of stative representation so that it can be applied both to representational phenomena that are, and to representational phenomena that are not, assertoric propositional attitudes.) But even if we allow that sense can be made of this idea on RP and that we have an understanding of what it is for an experience (as opposed to a thinker) to be non-neutral with respect to how things objectively are, fundamental difficulties remain to be faced. For there is still the problem of understanding how, when a perceiving subject has an experience that is non-neutral with respect to how things objectively are, she is thereby provided with a reason to make a judgement about how things objectively are.

Any representationalist who wants to explain how this is possible will have to hold that whilst experiences are not assertoric attitudes towards a certain content they are

relations of some kind between a perceiving subject and a content. For any such representationalist must hold that when a subject has an experience that represents things as being a certain way, she appreciates both that the relevant experience is representing things as *being* a certain way, and precisely which way it is representing things as being. This rules out, conceptions of perceptual experience on which there need be no relation whatever between a subject and the way experience represents things as being. So it is not enough for the representationalist to say that for an experience, *e*, to occur at *t* is for the world to be represented as being a certain way by *e* at *t* – they must say that for an experience to occur at *t* is for the world to be represented as being a certain way *to* a perceiving subject at *t*.

As soon as the representationalist is made to formulate their position in this way they become vulnerable to a series of closely related, and I think, quite conclusive objections. Before I present them I should make a final preliminary point.

7.

It has recently been denied by prominent representationalists that the content of experience is propositional. McDowell has appealed to the idea of the content of an ‘intuition’ and has contrasted this sort of content with that possessed by judgements, and Crane has drawn a contrast between the sort of representing pictures do and the sort assertions do, and has likened perceptual representation to the former and contrasted it with the latter. Both thinkers distance themselves from the idea that the content of experience has propositional form. Much could profitably be said about these proposed modifications to RP because they might seem to make RP invulnerable to the objections I

am about to raise. I must say just enough about them to explain why I think they have no significant bearing on these objections.

McDowell and Crane both maintain their commitment to the notion that experience has representational content. The modification to RP that they propose is that some representational content does not have propositional form, or is not constituted by a proposition; and this does not require either to deny that the content of experience may be *expressed or captured* using a proposition. In light of the relevant modification we might say that whilst all representational content is content that can be rendered using a proposition, not all representational content is content that is constituted out of a proposition. That, I think, is why McDowell can say that 'Intuitional content is still content. And it is...all but propositional' (Lindgaard (ed.), 2008: p. 200) and Crane can say 'The notion of the content of experience...is the notion of the way the world is represented in experience.' (Crane, 2009: p. 456).

None of the arguments I offer here turn on the unavailability of this distinction between kinds of representational content. All that is important to me is that if a representation occurs at *t*, there is a way things are represented at *t*, and that this is a way things are represented *as being to* an appropriate subject. That incidentally entails that there is a proposition that *might* be used to capture which way this is; but McDowell and Crane are quite right to point out that it does not entail that this proposition constitutes the content of the experience. Neither does it entail that for a subject to have an experience that represents things as being a certain way to her, is for her to stand in some sort of relation to a proposition that captures which way this is. What it does entail is that, in having the experience, and so in standing in the relevant relation to its non-propositionally

articulated content, she appreciates that there is a particular way things are represented as being in virtue of its occurrence.

When I use the formula 'a subject has an experience with content that p at t ' and its variants, I do not imply that the experience has content constituted out of the proposition that p , but only that it represents things as being a way that might be captured using the proposition that p ; and in having the experience the subject appreciates that there is such a way (thus appreciating that representing is going on)_and which way this is.

We might say that on McDowell and Crane's modified versions of RP, for a subject to have an experience at t is for her to be related to a way things might be, or a state of affairs, or a possibility at t – not a proposition articulating it – a state of affairs that her experience represents to her as actual or actualized or as obtaining. The arguments that follow have purchase on this view as surely as they do on the more familiar unmodified versions of RP.

8.

If a subject has an experience with content that p at t , her having this experience at t has to be such that, all on its own, it can give her a reason to judge that p at t (DJT). If she believes that she is having an illusion or an hallucination at t she may take herself (rightly or wrongly) to have, courtesy of her experience, only a bad reasons to judge that p , but she must have at least that. If a representationalist wants to accommodate DJT they will have to hold not just that there is a way things are represented at t in virtue of the occurrence of an experience, but also that this is a way things are represented *as being to* an appropriate subject.

The following awkward questions immediately arise for a defender of this view.

1. How is it that she appreciates at t that her experience is, so to speak, addressing her, or issuing some sort of invitation to her that makes certain sorts of response from her appropriate?

2. Why is it that she takes it at t that her experience is addressing her *in a certain way*? Why does she take it at t that her experience is, so to speak, telling her that p is the case, rather than, for example, asking her if it is the case, or inviting her to consider if it is the case, or to suppose for the sake of argument or amusement that it is the case, or just idly to entertain a certain possibility?

3. How is it that she takes it at t that her experience is telling her one thing rather than another? How is it that she grasps the content of the representing that is going on?

As soon as the representationalist is forced to deny that for a perceiving subject to have an experience with content that p at t is for her to represent it as being the case that p at t , these questions must arise. For firstly, if it is Sam that represents something as so at t , we need no explanation of how she comes to appreciate that she is being addressed in some way at t because she is not being addressed in any way at t . And secondly, 'Sam represents it as being the case that p at t' entails that Sam appreciates both that something is being put forward as so at t , and what is being put forward as so at t , but 'Sam has it represented to him that it is the case that p at t' entails neither of these things. These sorts of issues can as well arise in non-linguistic as in linguistic contexts; the representings in question don't have to be written or verbal, they might be pictorial, diagrammatic or

cartographical etc. Consider the following situation. Sam is pursuing Finn who has been kidnapped and is being taken across country to the border. When his kidnapper is napping, Finn, who suspects that Sam is in pursuit, manages to arrange some stones near the campfire into an arrow-like pattern with the intention of telling Sam which direction they will be moving in tomorrow. Sam finds the campfire and she sees the stones that Finn has arranged, but she totally fails to appreciate a) that they constitute a representation of any kind (she fails to appreciate that she is being addressed by or in them, or that they have been put into this arrangement by Finn with a particular sort of representational intention, and using particular representational conventions). Failing to appreciate a), she also fails to appreciate b) that they constitute a representation *of a certain kind* – one which pretends to represent how things are, not just to articulate a mere possibility, or a fiction; and c) that they represent one thing rather than another as being the case. Situations are possible in which Sam appreciates a) above, but not b) or c); in which she appreciates a) and b) but not c); and yet others in which she appreciate a) and c) but not b).

9.

Let us put aside the issues raised by the first and third questions at the beginning of the last section and allow for the sake of argument (rather too generously I suspect), that, perhaps by appeal to some refinement of the notion of the representational content of an experience the representationalist has found an answer to them. The second of those questions still raises a very important problem for them. Its urgency is best brought into view by reflection on ordinary linguistic situations in which one person represents something as so to another. If Finn believes at *t* that Sam, in uttering the sentence 'the

cavalry is coming', is telling him that the cavalry is coming, he cannot justify this belief simply by appeal to the fact that Sam uttered just that sentence and not some other at *t*. Sam might have used just those words to do any number of things other than to make a serious assertion at *t*. So Finn's belief that he is being told something at *t* by Sam will have to be based on such things as facts about Sam's tone of voice and general demeanor, and about the context in which she makes her utterance. There are no sentences that can be used only to make assertions, ask questions, make tentative proposals, articulate mere possibilities, or tell jokes or fictional stories. So just what someone is doing in producing a given sentence must be determined by appeal to various sorts of facts about the particular situation in which they produce the sentence, since it cannot be determined merely by appeal to the fact that just that sentence has been produced.

Essentially the same issues arise if we imagine that Sam presents Finn with a certain picture of cavalry on the move at *t*. Because the very same picture might in one context function as a picture depicting how things actually are (or were), and in another as depicting a purely imaginary state of affairs, if Finn believes that the picture he is seeing at *t* is a picture representing how things objectively are, that belief will not be justifiable simply by appeal to facts about the picture he is seeing at *t*.⁷

Now, unless we can find some very dramatic difference between what it is for an experience to represent something as so to someone, and what it is for a person to represent something as so to someone – either by making an assertion or by drawing a picture for example – it is hard to see what a representationalist can say in response to these points. But they already tell quite strongly against their view.

Representationalists often say that perceptual experience has a 'face-value' at which it may either be taken or refused (e.g. McDowell, 1994: p.26; Peacocke, 1992: p.71).

McDowell, for example, not only claims that experiences have a face-value, he insists that this idea is non-negotiable if we are to hold that experiences provide a subject with reasons for judgement; for only if a subject is at liberty to refuse to go along with the way their experience represents things as being on certain occasions, can we consider them to be justified in going along with it on others (McDowell, 1994: p.11). If, on RP, a subject were quite unable to resist the epistemic solicitations of her experience, she could at best have exculpations for taking things to be as it represents them to her as being and never justifications.

The problem for representationalists who appeal to the idea that experiences have a face-value is just that unless some explanation is forthcoming of how experiences, in sharp contrast to sentences or pictures, can be intrinsically or essentially assertoric (or 'serious'), a subject will require a reason to take their experience to be representing it as being the case that p to them, rather than asking them whether p , or inviting them to suppose that p for the sake of argument or amusement etc. An experience, e , will have a face-value only under an appropriate interpretation, and a subject will require a reason – of a sort they cannot get from e – for committing themselves to an interpretation under which it has a face-value rather than one under which it does not. Even if we can equip her with such a reason, even if we can explain, perhaps by an ingenious appeal to some experiential analogue of a serious tone of voice or a committed demeanor, or to some other feature of the circumstances in which the relevant representing occurs, we will not avoid the relevant problem. For any view on which a perceiving subject needs a reason to take her experience to be doing one kind of thing rather than another, will be a view that is incompatible with the idea that the occurrence of an experience is sufficient to provide a perceiving subject with a reason to make a judgement about how things objectively are (DJT). Whether, with McDowell, we

treat perceptual experience as having conceptual content, or with Evans and Peacocke, we treat it as having non-conceptual content, we face this problem.

Can we avoid it by making sense of the proposal that experiences, unlike sentences or pictures, are intrinsically or essentially assertoric?⁸ I think we cannot. It may be suggested that it is because experiences, unlike assertions or statements have non-conceptual content that they are essentially such as to have a face-value at which they can either be taken or refused. But consider the case of pictorial representation. The very same considerations that may be taken to motivate the view that experiential representation in contrast to judicatory representation is non-conceptual may also be taken to motivate the view that pictorial representation in contrast to linguistic representation is non-conceptual. But these considerations are meant to explain how much representing experiences do in contrast to beliefs (how fine-grained or detailed the relevant representing is), not how it is that they represent something as so, rather than as possible, or imaginary. Whether a picture takes the form of a rough sketch consisting in a few grey lines or a finely detailed drawing consisting in thousands of lines and patches of colour does not settle the question of whether things are represented as being a certain way in it. Alternatively, it may be suggested, at least by those representationalists happy to allow that experiences have non-representational or qualitative properties over and above their representational ones, that it is in virtue of possessing non-representational properties, or 'qualia', that experiences are essentially such as to have a face-value. But again this seems entirely the wrong sort of property to do the relevant explanatory job. That there is 'something it is like' for a subject to have an experience does not seem apt to entail that the experience is essentially non-neutral with respect to how things objectively are.⁹

If Sam vividly imagines that p at t there may be 'something it is like' for her to imagine things thus, but that does not entail that something is represented to her as being the case in virtue of this imagining at t . So in this case we have a mental event that, on the relevant views, has both representational and non-representational properties but precisely does not represent something as the case. Conversely if Sam judges that p at t there need be nothing it is like for her to make this judgement at t , but something must be represented as, or taken to be so at t , since for Sam to make a judgement just is for her to represent or take something to be so. That there are representational mental phenomena that, on RP, it is natural to suppose are 'imbued with consciousness' but do not bear on how things are, and others that are not thus imbued that do, very strongly suggests that representationalists cannot appeal to 'qualia' in providing an explanation of what it is for the representational content of perceptual experience to be essentially assertoric.¹⁰

In general we have a well established practice of capturing and appreciating what might be called the 'force' of a given representation by appeal to such things as what its producer was trying to do in producing or making it, or the way, on a particular occasion, it is being used. In linguistic contexts (in distinguishing between assertions, questions and jokes for example), and in certain psychological ones (in distinguishing between idle thoughts and judgements for example) this practice seems to function perfectly well; but in the present experiential context it quite breaks down. It seems plausible to suggest that it breaks down in just these contexts because in them there just is no analogical application either for the idea of what is being attempted by a producer of a representation, or for the idea of public conventions that govern the way a representation may be used in a given context.¹¹ The idea of public conventions governing the use of a given representation finds application even in certain psychological contexts because, for example, for one to make a

judgement, but not to have an idle thought, is for one to do something that requires that one be prepared to participate in a rule governed public practice of giving reasons for one's epistemically significant commitments.¹² I submit that this argument already defeats all versions of RP that aim to accommodate DJT.¹³ Either the representational content of experience is the only kind of representational content that comes with a certain sort of 'force' built-in, or there is something extraneous to that content about which the subject can have justified beliefs apt to serve as reasons for treating it as having a certain type of 'force'. The first option seems precluded by essential features of the very idea of representation, and the second is inconsistent with DJT.

Representationalists might want to grasp the first horn of this dilemma and insist that the representational content of perceptual experience is essentially assertoric. Let us allow, for the sake of further argument, that it is.

10.

We can allow that a perceiving subject a) is able to understand in having an experience, *e* at *t*, that it is addressing her in some way, b) that simply in virtue of having *e* at *t*, she has reason to suppose that, in addressing her, it is representing something to her as so rather than asking her whether something is so or inviting her to suppose that something is so (etc.), and c) that she is able to understand, in having *e* at *t*, precisely what e is representing to her as so. But now we can press the following questions – why should a perceiving subject d) take any notice whatever of the experience which she appreciates is addressing her, and in doing so representing something to her as being the case at *t*; and e) if she does have reason to take some notice of it, what reason does she have seriously to

consider whether things are as it tells her they are, or to become inclined to believe what it tells her at t ?

That Finn is having something represented to him as so by e at t and that he appreciates that he is, and how things are being represented to him as being at t does not, by itself, give him reason to take any notice of e at t . To have such a reason Finn will need to have beliefs about e at t – he will need to believe that e is the sort of thing of which he should take some notice at t . If he has such beliefs about e at t there will necessarily be room to raise questions about their grounds – we will be able to ask whether he is right to believe such things about e and whether he has adequate reason to take e to be worthy of his attention at t – and such questions will not be answerable simply by appeal to the occurrence of e at t .

This sort of problem arises at least once more in essentially the same way for the representationalist. For even if we allow that Finn attends at t to an experience, e , that represents something as so to him at t , and that doing so is just part of what it is for him to have e at t (and so not something he needs reason to do), he will certainly need a reason e cannot supply to consider seriously, at t , whether e is representing things to be as they really are, and, perhaps, yet another reason to become inclined at t , to believe that it is.

The need to include appeal to such beliefs as these in accounts of perceptual justification (beliefs, that is, about the reliability of perceptual experience in general or about the likely causes of particular experiences), is, of course, precisely the need that has done so much to encourage philosophers to present skeptical arguments about the foundations of empirical knowledge in sense-experience. If the occurrence of a certain perceptual experience at t can provide Finn with a reason to make a judgement about how things objectively are at t only if he has beliefs about the reliability of the experience that

occurs at t , or about the nature of perceptual experience in general, then the epistemic burden is shifted away from experience and towards beliefs about it – beliefs that the skeptic is quick to point out, we cannot look to experience to justify.

The objection I am pressing now however is not the skeptical objection, but a more basic one that is closely related to it. The relevant point is just that if a perceiving subject can get a justification from experience only if they have justified beliefs about particular experiences, or about experience in general, then perceiving subjects cannot get a justification directly from experience – and that is what the representationalist requires.

11.

If 'Sam has it represented to her that p at t' ' entails 'It perceptually seems to Sam that p at t' ' then the objections to RP raised thus far may be thought to fail.¹⁴ For 'It perceptually seems to Sam that p at t' ' seems to entail that Sam appreciates that things seem to her a certain way at t , and which way they then seem to her. There is also a rather vague implication that if things seem a certain way to Sam at t then she cannot be entirely non-neutral with respect to how things are at t - and this implication, however vague, may be thought to carry over to the case in which things 'perceptually seem' to Sam to be a certain way.

The availability of this sort of formulation, I think, does much to obscure the significance of the objections already made here against RP. In effect, the representationalist who helps themselves to it – and many do – is, in doing so, simply assuming that all the objections I have made up to this point have been answered (or just failing to notice them). Whilst I am sure that these objections have not been met, I am happy to pretend that they have for the sake of further argument. Now the point is that,

even armed with this apparently promising formulation, the RP theorist faces a quite insoluble dilemma.

The view that, if it perceptually seems to Sam that p at t , Sam takes it to be the case that p at t , has been ruled out already (by acknowledgement of the possibility of perception without belief). Now what is important about that sort of construal of 'it perceptually seems to Sam that p at t ' is that it simply entails that Sam appreciates both that something is being represented as so at t , and precisely what it is that is being represented as so at t . We can perhaps hope to preserve this feature of that analysis whilst avoiding the feature that is incompatible with recognition of the possibility of perception without belief. How might we do that?

Two sorts of view are possible here.¹⁵ On one, for it to perceptually seem to Sam that p at t is for Sam to become inclined to believe that p at t . Variants of this view are possible. We could hold, for example, that for it to perceptually seem to Sam that p at t is for Sam to suppose that p at t , or to consider the question of whether it is the case that p at t , or to entertain the possibility that p at t . We might call these attitudinal analyses of the relevant formulation of RP, for, in each case, they appeal to the idea that perceptual experiences are non-assertoric attitudes adopted by a subject towards the content of experience. (To call them attitudes does not, in light of the points made in section seven above, entail that they are attitudes to a proposition; they are rather attitudes to a certain way experience represents things as being to a subject – a way that needn't be realized propositionally in the experience, but must be apt to be rendered propositionally). There may be other variations on this attitudinal theme but they will all, as a matter of necessity, be subject to the same objection.

On the other sort of view, for it to perceptually seem to Sam that p at t will not be for her to adopt a kind of attitude towards the way her experience represents things to her as being – an attitude that falls somewhere short of being assertoric; it will simply be for her to appreciate which way things are being represented to her as being at t . We might construe this sort of appreciation as something that is required if Sam is to adopt any particular type of attitude towards the relevant way things are represented to her as being. This line of thought may involve appeal to the following idea. If Sam is even to entertain a given possibility— she must understand which possibility it is. Even to entertain a possibility is to do something with it, as is to consider whether it is an actualized possibility, to suppose that it is actualized for the sake of argument, or to become inclined to believe that it is; and to do something like this with a possibility requires that one understand that it is the possibility that things are one way rather than another. So there is a distinction here between mere understanding, and a variety of things that require mere understanding and add something to it – like considering, or supposing, or becoming inclined to believe. On this sort of non-attitudinal analysis of what it is for it to perceptually seem to Sam that p at t , then, for Sam to have a perceptual experience, e , is merely for her to appreciate or understand which way e is representing things to her as being, or which possible state of affairs it is putting forward as actual. Another way to put this might be to say that for Sam to have a perceptual experience is merely for her to appreciate which way things would have to be in order to be the way her experience represents them as being.

Attitudinal analyses of what it is for it to perceptually seem to Sam that p at t are ruled out by what I will call the epistemic privilege of perceptual experience. To say that perceptual experience is epistemically privileged relative to judgement and belief is to say that whilst perceptual experiences can justify judgements and beliefs they can themselves neither be justified nor unjustified. Perceptual experiences are, as it were, epistemic movers that are themselves neither in epistemic motion or rest: they are prolific and potent reason producers that cannot themselves be reasonable or unreasonable. If Finn believes or judges that the cavalry are coming at t we can ask him what his reasons are for believing that, or making that judgement, at t ; but if Finn sees the cavalry coming at t (or sees that the cavalry is coming at t) we cannot ask him what his reasons are for seeing that at t (or for seeing that that is the case at t).¹⁶

This remarkable epistemic feature justifies talk of the epistemic privilege of perceptual experience relative to judgement and belief because, roughly, judgements can be reasons only because they are the sorts of things for which reasons can be required, but perceptions can be reasons despite not being the sorts of things for which reasons can be required. Whilst a judgement (unlike a desire, an idle thought or an imagining) can settle questions about the epistemic standing of other judgements, it does so in a way that necessarily allows for the raising of the same sorts of question about its own standing; whereas perceptual experiences, though apt to settle just the same questions about the epistemic standing of judgements, do so in a way that necessarily excludes the raising of such questions about their own epistemic credentials.

Now the most obvious explanation of why a subject can neither be justified nor unjustified in having a particular perceptual experience at t but can be justified or unjustified in making a particular judgement at t , is that in having an experience they enjoy

or suffer something but do not do anything, but in making a judgement they do not suffer or enjoy anything but perform a certain sort of action – an action for which, unsurprisingly, it makes sense to hold them responsible in certain sorts of ways.

The epistemic privilege of perceptual experience rules out attitudinal analyses of ‘it perceptually seems to Sam that p at t ’. On such analyses, for it to perceptually seem to Sam that p at t is for Sam to adopt some sort of attitude towards the way his experience is representing things as being to him at t . Whatever that attitude is – whether the representationalist construes it as a case of a subject entertaining, considering, assessing or becoming inclined to believe, adopting it on a certain occasion will be the sort of thing a subject counts as doing on that occasion, and so the sort of thing a subject may have or lack reasons for doing on that occasion. Since a subject can neither have nor lack a reason for having a perceptual experience at t , and if a subject adopts an attitude at t they can have or lack a reason for doing that at t , perceptual experiences cannot be any kind of attitude towards the way an experience represents things as being. If Sam entertains a given possibility at t , or considers whether it obtains at t , or supposes that it does at t , or becomes inclined to believe that it obtains at t , it will be perfectly appropriate to ask for his reasons for doing such things at t , and anything for which a subject might require a reason cannot be a perceptual experience.

It may be objected here that a thinker does not need a justification to entertain a possibility at a given time, but only to do such things as wonder whether it obtains, to suppose that it does, or to become inclined to believe that it does. Entertaining a possibility at a given time is not yet to make the sort of commitment for which a thinker may be required to have a reason, it is not yet to make even the most tentative move in the

direction of commitment; so if we say that for a subject to have an experience is for her to entertain the possibility put forward as obtaining in it we can avoid the present objection.

To this the following reply should suffice. Whilst a thinker may not need a theoretical or epistemic justification for entertaining a given possibility at a certain time they may well need a practical or ethical one. If Sam idly entertains a given possibility at t she may be asked why she is doing that rather than something else at t , or blamed for doing that rather than something else at t . Whilst Sam can be asked why she is looking, or staring or peeking at Finn at t , and whilst she may be told not to do these things at t or blamed for doing them, she cannot be told to stop seeing Finn, or blamed for seeing Finn at t . So for Sam to have a perceptual experience cannot be for her to entertain the possibility put forward as obtaining or actual in it.

We can conclude that attitudinal analyses of 'it perceptually seems to Sam that p at t ' can be ruled out on the grounds that they require the absurd view that a perceiving subject may be justified or unjustified – whether in a moral or epistemic sense – in having a particular perceptual experience at a particular time.

This leaves the non-attitudinal analysis on which for it to perceptually seem to Sam that p at t is for Sam to appreciate how things would have to be to be as they seem to her at t . This view certainly seems to avoid the objection to which attitudinal views were vulnerable. If Finn makes a certain proposal to Sam at t , or tells her that something is so at t , and does so in a language that Sam understands, Sam will not count as doing anything for which she might require a reason at t simply in virtue of her understanding what Finn has proposed, or her appreciating how things would have to be to be as Finn has represented them. Speakers of a language plausibly have a standing capacity to understand proposals made in the sentences of that language actualizations of which at particular times will not

count as actions they perform at those times. If Sam speaks English, for example, and proposals are made to her in English, she cannot be told to refrain from understanding these proposals, or blamed for understanding them. All this seems consistent with the claim that someone may understand how things are being represented to them at a given time without thereby counting as doing something at that time for which they might have or lack a reason.

So the non-attitudinal proposal escapes the objection from the epistemic privilege of perceptual experience. But it walks straight into another equally compelling one. If for Sam to have a perceptual experience is just for her to appreciate how things would have to be for it to be veridical (or for her to appreciate which state of affairs it puts forward as obtaining), then her having a perceptual experience at t could not be the sort of event that could have any epistemic bearing whatever on a judgement about how things objectively are. That one grasps at t which way things are being put forward as being at t cannot – on its own – give one a reason to become inclined (barring countervailing beliefs) to believe that (or to consider whether etc.) things actually are that way. So on non-attitudinal construals of RP the fact that a subject can neither have nor lack a reason for having an experience may be explicable, but the fact that their experience can provide them with a reason to judge that things are as it represents them to her as being cannot be. This ‘attitude dilemma’ seems to me a conclusive objection to RP. It shows that, even if all the previous objections are waived for the sake of argument, and it is allowed that for Sam to have an experience with content that p is for it to perceptually seem to her that it is the case that p , there is no way to analyse this formulation so as to make it consistent with the idea that perceptual experiences can have any sort of epistemic bearing (direct or indirect) on beliefs and judgements. The RP theorist can make room for the idea that experience can

settle questions about the epistemic standing of beliefs and judgements only by treating it as something that is apt to raise questions about its own epistemic standing; and that is absurd.

I think we can certainly conclude that, far from it being the case, as many prominent representationalists suppose, that RP provides the only conceptual framework within which the remarkable epistemic properties of perceptual experience can become intelligible, it has turned out to make its possession of those properties utterly mysterious.¹⁷

Indeed, I think the attitude dilemma allows us to go even further than this. Because the relevant epistemic properties of perceptual experience are essential properties, it is not too strong a claim to make on its behalf that it shows that RP yields no coherent conception of perceptual experience. By DJT if something is an experience it must be apt to have epistemically significant consequences for an appropriate subject; so nothing quite incapable of having such consequences could be an experience. By the 'Epistemic Privilege Thesis' (EPT) – if something is a perceptual experience, it must be apt to justify beliefs but it must not be apt either to be justified or unjustified; so nothing apt to be justified or unjustified could be a perceptual experience. The attitude dilemma shows that RP yields only a choice between a conception of experience that is inconsistent with DJT and one that is inconsistent with EPT, so if DJT and EPT are true, RP yields only a choice between incoherent conceptions of experience.

13.

On the assumption that possession of representational content explains what it is for an experience to have *a* bearing on just the sorts of things perceptual judgements are

about, it seems to me that the *only* explanation of why RP falls foul of the attitude dilemma is that the notion of apparent presentation is built into the very idea of perceptual experience, and RP cannot accommodate it. RP may explain how perceptual experience can have a kind of bearing on the ordinary world, but not how it can have the sort of bearing on it that is necessary to make its epistemic role intelligible.

In other words, the attitude dilemma shows that the metaphysical thesis that perceptual experiences are relations to a content (RP) is inconsistent with the phenomenological thesis that perceptual experiences seem to be presentations of ordinary objects (PT).¹⁸ The relation between metaphysics and phenomenology is, to say the least, delicate and difficult. Hasn't every philosophical theory of what perceptual experiences are presented itself as consistent with PT? So it does not simply follow from the failure of RP that the metaphysical thesis that experiences are typically relations between a subject and an ordinary object (PP) is consistent with PT (and so also with CT, NCT and DJT). What remains to be done is to remove one ground for thinking it can't be, namely, that in light of what has come to be called the 'Myth of the Given', no view on which perceptual experiences are mere presentations could be consistent with DJT. If that can be done, it will not quite demonstrate that PP is consistent with PT, but, given the success of the case presented here against RP, and the simple plausibility of the idea that, typically, experiences are what they seem to be, it will come as close to that as can be hoped for.

14.

I suggest that we think of perceptual experiences as activations or actualizations of certain of the natural passive powers of intelligent creatures. These powers comprise both

conceptual and non-conceptual capacities together with some that are hard to fit into that classificatory schema. Conceptual powers include recognitional capacities and non-conceptual powers include discriminatory capacities and powers of self-movement. Capacities to distinguish between optimal and less than optimal conditions of presentation, being closely linked both to recognitional powers on the one hand and to discriminatory powers on the other, are hard to classify as conceptual or non-conceptual.¹⁹

To possess such a passive power is to be able to let ordinary things and their features (etc.) present themselves to one as themselves, or as they really are.²⁰ For a perceiving subject to have a perceptual experience at *t* is for such a passive power to be actualized or activated at *t*. A subject is neither simply passive when their passive perceptual powers are activated (as they are, for example, in being hit over the head), nor simply active (as they are, for example, when they consider a certain proposal or make a judgement).

Activations of these capacities can, in a sense, go off more or less successfully or well, since ordinary things, even in apparently ordinary circumstances, can seem to be revealing their true nature to one when they are not. It can even seem to a perceiver—perhaps courtesy of unusual internal or external conditions—that a certain ordinary object is presenting itself to her as itself at *t* though there is no appropriate ordinary object that is presenting itself to her at *t* at all.

So on this view it is not experience that can deceive or mislead but the ordinary objects that seem to present themselves to us in it. Ordinary objects— with help from the relevant conditions— can, in presenting themselves to us, disguise as well as reveal their true natures. For a creature's passive perceptual powers to be well developed is, in part, for it to be good at not letting ordinary objects get away with these aesthetic antics very often.²¹

That the relevant passive powers are powers to let ordinary things present themselves *as themselves* or *as they are*, implies that for an object to seem to present itself to a perceiver is always for it to present itself to a perceiver in a certain way, or as an object of a certain kind.²² On the other hand, to seem to be confronted with something is always to seem to be confronted with something of a particular kind, however generic. (Perceptual presentation requires at least that ‘something or other’ catch and hold the perceptual attention however briefly). So the relevant notion of purported perceptual presentation or apparent perceptual acquaintance is precisely not a notion of ‘mere’ or ‘sheer’ presentation. If Finn perceives a certain tree at t and that tree is an elm, then Finn perceives an elm at t ; but that does not entail that the relevant object presents itself to him as an elm at t . If Finn lacks the appropriate powers (if he has no idea what an elm is, or no idea what one looks like, or both) it will not be able to present itself to him in that way (and so the relevant experience will not provide him with a reason to make a judgement about an elm, but only about a tree).

The various ways an ordinary object can present itself as itself to a perceiver (given various ‘presentation conditions’) are rooted in what sort of thing it is. They are not explicable by appeal to aspects of the content of experience but to aspects of a thing’s nature. Indeed the various ways it can present itself as something *other* than itself to a perceiver (given certain conditions) are also rooted in what sort of thing it is (straight sticks are essentially such that they can present themselves as bent sticks in certain conditions etc.).

This conception of perceptual experience can accommodate DJT and EPT and so avoid the attitude dilemma. It is consistent with DJT because it has the following two features. First, for a perceptual experience to occur at t is for a perceiving subject to seem to

be presented with just the sort of ordinary things about which she is prone to make perceptual judgements. The apparent presence of just these sorts of things is apt – *all on its own* – to put her in the appropriate epistemic position to make a judgement about them. Second, if an ordinary object seems to present itself to a subject, it must seem to present itself to her in a certain way; and a subject cannot be perceptually sensitive to the way something seems to present itself to him in experience unless he has certain appropriate conceptual and non-conceptual capacities. So just having a certain experience can, all on its own, give someone a reason to make an appropriate judgement because a) it seems to confront them with the very thing that judgement is about, and b) it could not do so did they not have the appropriate conceptual (and non-conceptual) capacities, and were not those capacities drawn into operation in the experience.²³

It can also accommodate EPT. It can do so because to let something seem to present itself as itself to one at t is not to make any kind of commitment, or to perform any kind of action at t for which one might have or lack a reason: it is just to seem to be confronted by or to encounter a certain sort of thing. In having an experience a subject's conceptual powers of recognition and her non-conceptual powers of discrimination and self-movement are drawn into operation, and this, so to speak, affords ordinary objects an opportunity to seem to present themselves as themselves to her. To have an experience is to suffer ordinary objects to seem to make their true natures manifest; and to suffer this to happen at t is not to make any kind of commitment at t , so not to do something which might make questions about justification appropriate. One neither recognizes nor fails to recognize one's pet as a dog in seeming to encounter him around the house through the day. To seem to be presented with a car as a car or a tree as a tree requires that one be able to have thoughts about these things, but does not require that one 'take' (or become inclined to

‘take’) them, at the relevant time, to be of the relevant kind. (Recognitional capacities can be activated otherwise than in full blown ‘acts’ of recognition).

The passivity thus allowed for has not been well understood in the history of philosophy, and it can be conspicuous only in its absence from RP. It is a passivity that involves apparent exposure to the sheer ordinariness (or realness) of the objects that seem to present themselves to one in experience. This sort of apparent exposure is quite absent from imagining (though imagining can be presentational), even when what is imagined or remembered is an ordinary object; and it is even more obviously absent both from the sort of thinking about ordinary objects that is independent of a subject’s will (which cannot be presentational at all), and from understanding or appreciating as opposed to considering or becoming inclined to believe. It is because, in experience, this sense of being exposed to the ordinariness of the things that seem to present themselves to us, is phenomenologically all of a piece with finding ourselves apparently presented with their true nature, that perceptual experience enjoys its extraordinary epistemic privilege.

I submit then that it is reasonable to suppose that a view on which experiences are typically relations between a perceiving subject and an ordinary object is consistent with PT and so with CT, NCT and DJT. The best explanation of why PP can avoid the attitude dilemma (and all the arguments that preceded it) is that it is consistent with PT; that is to say that the best explanation of why PP can succeed where RP fails is that perceptual experiences are, typically, just what they seem to be – ordinary relations to ordinary objects.

That the notion of apparent perceptual acquaintance to which we have turned after the failure of RP is an essentially phenomenological one is of the greatest interest. It means that if, in philosophy, we are to make the normative force of perceptual experience and

(with it) the objective purport of judgement and factual discourse intelligible (perhaps in the face of skeptical anxieties) we will have to throw ourselves (reflectively or imaginatively) into the point of view of the perceiving subject. This is because the pretension to objectivity that is an essential feature of judgement and factual discourse is grounded in a form of apparent acquaintance with ordinary things that can only be explicated phenomenologically. It should come as some comfort to those philosophers long used to viewing explanatory appeals to an essentially subjective perspective with suspicion, that on the view sketched here, this perspective consists in ordinary relations that expose – courtesy of activations of their natural rational and animal powers – the perceiving subject to the ordinary world.

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Endnotes

¹ When perceptual judgements include demonstratives this is particularly clear. If one judges on the basis of perception at t 'This is pink and muddy!' it is obvious to one that the demonstrative picks out the very thing that now seems to be presented to one.

² This mention of seemings does not commit me to a common-factor account of perceptual experience. All perceptual experiences seem to a subject to be presentations of ordinary objects, but not all are that. The dictum that things are not always (just usually) as they seem applies, on this view, to experiences as well as to ordinary objects and events etc.

³ This is not to say that a perceiving subject with no beliefs at all at t could acquire such a reason just by having an experience at t . The point is just that no particular beliefs (like beliefs about what experiences are and how they are caused) must bear epistemically on an appropriate perceptual judgement at a particular time, for it to be rationalized by an experience.

⁴ See e.g. McDowell, 1998; McDowell, 2008, in Lindgaard, ed. (pp.1-14); and Crane, 2009. For a representationalist who argues that RP is inconsistent with PT but is none the worse for it, see Pautz, 2007.

⁵ That Armstrong's belief analysis is the first version of RP to make an impact in recent analytical philosophy is itself significant, for it clashes dramatically with the intuitions I am working with here. The view that to have an experience just is to acquire a belief, could only seem at all plausible as long as the importance of grounding the epistemic properties of experience in its presentational phenomenology remained unappreciated.

⁶ Richard Heck has wrongly suggested that that is exactly what they are, at least in part in order to provide a representationalist defence of DJT. See Heck, 2000.

⁷ Contra Crane, this does not entail that a picture – even without an accompanying verbal or written assertion – cannot represent something as being the case, and so be apt for evaluation as true or false. Conventions for the use of pictures can be 'in play' without being explicitly asserted occasion by occasion. Of course a picture cannot represent something as being the case considered in abstraction from all public conventions governing

its use, but it cannot be accurate or inaccurate considered in abstraction from such conventions either. See Crane, 2009: p.459.

⁸ This is the challenge I presented to Martin earlier, and left hanging. What is it for a perceptual experience to be a case of stative representation given that it cannot be an assertoric propositional attitude?

⁹ Martin seems to appreciate this point. See Martin, 2002: p. 389.

¹⁰ Similar objections might be brought against views on which the content of experience, in contrast to the content of belief, is essentially singular, or on which it is essentially object-dependent. That a given content picks out a particular individual uniquely does not require that it represents this individual as really existing or as really being a certain way; similarly that a given content is metaphysically dependent on the existence of a particular object does not entail either that the representation represents just that object, or, if it does, that it is represented as really being a certain way in it.

¹¹ Certain central themes in Wittgenstein's later philosophy are in play at this point in the argument.

¹² I strongly suspect that a line of thought very close to this also rules out a representationalist answer to the two questions I set aside at the beginning of this section. I suspect that there are no self-identifying representations and no self-identifying representational contents. That is to say that it is only in virtue of having a rule governed use that something can be recognized as 1) a representation of any kind, 2) a representation with a certain force, 3) a representation with a certain content.

¹³ Even openly externalist theories of perceptual justification as 'entitlement' will not be untouched by these arguments (and those that follow) since, no less than their internalist competitors, they require experiences to have a 'face-value'. On these accounts evolution can have endowed experiences with their epistemic properties only by endowing them with a face-value. See Burge, 2007, and Peacocke, 2004..

¹⁴ Many representationalists formulate RP by appeal to the notion of how things perceptually seem to a subject. See, e.g., Evans, 1982: p.123; Byrne, 2001: p.201; McGinn, 1989: p. 58.

¹⁵ No very elaborate examination of 'appearance talk' in all its nuance is important here, for the claim is just that either 'It perceptually seems to Sam that p at t' will be construed so as to entail that Sam adopts some sort of attitude towards the way his experience represents things as being to him at t, or it will not.

¹⁶ Peter Markie emphasises this feature of perceptual experience. See Markie, 2005.

¹⁷ John McDowell is perhaps the contemporary philosopher most closely associated with this idea – but he is surely right that this conception of the importance of RP goes back to Kant’s celebrated rejection of what we might now call ‘sense-datum empiricism’.

¹⁸ RP and PP count as metaphysical rather than phenomenological theses just because they are about what experience *are* not how they *seem*. The relevant metaphysical commitment is quite thin. McDowell makes it, for example, despite rejecting a common-factor version of RP, because he holds that, at least in the favourable cases, experiences are relations to a content and not to an ordinary object. These commitments are different because, for McDowell, if Finn has a perception at *t* there must be an appropriate content instantiated in his experience at *t* and an appropriate object that is represented as being a certain way in that content, and for me, if Finn has a perception at *t* there must be an appropriate object he then perceives – but no content.

¹⁹ I think that this sort of view can expose what has always been so unsatisfying about the debate between conceptualists and non-conceptualists about the alleged content of experience. For an excellent discussion of the concept of a power that brings out its roots in Aristotle see Hacker, 2007, pp.90-121.

²⁰ These claims draw their inspiration chiefly from Husserl and in particular from his account of ‘single-rayed presentations’ in the fifth of his *Logical Investigations* and his phenomenology of perceptual justification in the sixth. See Husserl, 2001, vol.2. Husserl’s ‘principle of all principles’ is precisely an attempt to capture the epistemic privilege of experience relative to belief and judgement. See Husserl, 1983: § 24.

²¹ So in a figurative sense it may be said that ordinary objects represent themselves as being a certain way to us in experience, and so that they have content. Straight sticks for example can represent themselves to us as being bent and when they do, they represent themselves to us as being a way they are not – so falsely.

²² So this version of a ‘no-content’ view can escape McDowell’s criticism of Travis’ position. See Lindgaard, ed. 2009: p.10, and Travis, 2004.

²³ Obviously, these remarks are designed to accommodate McDowell’s view that conceptual capacities are drawn into operation in experience. PP and not RP seems to me to offer the right framework within which to develop this insight.