

A PEIRCEAN CRITIQUE OF AND ALTERNATIVE TO
INTENTIONALISM ABOUT PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

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1. Perceptual Experiential Content: Setting the Context and Defining Terms

1.1 The thesis stated

My thesis is broadly construed this way: intentionalism, as a theory about perceptual experience, says that the intentional character of perceptual experience determines the phenomenological character of that experience. In some way, yet to be explained, phenomenology is determined by intentional content. It will take some work to unravel this notion and the corresponding implications. After I have done this I will show that intentionalism fails on two accounts. It fails to replace the sense-data theory as an explanation of the content of perceptual experience. I will show this to be one of its primary motivations. It also fails to deal satisfactorily with the problem of perceptual illusion. I will then offer an alternative rooted in the perceptual theory of Charles Peirce. I believe his critical but common sense approach preserves the intuition of sense-data theory, that perception is primarily a relation between perceivers and objects. Peirce's theory also provides a better solution to the problem of illusion.

I will give a whole chapter over to exploring the meaning of this notion of intentionalism about perceptual experience. I think the effort will be worthwhile. Fields of philosophy like perception have become highly specialized. Even though terms like content, intentionality, and phenomenology are common buzzwords, it is far too easy to use these concepts without specifying exactly what is meant. I want to gain as much terminological clarity as possible.

1.2 The arguments summarized

The argument of this thesis will follow this route: First, I will spend some time developing the major moves of the intentionalist theory with the purpose of clearly stating what I take to be the crux of the argument for intentionalism of either a conceptualist or nonconceptualist bent.¹ This will involve some description but should provide a context for my arguments that follow. As there are many participants I will select those who I take to play a predominant or representative role in the contemporary arguments for intentional content. In my conclusion of this section I will set out the difficulties that stand in the way of dealing with the content of perceptual experience solely in intentionalist terminology. I will then contend that intentionalism of either form is not justified in limiting its characterization of perceptual experience to intentional content. Neither is phenomenological content determined by nor identical with intentional content, at least not in any philosophically important sense. No error on the part of early sense-data object-content approaches should result in the elimination of an object-content characterization. This is what I will argue for.

I will first show this with an argument that there is simply no way to specify an intentional content with any single perceptual experience. In other words, my argument will show that intentional content is too easy to claim but too hard to specify. In fact nothing intrinsic to experience defines for us one certain way the world is represented as being. Much of this will hang on just what is meant by representational content. Representational content is used in a psychological

¹ See chapter 2 for a fuller treatment of these concepts.

and epistemological sense. The former is philosophically benign while the latter is interesting. Unfortunately it is also the latter use of representational content that fails on the intentionalist account. I will show that it is simply not the role of the experience to define for the perceiver any single meaning contained in the experience.

Next, I argue that there is an intuitively appealing and explanatorily necessary causal story in perceptual experience that needs to be sustained if we are to take perceptual experience to be understandable at all. At one level this is not much to ask of a theory of perception. I take it that a causal requirement on the concept of perception is necessary but not sufficient for a successful theory of perception. I will argue that the intentionalist formulation of the content view cannot sustain this account. The loss of the causal requirement results in a loss of worldly content and worldly interaction at the perceptual level.

Following that, I will argue that one of the central motivations for intentionalism about perceptual experience, namely the argument from cases of illusion, can be dealt with satisfactorily without the intentionalist theory. I will first show how important intentionalism takes its resolution of the argument from cases of illusory experience to be, and then I show that intentionalists lose much of the impetus for their revision of the object-content view once the argument from illusion is satisfactorily dealt with in an alternative way.

All of these main arguments come in chapter three. For this reason chapter three is the crux of my thesis. I will take these arguments to be significant enough to warrant a different description of perceptual experience. I

will explore the basic framework developed by Charles Peirce at the beginning of the twentieth century as my guide for an articulation of a more satisfactory account of perceptual experience. First, I will resolve a difficulty within the scholarly literature on Peirce's theory of perception. Peirce's theory of the percept has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. It is a difficult concept because Peirce was wrestling with the very heart of perceptual experience namely the status of the phenomenological content of perceptual experience, otherwise known as the percept or sense-data.

After describing the view Peirce held, what I will call a "two-level view of perception" I will show why it is compelling, and why it should replace the currently influential intentionalist view. I will argue, following Peirce, that perceptual experience is *silent* in a philosophically significant way. Our senses are *silent*. Second, Peirce tells us that the closest philosophically interesting representational content in the vicinity of perceptual experience is perceptual judgment, which only serves as an index and not a full-blown genuine representation of some state of the world. It serves the purpose of indexing, pointing, or identifying but not symbolically mediating. After this I will argue why I think the primary motivation for intentionalism, the traditional problem of illusion and the seeming failure of sense-data theories, can be handled in such a way that does not lead to the intentionalist's desired conclusion.

Last I will draw some conclusions about the current debate over the content of perceptual experience as a complete account of the nature of perceptual experience.

1.3 Sense data theory, intentionalism, and natural realism explained

Intentionalism is a reaction largely to the perceived failure of sense-data theories. It rejects what it should preserve of the sense-data theory, namely that perceptual content is object-content, and retreats to various forms of intentional content. There are several reasons for this that I will explore below. In order to preserve the correct intuition of the sense-data theory that perception is primarily a relation between perceiver and object and not a way of representing I will propose a version of naïve or natural realism about perceptual experience.² It will help then to provide some context for how these theories arose.

The philosophy of perception and questions and problems raised therein are as old as philosophy itself. The Presocratics were primarily concerned with the physiological basis of the senses.³ As is true with many philosophical questions real inquiry begins in Plato. In the *Theaetetus* Plato has Socrates examine the hypothesis that perception is a reliable form of knowledge. Here Plato separates the flux of sense perception from the more reliable knowledge through knowing Forms.⁴ Thus began the long tradition of distinguishing between the sensory appearance and the reality known through rational means. This division was exacerbated by the method of doubt employed by Descartes.

Descartes' method in *Meditations on First Philosophy* was to doubt any faculty that was not completely trustworthy. Repeatedly Descartes reminds his

² I will use natural realism for the name for this position instead of the traditionally used naïve realism. I take the name from Putnam (1994: 454) who takes it from James (1912). I do not like the term "naïve" because it contributes to the misunderstanding that the naïve realist is merely the common persons position and not a substantive theoretical position.

³ Hamlyn (1961: 8).

⁴ Plato (1989: 845-919).

reader of the mistake of trusting the senses for knowledge of objects in the world.⁵ His conclusion is that only through purely mental scrutiny can any object be known by the mind. The senses are only capable of informing the mind of what is beneficial and harmful to itself. Of their reliability for knowledge of objects in the world Descartes says,

But I misuse them by treating them as reliable touchstones for immediate judgments about the essential nature of the bodies located outside us; yet this is an area where they provide only very obscure information.⁶

It is against this view of the senses that Locke initiates the roots of the contemporary sense-data view. Locke posited “a new way of ideas” by which he rooted all knowledge in ideas of sense or reflection. For Locke the ideas we have do represent objects in the world and are the links by which we know the external world. The simple ideas of sense are literally the building blocks of our knowledge of the world.⁷ This theory of perception has come to be called indirect realism and specifically a representative theory about perception. This theory was eventually to be instantiated by the sense-data theory put forth by Russell and Moore among others. By moving directly to the twentieth century we skip over the attempt at synthesis by Kant and the Idealist reaction by Hegel and Fichte. Since Moore and Russell react to this idealism by a return to empiricism, in a very real way, Locke’s Representative Realism is reborn in the sense-data

⁵ It must be remembered though that Descartes did trust the senses to give good information about the state of the body under normal viewing conditions. Descartes did not mistrust the senses near as much as some of his later interpreters, specifically Malebranche.

⁶ Descartes (1989: 59).

⁷ Locke (1961: II.ii.1).

theory. It is at that point that the contemporary debate that is the subject of this thesis begins.

In the twentieth century the debate has focused on the nature of the content of perceptual experience. But the debate looks very different at the end of the twentieth century than it did at the beginning. The terms of the more recent debate over content are still being defined and yet it is already generating a rich range and diversity of perspectives.⁸ Historically, one trend has been to assimilate an account of perception to either sensation or judgment. The sensational account deals well with the passive sensory aspect, while the judgmental account brings the concept closer to the active role that perception plays in gaining knowledge about the world.⁹ Commonly this is represented by the difference between perceiving aspects of an object and perceiving *that* such and such is the case, or perceiving a fact. But it seems crucial to me that an either/or account will not suffice. It is part of this present study to understand how a proper account of the knowledge derived from perception is dependent on an account of the nature of the objects of perception, which is better equated with the sensational aspect.

There are epistemic problems of perception that differ from the traditional problem of determining the nature of perceptual objects. The traditional problem attempts to devise a theory that accounts for our ordinary conception of

⁸ For an introduction into the field of the content of perception see Crane (ed.) (1992) especially Crane (chapter 1), Gendler and Hawthorne (eds.) (2006) and Gunther (ed.) (2003). Each of these collections contains a helpful introduction situating the debate about the content of perceptual experience within the broader framework of the philosophy of perception.

⁹ Hamlyn (1961) is an excellent historical account of philosophy of perception beginning with the Pre-Socratics and ending with the middle of the twentieth century. This division of traditional accounts of perception into either sensation or judgment is his.

perceptual experience and how to deal with the problem of illusion or hallucination. The traditional theories such as sense-data and intentionalism as well as natural realism attempt to analyze perceptual experience and the possibilities of error from illusion or hallucination. This question and its resolution are traditionally taken as separate from whether perceptual experience provides a subject with justified belief about the world. In other words, whether one is a direct realist or an indirect realist is not supposed to immediately determine one's answer to the epistemological problem of perception's role in justification. I think however that the two problems are closely related.¹⁰

There is a second problem that is commonly called the epistemological problem of perception. The epistemological problem of perception asks how perceptual experience can be involved in justifying beliefs about the world. While various theories about the nature of perception provide various answers to the epistemological problem, the latter should not be confused with the traditional problem. Recently, these two questions about the nature of perceptual experience and its role in epistemic issues have been merging. It will be part of the aim of this thesis to ask whether the assimilation of sensation and judgment is the right response to problems in philosophy of perception. Below I offer a short characterization of the sense-data theory, intentionalism and natural realism in order to show how they construe the primary terms of the debate.

¹⁰ In other words if we could simply describe the relation between perceiver and object, as well as the nature of perceptual objects, we would progress a long way toward resolving the epistemological issue.

The sense-data theory closely resembles the theories that arose out of modern philosophy. Traditionally understood sense-data can be associated with Descartes' and Locke's *ideas* and Hume's *impressions*. They are thought of as mental objects that are the direct objects of experience. In the sense-data theory the objects in the world are experienced indirectly via these intermediary objects. This preserves a strict distinction between appearance and reality, namely a substance distinction. More contemporarily, the sense-data theory is associated with Russell (1912) and Moore (1993). Moore holds up an envelope and then says, "Though we all did (as we should say) see *the same* envelope, no two of us, in all probability, saw *exactly the same sense-data*."¹¹ Here Moore draws the distinction between the seeing of a particular sense-datum and seeing a real object. Moore then argues that none of the various sense-data had by any of the perceivers while seeing the envelope could be equated or identified with any particular part of the object. His conclusion is this: "This seems to be the state of things with regard to these sense-data—the color, the size and the shape. They seem, in a sense to have had very little to do with the real envelope, if there was a real envelope."¹²

Russell (1912) makes a similar move in chapter one of *The Problems of Philosophy*. He describes a scene of several people viewing a table. Because each person's position to the table is different, their sense-data are different. The problematic question becomes how to bridge what is immediately known in

¹¹Moore (1993: 50).

¹² Moore (1993: 56).

sensation with some reality such as the physical table. What is the link between these direct objects of perception and the mediately known external objects?

To summarize the sense-data position I will say that the sense-data theory says that whenever something looks *X* there is some object *O* that looks *X*. This *O* is called a sense-datum. Perception is sensation of sense-data. Sense-data are the organization of color, size and shape to the perceiver. Critical to the argument for sense-data is that sensation presents the perceiver with knowledge of a kind—namely color, size, and shape. Sense-data are mental objects that are directly perceived and which supposedly make the perceiver indirectly aware of the objects that cause the sense-data. The difficulty is in proving that this is in fact the case.

The sense-data theory came under increasing fire for several good reasons. Sense-data are mental and in a scientific environment increasingly interested in material or natural explanations sense-data posed problems to physical reduction. Sense-data also posed difficult problems for knowledge of the world. This criticism is usually construed by saying that sense-data, instead of revealing the world, create a “veil of perception”. This criticism is similar to that of the modern empiricists, namely that the material world is never experienced directly and therefore our knowledge of sense-data only applies indirectly, and possibly not at all, to worldly objects.

Intentionalism is a broad movement encompassing many views. But I will limit my description to that which is common to the intentionalist camp broadly construed. Brentano (1995) is the source of current theories of intentionality.

Brentano thought that the most significant difference between the mental and physical was a feature he called *intentional inexistence*, sometimes described as the *aboutness* of the mental. The key to this difference can be expressed with an example. Non-intentional relations expressed by propositions of facts are only true if both relata exist. For X to hit Y both X and Y must exist. But in mental relations like desiring, believing, and imagining both relata need not exist. I may believe or desire or imagine X without X having to exist. X, in this case is an intentional object, an object that my mental states are about or directed toward. I consider it an open question in what sense perception might be a mental state exhibiting this characteristic of intentionality. The intentional theory of perception borrows this concept of intentionality and subsumes the concept of perception under the class of mental states. Characteristic of these mental states is their propositional or representational content. The content of the mental state is said to have correctness conditions, which depend on whether what the state is about is true, or not. In other words, if a belief that *x is f* is true, *x* must actually be *f*. Otherwise the content of the belief is false. Not all mental states have correctness conditions, but it is asserted by the intentionalist that perception does.

By understanding perception as an intentional state of a particular kind, the intentional theory claims that perceptions have correctness conditions that determine whether the perception is correct or incorrect. This is very different from the sense-data theory that construed mental objects with phenomenological content, but not propositional correctness conditions. I will spend more time on

the intentional theory below and so will refrain from further description and citing examples here. But, what I will do is compare and contrast the intentional theory with the sense-data theory it is supposed to replace.¹³

For the sense-data theory, relation to objects, albeit mental objects, was primary. This resulted in attention in perception being given primarily to the phenomenology of the perception but conceived under empiricist loyalties and not in the vein of Husserl.¹⁴ The intentional theory equates perception with intentionality and specifically representation. I will show this by example below. A perception is equivalent to an intentional state. For the intentionalist it is the representational content of this intentional state which is the content of perception, and further, it is the intentional content which determines whether an object is perceived or not. Intentionalism, unlike the sense-data theory, which defends indirect perception, considers itself to be a theory of direct perception. When the intentional content is correct it is the real object that is seen; the perception is veridical. In other words, for the intentionalist, the experience is a mental state characterized by intentional content. When the content is incorrect the perception is illusory or hallucinatory.

I will defend a view held by Charles Peirce that is closer to the sense-data view of perceptual experience, but with some important qualifications. For Peirce, perception is a two-level concept with emphasis on the relation to the object, rather than on the notion of correct representation. Unlike the

¹³ For examples of the idea that the intentional theory was a replacement for the sense-data theory see Anscombe (1981: 11-13).

¹⁴ For a classic contemporary defense and elaboration of the notion of the phenomenology of experience see Nagel (1974) "What is it like to be a bat?"

intentionalist Peirce held that a perceptual judgment followed the presentation of the object and not vice-versa. Also, unlike the sense-data theory, Peirce's perceptual content is not merely a mental entity, but an interaction between two existences, or self and non-self. I take this view to be a natural realist theory of perception for several reasons.

The natural realist usually appeals to common sense to explain perception. The natural realist conceives of experience of the environment provided by the senses as lacking correctness conditions. It simply is not a function of the senses to communicate accuracy or inaccuracy, and it is not the nature of the presentation of the environment in view to be accurate or inaccurate. A judgment about the objects in view may have correctness conditions and therefore is a mental act, but this is to be distinguished from the phenomenological presentation of the environment that is object of the mental activity. It is crucial to Peirce's account and mine that we should maintain the metaphorical nature of the metaphor that the senses deceive us. The intentionalist in some sense takes this literally while the natural realist preserves the metaphorical reading.

In order to provide a context for the contemporary debate about the content of perceptual experience I will begin by discussing some of the primary terms that are used by the various views, albeit sometimes in very different ways. It should be noted that much research could be spent in each of these areas alone. My purpose then will be to set some parameters by highlighting

commonalities and distinctions important for my thesis instead of offering a comprehensive account of each term.

1.4 Some problematic terms

Perception itself is a contentious concept. As I mentioned above in some theories it is limited to sensation and in others it includes judging. How it is defined is heavily dependent on the theory of perception a philosopher employs. But, if construed broadly enough a general definition can be given. Perception in the sense discussed by sense-datum theorists, intentionalists, and natural realists is a concept that crucially involves the senses. Perception is specifically a way of gaining information. It is commonly thought that we can perceive both aspects of objects in view and facts. Vision is often the sense of choice for perceptual theory both historically and in the contemporary literature. It is also customary to claim that whatever is said about vision follows for the other senses. While I lean in this direction I will refrain from generalizing in this thesis. The philosophers and positions I interact with will all involve vision and so will my conclusions. It will be enough to attempt to resolve some of the difficulties in vision without assuming justice is done to all of the senses.

Perception presupposes three things: First, an entity capable of having the environment in view. This capacity is made possible by the sensory system that makes feeling the world possible. At its most fundamental level we might characterize this as an ability to be sensitive to impacts from the surrounding environment. Second, an entity capable of performing actions such as focusing on some part of the view, which entails the ability to respond to certain features

of the environment in view. Last, perception presupposes a capacity to assimilate or understand what the system, in this case human, is responding to. So far, I take none of this to be controversial within the theories I discuss. In other words I think most theories of perception attempt to accommodate our common sense notion of perceiving. What gets tricky is how to flesh out these characteristics in an account of the experience of perceiving. I am laying the groundwork for a criticism of intentionalism about perceptual experience in order to understand the deficiencies of the view. My point so far is to say that an account of perception or of the content of perception must be able to make sense of these characteristics. If an entity lacks the proper instruments for feeling or sensing the environment, perception will not be possible. Also if the entity has the instruments to view but lacks the instruments to act in response to features of the environment or lacks the capacity to recognize correct or incorrect responses, then it is not able to perceive. But I think these characteristics of perceiving are broad enough to include non-human perceivers. Further definition would certainly make this a contentious point. Is perception conceptual? If so it could be argued that it is only humans, and more specifically those who have concepts, that can perceive.

What does it mean to talk about perceptual experience? This gets us closer to our point of contention. For one might legitimately ask how we should characterize the content of perceptual experience? It has been argued that reflecting on experience inevitably involves reflecting on the scene in view. This is a way of pointing out what is often called the transparency of experience. The

transparency of experience is tough for the sense-data theory to accommodate and yet it seems very intuitive. But another type of content resists the transparency idea; this content is known as the representational content of perceptual experience. It is this content, elaborated on below, that intentionalists have argued is the true content of perceptual experience.

1.4.1. Content

The content of a perceptual experience can be understood in very different ways. In one sense of content one might speak of the content of a treasure chest. This might also be closer to characterizing the view one has when perceiving. A characterization of this content of perceptual experience is closely linked with the sense-data theory about perceptual experience. On the object-content view one would describe the experience by describing the view of the immediate object that lies open to one.

The other way of characterizing the content of an experience, which we will see has been largely a reaction to the failure of the treasure chest content view described above, is by a description of what the experience represents informationally. The information content is also the intentional content of the experience. It is what the experience is a description of what the perception is *about*. In this sense the content correctly or incorrectly represents some way the world is. In this case perception is understood as a propositional attitude, an attitude one can take toward propositions. They are supposed to be the content of the perception. So, if one can take a believing attitude toward *that p* one can

also take a desiring, expecting or perceiving attitude or so the intentionalist would have us believe.

McDowell defines content in its contemporary meaning as “what is given by a ‘that’ clause.”¹⁵ In this sense a proposition such as “I see that p ” (where p represents any proposition such as “The cat is on the mat.”) gives the content of the perceptual experience. Key to this type of account of perceptual experience is that it involves representational content and therefore correctness conditions. It is a central part of my thesis that perception in fact is an attitude that does not involve representational content or correctness conditions. It lacks some critical characteristics of significant representation.

Without reviewing a remotely complete recent history of the theory of perception one can see an important transition in thinking about the mental that has led to our current dispute over the content of perception. Early and mid-twentieth century theory of perception was dominated by sense-data theory and phenomenism. Both of these theories took perceptual experience to involve object-contents. They were prone to idealistic and subjectivist readings. Indirect theories of perception such as sense-data theories provided an explanation for the traditional problems of illusion and hallucination (they shared an object content with veridical perception). But they failed to provide the kind of contact with the world that could lead to justified knowledge (i.e. the “veil of perception”) and resisted physical reduction. The successor to subjectivist versions of perception was the intentional theory of perception that had the advantage of

¹⁵ McDowell (1996: 3).

being realist about belief in the external world and so claimed to avoid the “veil of perception” problem. The intentional theory remains very influential and provides a neat solution to the problem of illusion. We have illusions because the immediate content of perceptual experience is intentional, it is about objects in the world. The objects represented by the content may or may not actually be there.

Crane introduces the contemporary debate over content in a different way.¹⁶ One notion of content arose out of the question of meaning in the philosophy of language in trying to understand how language represents. The other notion of content comes from cognitive science, which has developed computational and information-processing models of the mental. Different uses of some of the key terms by the different communities have made for some terminological confusion. I will not focus on the cognitive science use of representation. Whatever is true about representational states in cognitive science will be verified empirically. When philosophers state that perceptual experience represents the world to be a certain way they are making a very substantial philosophical claim about the content and role of perceptual experience. This is my focus.

Strawson (2005) has noted the often confusing ways that notions such as representation, sensation, and content are used in contemporary talk about experience. My purpose in this study will not be to completely clear up the terminological muddle, which would take a totally different turn, but to state what

¹⁶ Crane (1992: 6).

are some conditions that need to be considered for these terms to have the minimal and basic use that they do. So, let it be understood that by the content of perceptual experience the intentionalist generally means the representing of the world to be a certain way.

1.4.2. Nonconceptual content

Within the debate about the content of perceptual experience, concepts are generally understood as Fregean senses. In the Fregean vein, the sense is the thought or proposition that a statement is about and is constituted by concepts. Also, sense determines reference. Concepts are also closely related to language use and such conceptual mental states as beliefs. One easy way to distinguish conceptual content from nonconceptual content is to say that nonconceptual content is whatever conceptual content is not. But this only gives us a negative definition. Part of the exploration in the following chapters is to uncover just what nonconceptual content might be.

In this sense the content of an experience that is nonconceptual is one that is individuated not by Fregean criteria of difference in sense or by conceptual capacity at all. In fact, the nonconceptual content of perceptual experience just is supposed to be the content of the experience that, while being specified or described by concepts, is not determined by concept possession. But one difficulty the nonconceptualist runs into is how to specify an informational content that is not organized conceptually.

1.4.3. Object

An object can also mean very different things in different theories of perception. On the sense-data theory there are two objects. One object is mental, phenomenal, and immediate. The second object is known indirectly and represented by the first object. There is the *real* object that is supposed to be the cause of the sense-datum that one perceives. This real object is thought of as a physical object, a part of the world. On the intentional theory of perception an object is that which is intended or represented by the intentional content. If it seems to me that I perceive that a car is there, then the intentional object of my perception is a state of affairs *that a car is there*. This intentional object may or may not turn out to exist. That is the beauty of intentionality in perception: like belief, it may miss its intended mark. This intentional object is not phenomenal or material. Only when the perception is veridical is the real material, phenomenal object in view.

2. Intentionalism

2.1. The roots of intentionalism

It will help to begin with a more thorough look at the roots and current form of intentionalism. The theory has its roots in Anscombe (1965), Armstrong (1968), Dretske (1969), and Searle (1983) and it is only in these writings that one can detect any indication of why the move away from a sense-data theory or natural-realism is made. It is common today for an intentionalist about perceptual experience (henceforth an intentionalist¹⁷) to assume this theory of perception from the outset. It is rarely argued for. Take these more recent examples:

A perceptual experience represents the world as being a certain way...The representational content of experience is a many-splendoured thing (Peacocke 1992: 105).

That things are thus and so is the content of the experience... (McDowell 1994: 26).

Our experience of the world has content—that is, it represents things as being in a certain way. In particular, perceptual experience represents a perceiver as in a particular environment, for example, as facing a tree with brown bark and green leaves fluttering in a slight breeze (Harman 1990: 34).

It should be emphasized that the content of a perceptual experience specifies the way the world appears or seems *to the subject* (Byrne 2001: 201).¹⁸

¹⁷ There are intentionalists about many mental phenomena. In this thesis an intentionalist is someone who places perception among phenomena that exhibit intentionality. I am not targeting, nor do I want to, the broad Brentano Thesis that the main characteristic of mentality is intentionality, but only that perception does not qualify as a mental phenomena of this type.

¹⁸ I of course have not provided the context of these quotes which could provide extensive argumentation for this thesis. But, a quick glance at any of these papers will I think show that the thesis that experience has representational content is assumed from the outset.

These more recent formulations make clear that the kind of representation intended is significant representation, personally recognizable as such, and it plays a crucial role in fixing meaning. Let me return then to some earlier formulations of the intentionality of perceptual experience in order to try and elucidate a motivation for it.

Anscombe (1965) explains that the sense-data theory and the natural theory of perception both fail by neglecting the intentionality of sensation.¹⁹ She lists ten examples of abnormal sensory experience of various degrees of illusion or hallucination. Her conclusion from the examples is this: “Now ‘ordinary language’ views and ‘sense-datum’ views make the same mistake, that of failing to recognize the intentionality of sensation, though they take opposite positions in consequence.”²⁰ What I want to emphasize is that perceptual illusion, the traditional problem of philosophy of perception, is a major component in her argument that sensation is intentional.

Armstrong (1968) articulates a “belief theory” about perceptual experience. He says, “In the first stage, it is argued that an account of perception can be given in terms of the acquiring of beliefs about the physical world. Many of the *traditional* problems of the philosophy of perception can be solved at this stage.”²¹ He goes on to say this: “Perceptual *experience*, as opposed to mere perception, is simply this flow in so far as we are conscious of it... The content of our perceptions, which so many philosophers want to turn into a non-physical

¹⁹ Anscombe (1965: 11-13).

²⁰ Anscombe (1965: 13).

²¹ Armstrong (1968: 208).

object, is simply the content of the beliefs involved.”²² Finally, after discussing some examples of perceptual illusion Armstrong offers this solution:

But if we conceive of perception as nothing but the acquiring of true and false beliefs about the current state of the perceiver’s body and environment, or of mental events that resemble the acquiring of such beliefs, an extraordinarily simple and natural dissolution of the problem is possible (Armstrong 1968: 242).

Even though the belief theory of Armstrong is different in many ways from that of Anscombe’s, the motivation is similar. Intentional content is ushered in to solve the traditional problem of illusion and hallucination.

Finally, I will mention Searle (1983) who articulates a similar motivation.

Searle says this:

Internal to each phenomenon [belief and visual experience] is an Intentional content that determines its conditions of satisfaction. The argument that visual experiences are intrinsically Intentional, in sum, is that they have conditions of satisfaction which are determined by the content of the experience in exactly the same sense that other Intentional states have conditions of satisfaction which are determined by the content of the states (Searle 1983: 40).

Searle states explicitly why he thinks experiences have intentional content, namely because they have conditions of satisfaction. He goes on to explain that this content is propositional in the sense that it requires a whole state of affairs, a fact, to be seen. An example is seeing *that p* or *that such and such is the case*. Searle goes on to explain how the intentional content provides the specification of the conditions of satisfaction for a perceptual experience to be “veridical.”

My conclusion then is this: That one of the central motivations of the intentionalist theory of perception, or the idea that perceptual experience has

²² Armstrong (1968: 226).

content, is the traditional problem of illusion and hallucination. Early forms of the theory represented by the three philosophers above sought to solve one of the central problems of perception by claiming that the concept of perception should be associated or defined primarily, and sometimes solely, by its intentional content. The intentional content is supposed to specify the correctness conditions for a particular perceptual experience to be true/false or veridical/non-veridical.

From this specification another primary tenet of intentionalism about perceptual experience may be drawn out. The thesis that perceptual experience has correctness conditions expressed by a propositional content is central to intentionalism. One way of putting this thesis is to convert the metaphor *that our senses deceive us* into a literal truth. The intentionalist wants us to understand perceptual experience, say visual, as a process whereby our senses, say eyes, take in information in the environment which is represented by a propositional content that specifies the conditions for success in perception.

Below I will argue why perceptual experience is not to be described by any intentional content in so far as intentional means representational. Even if the motivation was warranted, which I will also argue against, the thesis is false. Perceptual experience is not representational even if it is mental and therefore in some sense intentional. I will argue, following Peirce, that perceptual experience is *silent*. Our senses are *silent*. Second, Peirce tells us that the closest propositional content in the vicinity of perceptual experience is perceptual judgment, which only serves as an index and not a full-blown representation of

some state of the world. It serves the purpose of indexing, pointing, or identifying but not fully representing. After this I will argue why I think the primary motivation for intentionalism, the traditional problem of illusion and the seeming failure of sense-data theories, can be handled in such a way that does not lead to the intentionalist's desired conclusion. But first I take an aside. There is a growing body of literature within the intentionalist framework about the kind of representational content perceptual experience has. Specifically, McDowell's *Mind and World* has received much attention, both negative and positive. But, in the end I don't think that anything hinges on the distinction made within this debate. So, after some elaboration I will deal with the broader thesis shared by both parties of the dispute over the status of the content of perceptual experience, namely the very idea that a particular perceptual experience can be successfully identified with a propositional content that provides its correctness conditions.

2.2. McDowell: A conceptualist version of intentionalism²³

McDowell (1996) has articulated an enormously intriguing challenge to our standard conception of the link between mind and world. It will be helpful to label the challenge conceptualism about perceptual experience (or conceptualism for short).²⁴ The challenge begins with a common sense idea, namely, that we take our beliefs to be answerable to the world.²⁵ Beliefs about the world have

²³ For other defenses of conceptual content see Sedivy (1996) and Brewer (1999) (although see Brewer (forthcoming) for a different view on the matter).

²⁴ This is not the only theory that goes by the title of conceptualism. There is another theory about the status of abstracta, one of which is conceptualism as opposed to realism or nominalism. Here I will use conceptualism to name the thesis that the content of perceptual experience is solely conceptual.

²⁵ This is commonly understood as the correspondence theory of truth.

correctness conditions or truth conditions whose value depends on how the world actually is.²⁶ A belief is false which does not represent the world correctly. A belief is true which does represent the world correctly. Thinking is in some way answerable to the world. The question becomes how one defines belief and world. Problems arise according to various definitions.

A very central notion for McDowell, which he picks up from Sellars, is that there are two *spaces*, traditionally named the normative and descriptive, and renamed by Sellars as the space of reasons and realm of law. The normative space or space of reasons is identical with the space of concepts for McDowell. Whatever falls within the space of reasons must also fall within the space of concepts. The reason this distinction is important for McDowell is that it preserves a nonreductive account of knowing. Sellars says:

The essential point is that in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says (Sellars 1997: 76).

McDowell (1998) criticizes Sellars for transgressing the master thought of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* by stepping over the demarcation line in *Science and Metaphysics*. Above the line is the space of reasons, which is where justification takes place. Below the line is the descriptive space filled by the empirical sciences in McDowell's theory. If descriptions of sensory systems making impingements on consciousness are below the line then it cannot be a

²⁶ I use correctness conditions here because that is the term used in theories of the content of perception. "Correctness conditions" came in to play because philosophers were uncomfortable using truth, which is normally a semantic property, for mental events like perception. A similar terminological innovation occurs with veridical/nonveridical. Essentially this means true or false.

source of justification for beliefs about the world. McDowell wants to preserve Sellars' original thought that only reasons can justify and reasons are conceptual, therefore nothing that is nonconceptual can be a reason for belief. This sounds like a version of Coherentism whereby only a belief can justify another belief.²⁷ But, McDowell makes some important qualifications that I articulate below.

McDowell's next move is to set the stage by describing an oscillation between two ways of conceiving how justification is achieved. He charges Evans (1982) with falling into the Sellarsian trap of the myth of the given. Evans is charged with holding such a view, because he views perceptual experience as both nonconceptual and playing a justificatory role in knowledge. The myth is taken from Sellars' attack on correspondentism in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. The fundamental error of the myth so conceived is that "the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere. The extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought."²⁸ The problem with reasons considered as extra-conceptual, according to McDowell is that they are not structured in the right way to do what they are supposed to do. They provide exculpations where we want justification.²⁹ When we want reasons the myth offers us non-reasons. The alternative view in the oscillation, on McDowell's account, is Davidson's Coherentism. Coherentism cuts out the reliance on the world for justification and seeks justification only

²⁷ See for instance Davidson (1986) "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge".

²⁸ McDowell (1996: 7).

²⁹ McDowell (1996: 8).

among other beliefs. But, this, while it makes a type of real justification possible, renounces a central piece of the intuition, that experience provides rational constraint on our thinking about the world.³⁰

What is common to both views is their conception of experience with the world. Both views conceive of experience as nonconceptual. Whereas that conception of experience provides justification by recourse to a given in Evans' case it is excluded from justification in Davidson's case. Either way experience is relegated to a causal role in both cases.³¹ It seems now that we can summarize McDowell's argument this way:

P1: Perceptual experience provides reasons for belief about the world.

P2: Reasons are by their nature conceptual.

C: Perceptual experience is conceptual.

³⁰ McDowell (1996: 18).

³¹ A chart might make this clearer.

	Experience of World	Constraint on Mind	Result
Evans: Myth of the Given	Nonconceptual: Experience is outside conceptual realm and conceived as a purely sensory affair	Exculpations: Purely sensory experience provides a "given" foundation.	We get constraint but it is not of the right kind. Its hard to see how a bit of the given could justify anything conceptual.
Davidson: Coherentism	Nonconceptual: Experience is outside conceptual realm and conceived as a purely sensory affair.	No constraint by sensory experience. Only other beliefs provide constraint.	We are left feeling that there is no constraint by the world. McDowell calls this the wheels spinning in the void.
McDowell: Conceptualism	Conceptual: Experience is of the same nature as thought. Both are conceptual.	Rational Constraint. Since experience itself is conceptual it can provide the right kind of justification.	A solution that avoids the pitfalls of the others, but one wants to understand just how experience of the world might be conceptual.

What is a paradigm case of McDowell's conception of perceptual experience? In McDowell's case, what justifies a belief *that p* is the perceptual experience *that p*. To experience the world as *that p* means nothing less than having the conceptual repertoire that usually works in spontaneous acts of judgment also available in a passive role to the sensory experiencing of the world. In other words when I judge *p* because I see *p* this is possible because perception is conceptually structured. If perception were not conceptually structured then it could not play the role of justifying a judgment. In this way McDowell says we are saddled with content (conceptual). McDowell has received criticism for purporting that experience comes with subtitles.³² But he is clear that this is not his intention. What he means is to understand conceptual structure as instantiated both linguistically and sensorily. By understanding conceptual structure this way he provides an account of how experiences can provide justifications for beliefs—namely because they are of the same kind or structure.

McDowell's characterization of perceptual experience, then, like the intentionalist's, is that perceptual experience is exhausted by intentional content. The content of perceptual experience, he says, is conceptual. This is controversial because it seems common sense that while descriptions of one's perceptual experience may depend on conceptual capacities the actual perceptual experience does not, or at least not wholly. But, given McDowell's use of demonstrative reference, or *that* clauses, he argues that any aspect of

³² Collins (1998).

perceptual experience can be taken in this way, as a reason, and indeed if it is perceptual experience it is.

Let me summarize then where I understand McDowell to be. McDowell's theory, broadly Kantian, is a two-factor view. It is a view that perception is a conceptual affair. There is no perceptual experience to speak of that is not conceptual. What makes it a two-factor theory is that one cannot separate the sensory and conceptual components. They are intertwined. McDowell is concerned with the explanatory and justificatory aspect of experience on thought and action. He pushes his theory about perceptual experience with this motivation. His central point is to explain how a perceptual experience can be a reason for belief *that p*. His answer is that only conceptual content can be a reason for another conceptual content. Therefore, we must come to understand mature human experience of the world as conceptually structured. But McDowell does not mean that sensory experience is later conceptually structured; he means to say that our sensory capacity is conceptually influenced all the way out to the world. In other words there is no pure given ever. Once we understand that our perceiving *that p* (i.e. perceiving a fact) is what justifies our belief *that p*, on McDowell's account, we can understand how experience justifies belief about the world. McDowell is clear that only the conceptual content of perceptual experience justifies belief. It is in this sense that he is at odds with the nonconceptualists about perceptual experience. But it is also in this sense that he is firmly within the intentionalist's camp about the nature of perceptual experience. It is exhausted by its intentional content. McDowell conceives of

perceptual experience as giving reasons for belief. He takes perceptual experience to have a content, available to the subject, that represents the way the world is.

What is new and interesting in McDowell's work is how honestly he allows his epistemological motivation to influence his theory of perception. He carries it to its logical conclusions even where it may seem strange. But I think it is this motivation that leads McDowell astray. As I will discuss below it is the very idea that the experience of the world provides the perceiver with some unique and fixed representational content, conceptual in McDowell's case, that is the mistake.

I want to raise a concern here that I will take to be significant for intentionalism as a whole. McDowell is largely silent about theories of perception arising from cognitive science or psychology. Largely he appears comfortable to leave theories of cognitive science to science and dismiss their relevance by placing them "below the line" as far as having epistemological import. But it is my contention that McDowell's account is lacking, as I believe other intentionalists' accounts are, in not paying attention to the import of contemporary representational theory of perceptual informational processing. McDowell holds that the object of perceptual experience is an intentional object, a Fregean sense, or a fact. But I will argue below that this theory of perceptual objects cannot solve problems that arise for the intentionalists about the nature of perceptual experience and its explanatory value. It is McDowell's rejection of a real phenomenological object-content, along with his acceptance of a robust

representational content that prevents his theory of perceptual experience from having the import it claims. If McDowell's concept of perceptual experience fails, then so does his attempt to preserve the empirical claim that experience of the world provides rational constraint on thought.

2.3. Evans and Peacocke: Nonconceptualist intentionalism

2.3.1. Evans on nonconceptual content

Evans (1982) is generally cited as the source of the notion of nonconceptual content in perceptual experience. He is also one of McDowell's (1996) targets and so it will be helpful to begin my analysis with his construal.

Evans (1982) has as its major theme a "comprehensive investigation of the phenomenon of reference".³³ A theory of reference asks how a linguistic expression denotes one or more objects in the world. Evans adheres, in spite of the backlash to Russell's Theory of Descriptions, to "Russell's Principle" which says, "a subject cannot make a judgment about something unless he knows which object his judgment is about."³⁴ This is a way of saying that in order for a judgment about an object to be justified the subject must have a "discriminating knowledge" that enables her to pick that object out, or refer to it. One of the conditions for discriminating an object, intuitively on Evan's account, is to perceive the object. It is within his defense of Russell's Principle that Evans elucidates an initial theory of nonconceptual content.³⁵ For Evans there is a level

³³ Evans (1982: 3).

³⁴ Evans (1982: 89).

³⁵ For a fuller account of Evan's theory of nonconceptual content please see chapters 5, 6.3 and 7.4 of (Evans 1982). I will be summarizing from these chapters in order to extract what is essential to his theory.

of information, or knowledge, that is nonconceptual content, that grounds conceptual content. His system resembles Russell's division between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. There are important differences but the purpose is similar. Evans, like Russell, attempts to ground conceptual knowledge to something more basic, nonconceptual knowledge. On this understanding it is easy to see why McDowell charges Evans with holding a version of the myth of the given. The given is the workings of the nonconceptual systems that provide a grounding or foundation for the conceptual system.³⁶

In Evans' sense there is a nonconceptual but contentful state of the subject that grounds the conceptual states of the subject. The informational (sensory) system takes in information about the environment that constrains the concepts applied when judging something to be true. He draws a distinction between two kinds of information: sensory or nonconceptual and testimonial or conceptual. The first involves perceptual experience and the second involves communication. He takes it as fundamental that perceiving is receiving and communicating is transmitting information.³⁷ What is crucial for our discussion is how to understand knowledge, because in informational theories information is substituted for knowledge, as both representational and nonconceptual.

The question that Evans purports to answer is how perception makes a thought possible. His answer is that perception is at a level of nonconceptual content that controls or constrains the conceptual content of our perceptual

³⁶ Evans (1982: 158, 160).

³⁷ Evans (1982: 122).

judgments. And, just for clarity, Evans is speaking of informational content, not object-content.

There are two criteria that make demonstrative reference possible for Evans: First, there must exist an informational link between the subject and the object. Second, the subject must have the ability to locate the object in space.³⁸ Let us explore both of these criteria for demonstrative reference.

Evans situates perception, communication, and memory within an informational system that “constitutes the substratum of our cognitive lives.”³⁹ When someone perceives, they are in an informational state with a nonconceptual content. The information contained in the state is from the object. This information is nonconceptual information “about the states and doings of the object over a period of time.”⁴⁰ But this information link is not enough to guarantee demonstrative identification.

Besides an information link between the subject and object, Evans posits the ability to locate the object in space in order to have identification conditions free of a conceptual element. Evans calls this *egocentric spatial thinking* or *here* thought. Examples of *here* thought are “It’s F *over there*”, “It’s F *up there to the left*”, “It’s F *a bit behind me*”.⁴¹ All of these thoughts are dependent on a cognitive map that locates a person egocentrically. Evans stresses that it is this cognitive map that makes egocentric thought about the spatiotemporal world objective.⁴²

³⁸ Evans (1982: 170).

³⁹ Evans (1982: 122).

⁴⁰ Evans (1982: 144).

⁴¹ Evans (1982: 153).

⁴² Evans (1982: 152).

Hearing something *from over there* is a case of the nonconceptual informational content that we rely on for conceptual thought. This is as far as Evans gets in defining a level of nonconceptual content.

In summary then, the combination of an informational link with *egocentric spatial thinking* is the nonconceptual content of experience that provides grounding for demonstrative reference. It is not clear whether Evans intends the information link to be personal or subpersonal.⁴³ But, it seems that it is best construed at a subpersonal level of cognitive activity. For this reason I will concentrate on understanding Evans' egocentric spatial thinking. Evans is clear why this content cannot be conceptual. It violates his Generality Constraint. The Generality Constraint says that for a content to be conceptual it must be repeatedly instantiable. Since perceptual states are contentful states that do not require one to be able to articulate the content or instantiate the content on another occasion, then they are thereby nonconceptual content.

The upshot, at this point, of Evans' account of the content of perceptual experience is that thought is grounded to a level of sensory information that is nonconceptual. Experience itself provides the perceiver with a level of content that constrains conceptual thought. Some parts of Evans' account may sound odd. His theory is rooted in information-processing theory. His use of representation is vague but accepted in that field. But I should note that it has a very different meaning from the conception of linguistic representation. The point

⁴³ The distinction between personal and subpersonal goes like this: A subpersonal account describes cognitive activity at a level unavailable to the subject. The personal level of description involves what is available to the subject in conscious experience.

on Evans' account is that the brain/mind in some way represents the information being provided by the senses and that this information then is used by our thought processes. His nonconceptual content is largely if not completely subpersonal and in that sense fails to address what McDowell finds so compelling. So far a theory of nonconceptual content cannot provide an account of content that would challenge McDowell's argument that perceptual representational content is conceptual.

2.3.2. Peacocke on nonconceptual content

Peacocke (1992) offers a very detailed defense of representative nonconceptual content. His theory begins with the idea that "perceptual experiences represent the world as being a certain way."⁴⁴ Since something that represents must have a content, Peacocke moves to describe what this content might consist of and how it is individuated. It should be noted that unlike Evans, Peacocke does take there to be conceptual content in experience. But, since the confrontation is with McDowell who is a full-blooded conceptualist, I will be primarily interested in describing and analyzing his notion of the nonconceptual content of perceptual experience. Peacocke unpacks nonconceptual representative content in two ways, scenarios and protopositions. I will take each in turn.

The first type of content is a positioned scenario. Peacocke takes scenario content to be the most basic kind of representational nonconceptual content. It is a spatial type that is individuated by encompassing the correctness

⁴⁴ Peacocke (1992: 61).

conditions for filling out (describing in analogue form maybe) the space around the perceiver. The spatial type can be filled out in two moves: First, one must fix an origin and axes. Second, one must specify a way of filling out the space around the origin. Specification would include identifying distance and direction from origin, surfaces, textures, hue, saturation, with degrees of solidity.⁴⁵

The spatial type, or scenario content, is different from a concept in that Peacocke takes concepts to be individuated by possession conditions and criteria for cognitive significance. Peacocke says this about scenarios,

With this apparatus, we can then say what is required for the correctness of a representational content of the sort with which I am concerned. Consider the volume of the real world around the perceiver at the time of the experience, with an origin and axes in the real world fixed in accordance with the labeling in the scenario. I call this a 'scene.' The content of the experience is correct if this scene falls under the way of locating surfaces and the rest that constitutes the scenario (Peacocke 1992: 64).

Scenario content then is necessary for establishing the most primitive concept by placing correctness conditions on the surrounding environment in view.

The second nonconceptual content that Peacocke stipulates to provide grounding for the conceptual content of perceptual experience is protopositional content. Protopositional content lies between positioned scenarios and conceptual content. "Protopositions contain objects, properties, and relations, rather than concepts thereof."⁴⁶ In this way this level of representational content can individuate conceptual content in a noncircular way.

⁴⁵ Peacocke (1992: 62-3).

⁴⁶ Peacocke (1992: 77).

Peacocke uses an example of the difference between a square and a regular diamond in giving an account of the two concepts. They are shaped just the same, but perceiving one is not like perceiving the other. The concepts are individuated by the content provided by protopositional content such as where certain symmetries lie and the bisecting of certain angles.

On another occasion, Peacocke (2001) refers to the *way* an object is perceived that individuates the concept used in demonstrative reference. Since *the way* could be instantiated in any number of particular objects it is general, but at the same time nonconceptual. In this sense there is a specific kind of nonconceptual content of experience that makes the judgment “That’s a square” different from the judgment “That’s a regular shaped diamond.”⁴⁷ And it is this nonconceptual content that rationalizes the judgment because it has correctness conditions. The correctness conditions are personally and subjectively available because the presence of certain objects, properties, or relations, given in certain *ways*, entitles the thinker to make a particular judgment.

The upshot of Peacocke’s argument is that he claims to have found noncircular concept-individuation by grounding concepts to a level of nonconceptual content. We judge the way we do in demonstrative reference because of the *way* the world seems, individuated by his version of intentional content, at the time of perceiving. Concept use is grounded in the accuracy of this nonconceptual content. And critically, this is only possible if this content has correctness conditions. As in McDowell’s view, it is the idea that experience has

⁴⁷ Peacocke (2001: 16).

correctness conditions, defined by the representational content, that gives experience its justifying role.

This has been a hurried and choppy survey of some recent attempts to ground conceptual content to the world. Both parties, conceptualist and nonconceptualist, are working within the broader framework of intentionalism. This is the theory that perception is a way of knowing, a fundamentally epistemological process and concept. This is shown most clearly in the notion that perception has a content that represents the world in a certain way. Peacocke argues that such nonconceptual representational content provides good reasons for forming a belief about an object. Below I will explore some of the commonalities and differences of Peacocke's and McDowell's views. Although they are divided over how to classify the informational content of perceptual experience, they are united in their commitment to experience being informationally contentful and having correctness conditions subjectively available to the agent perceiving. And again, this means that the concept of perceptual experience is limited to this representational content.

The arguments for or against various forms of content are many and varied. But, in the end both parties are searching for a way to articulate this central idea: First, in order for perceptual experience to play a role in thought and action it must have correctness conditions. Second, the correctness conditions of a particular perceptual experience are given by the content (intentional, representational) of that experience. As was mentioned previously, both parties want to preserve the idea of the *testimony of the senses*. But for this

metaphor to be translated into a literal theory of perceptual experience, one must be able to identify why it is the representational content that determines when one sees and not the other way around.

I take it intentionalism would fail if it were shown that nothing in experience could determine the accuracy of a representation of the way the world is. Another way of putting the same point would be that there is no identity between an experience and a single representational content. This would show that perceptual experience cannot limit or articulate representational content. I take it this would be a way of separating perceiving from representing and restoring a distinction between the two attitudes. This of course would not mean that perceiving is not often a part of knowing or representing but only that it fundamentally is not a way of knowing. It is fundamentally not a way of representing the world in any particular way. This is another way of saying that our senses are silent and that perceptual experience should be separated from judgment.

3. The Problem with Correctness Conditions and Perceptual Content

3.1. What should correctness conditions mean?

Above I offered some examples of the intentionalist theory of perceptual experience. Typical of this view is the idea that perceptual experience has a unique representational content that determines the correctness conditions for the perceptual experience. Often this is articulated by saying that perceptual experience represents the world to be a certain way. It is then said that it is this represented way that is the identification of a perceptual experience. The most important aspect of this content that represents the way the world appears to the perceiver is that it determines the correctness conditions for the perceptual experience. It is the truth of the representation that determines the veridicality of the experience.

Peacocke argues for the importance of correctness conditions in establishing whether a representational content of experience holds as a rational reason for belief. Peacocke says of the representational nonconceptual content of perceptual experience: "It is content which is evaluable as correct or as incorrect."⁴⁸ And again he says:

The ways in which the properties of things are perceived [...] contribute to the determination of which interval, which shape, which relation is perceived as instantiated. Thereby, they contribute to the correctness conditions for the perceptual experience (Peacocke 2001: 4).

⁴⁸ Peacocke (2001: 2).

And again,

If the thinker's perceptual systems are functioning properly, so that the nonconceptual representational content of his experience is correct, then when such experiences occur, the object thought about will really be square. In this description of why the linkages are rational linkages, I make essential use of the fact that the nonconceptual content employed in the possession condition has a correctness condition that concerns the world (Peacocke 1992: 80).

It might be difficult to understand what this representational content is supposed to be. Peacocke's attempt to identify such content is elaborate, prompting such names as scenario content and protopositional content. Given its importance for grounding our conceptual beliefs and thoughts it will be helpful to elucidate some examples of just what this representational content is. Dretske (1981) makes a distinction between analogue and digital informational content. Digital content is equated with conceptual content and has paradigm examples like propositions. Conceptual content is often thought of as digital, an exception being McDowell, because it represents its object in a less informationally rich sense. Analogue content on the other hand is informational content whose paradigm instances are pictures or maps. And we get a clearer meaning of what representational nonconceptual content is, as an example of analogue content, when Peacocke gives an example of the content that he is arguing for as not sensational (colored) but representational and nonconceptual none the less:

When you look at the new Art Museum in Balbao, or see a new abstract sculpture, or the face of a person, you see each of these objects as having a quite specific shape and size. Similarly, you see them as having quite specific shades of colors, surface textures and contours (Peacocke 2001: 2).

This is the fine grained, or we might say analogue, content of perceptual experience. Notice, it is not the object, property, or relation that is given but the way each of them is given that matters. We are talking about the specific way each of these are given, because it is this specific way that is characteristic of this exact situation and that is the nonconceptual representational content of this perceptual experience. But, if it is this rich analogue content of my perceptual experience that has correctness conditions, the next logical question that I want to ask is how to verify the correctness and who or what is doing the representing? In other words, if conceptual content is dependent for its justificatory capacity on the correctness of this nonconceptual representational content, then how does one verify whether the condition of correctness is met?

There are several different reasons one might give for taking the conditions for correctness to match the conditions in the world. You might ask a bystander to verify whether they are receiving the same information about the world as you are. If I want some verification that a certain perceptual content is correct I might ask my friend, "Do you see that so and so?" It will provide me some consolation if my friend replies, "Yeah, I see that so and so." But all we have decided so far is that we each have similar enough perceptual judgments. But what has been assumed about this situation is that there is a question about the way the world is. Aren't there many occasions where seeing does not involve knowledge claims? Should we assume that every case of seeing is a case of knowing something? I think this is presumptuous. Notice the difference between "I see the car" and "I see that the car is there." The first case is clearly not a case

of knowing anything. A knowledge claim is not being made. The second case involves a knowledge claim, but I think if we think clearly about the difference between the two, and the cases when either is appropriate, we will come to see that perceiving is not normally an epistemological concept. It is clearly not a way of representing the world to be a certain way.⁴⁹ I will discuss the times when it is used epistemologically below.

Another way to verify whether my perception is correct, on Peacocke's account, is to verify whether my visual system is functioning normally. The conclusion is commonsensically that since I am not normally given to illusions, if my system is functioning normally, under normal conditions, I am assured that the representational content is correct. But if this is what Peacocke means by representational content I cannot think that he means representation as a cognitive science term and not as a knowledge term. If we are to take it that judging that the world is a certain way is dependent, in cases of seeing, on the cognitive system functioning correctly, and that this is a significant form or representation, then I think we have been misled. No one would deny that judging how things are in the world, in cases of seeing the world, would be dependent on the proper functioning of one's perceptual system. But this does not get us very far in understanding how perception has a content that represents the world as being a certain way, a way that is judgeable. I think Peacocke waivers between an epistemological and a cognitively neutral conception of representation.

⁴⁹ For a rich analysis of the epistemological uses of the concept of perception see Collins (1967).

If the content is representational, then one would expect it to be something we could actually identify with some degree of accuracy on some perceptual occasions. In other words, if the representational content just is whatever I think when I see that such and such is the case, then it is a trivial affair. It is common sense to think about what we see and to take things to be the way we find them in the environment. But if the representational content is supposed to determine what I see and define a perceptual experience then we must have some way of identifying it or we will be incapable of determining when a perceptual experience is correct or incorrect. Peacocke has gone to elaborate lengths to describe some possible representational content. But so far I cannot see how this is anything more than the correct functioning of a perceiver's perceptual system. And while psychologists may choose any version of representation for their own purposes this is certainly not a version of representation that intentionalism claims to be governing our perceptual experience.

3.2. An argument against correctness conditions

Intentionalism usually formulates its claim this way: "the phenomenal character of a perceptual experience is entirely determined by the experience's propositional content—that is, by what it represents."⁵⁰ McDowell will say it this way:

That things are thus and so is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgment. It becomes the content of a judgment if the subject decides to take the experience at face value (McDowell 1996: 59).

⁵⁰ Byrne (2001: 199).

This is a strong claim. Again, the claim is that there is a representational content that is a perceptual experience, the correctness of which determines whether the perceiving is veridical or not. But so far I have seen no way of individuating this content except by accepting that taking the world to be such and such is a reliable guide to the representational content that determined the taking.

Travis (2004), following McDowell's usage, has said that to think that perceptual experience has a determinate representational content is to see it as having a *face value*. This face value is the representational content that may be either accepted or declined by the perceiver. It is another way of saying that our senses testify, that experience offers us a determinate way the world is, and when experience is correct we have knowledge of the world.

My argument against the identification of perceptual experience with its representational content goes like this:

- P1: Intentionalism depends on there being a unique representational content for a perceptual experience that determines the correctness conditions for the experience.
- P2: There is no one way of representing an experience that would result in its being correct as opposed to incorrect. An alternative way of formulating this is that there are many ways to represent a state of affairs in the world.
- P3: It follows that if there are many ways of representing the way the world is when the world is involved in an experience of itself in a perceiver, then the determination of the

correctness conditions for the representation to match the world must come from some other source.

C1: Following P1 and P2 intentionalism is false. Experience of the world does not represent one way the world is.

(P1) is a thesis about intentionalism. It is uncontroversially a fact about that theory. My argument depends on the strength of (P2).⁵¹

The way an experience represents the world to the perceiver is supposed to be found in the way the world *seems* or *appears* or *looks* to her. Travis offers two points about this supposed representational content:

First, we certainly do sometimes speak of things not being what they appear to be, or as, or what, they seem...where things may be or not as they appear, their appearing as they do is an utterly different and distinct phenomenon from anything being represented as so. Second, though we are often enough confronted with appearances, that is not yet to say that the appearances, on a given occasion, add up to such a thing as 'the way things appear to be' (Travis 2004: 60).

What does the intentionalist want from this representational content? I argued that their primary motivation was to dispel the conclusion from the argument from illusion. That conclusion said that what is primary in perception is that things seem a certain way to the perceiver. The sense-darwinist argued that this meant that there were intermediaries in perceptual experience, that perception was indirect at best. The intentionalist wants to preserve some version of direct perception and so changes the conception of perceptual experience to a representational content. This content is not an intermediary object between the

⁵¹ My argument is taken loosely from Travis (2004). While I cannot be sure that I follow everything in Travis' thesis and do not want to attribute to him views that are not his own, his articulation of the central problem of intentionalism is central to my understanding.

perceiver and the perceived world but a propositional content that represents the state of affairs that the experience is about. This is then what determines the correctness of the experience, namely whether the experience represents the way the world is correctly.

This is clearly seen by how intentionalists take *seemings* to work. The way things seem, how the world is represented, may or may not be the way the world actually is, but does determine the conditions whereby the experience may be correct if the state of affairs in the world is the way the experience represents them to be. I have belabored this point in an attempt to make clear the role that this content is meant to play. The question then becomes whether there is just one way for an experience of the world to represent the world to the perceiver? If there is not, if intentional content of some kind cannot fix uniquely the way the world is in some one perceptual experience then it is impossible for intentional content to play the role it does. Even if perceptual experience involves some level of representation, maybe better construed as indexing or recognitional, it will be better construed as relying on the phenomenological content and not determining it. It is also questionable whether it will be proper to talk about experience *representing* things in any way. We thus may see ourselves to being able to understand *seemings* as taking or perceptually judging the world to be a certain way without the need to postulate full-blown representation, something I believe experience proper is ill equipped to do.

Let us then take an example. I will choose simple examples in order to articulate the difference between representing and taking. I take *taking* to be

indexing or noting the way things are. Let's say I am looking at two friends interacting. I see that Joe has given something to Bill. The purported representational content of my experience, the way the world seems, is that Joe has given something to Bill. What, of what I saw, would determine whether this were true or not? There is nothing in the way the world appears that will assure me of whether Joe gave a gift, or whether Bill forced Joe to give, or whether Joe owed Bill the item. The determination of the correct representation depends not on me, or on the way the world appears but on some third item, namely some unifying situation that makes one out of many ways of representing that situation true. It is unclear how perceiving this scene could determine just one way of representing the scene. It is also unclear how my taking things to be the way I took them can be counted as a way of representing. That is not to say that I do not take things to be a certain way, but that the taking is not a full representing. Nothing like this happens in perceptual experience.

Let us try another example. "I see a green book." Have I represented anything to be a certain way? I have certainly associated a certain color with a certain object. But it does not follow that there is any one way things must be in the world for my taking the book to be green to be true or false. When I see that the book is green, I merely note it. Let me represent the seeing to someone else. I hold the book up to a friend and say, "Do you see that this book is green?" And he says, "No, that book is olive." Or, "No, that book is lime" or whatever other color one might represent to be green. On a certain shared understanding, or way of representing things, my representation might be true or false. But it does

not follow that my perceptual experience represents the way things should be in order for them to be that way. That is simply not the role that experience plays.

Two conclusions are important for this argument. I will state them negatively here and leave them to be stated positively in the theory I articulate from Peirce later. First, I have seen no way of understanding how experience can be a source of representing how things should be represented. While perception certainly involves being aware of the perceived object it does not follow that this awareness is a mode of representation. Representation always involves an object, a sign or some mode of representing, and an interpretation, or some might call it an understanding.⁵² If experience did represent the world correctly or incorrectly, that would mean that there was one right way of representing the world for each state of affairs which would eliminate what Peirce called the interpretant or interpretation. But the most common forms of perception involve no amount of interpretation. There is nothing that needs interpreting unless something is unclear or ambiguous. And if this were the case it would not follow that the experience would contain a content that could determine the interpretation. Second, as far as I can see, all attempts by intentionalists to formulate any representational content that might determine the way the experience represents the world are always abstracted from what I have called knowledge claims involving perception, or judgments which are still

⁵² This is almost exactly the way Charles Peirce articulates full representation in his writings. Peirce, by my lights, investigates the relationship between these three components of representation in far greater detail than any philosopher to date. And, while this thesis is not an investigation of semiotic theory I do owe this triadic theory of representation to Peirce at every turn. See "On a New List of Categories" for an early version of Peirce's view as well as "Sundry Logical Conceptions" and "New Elements" for a more fully developed theory of the nature and logic of representation.

different from what Peirce called *perceptual judgments*. Intentionalism only works if one assumes at the front end that perception automatically is a mode of representing the world to be a certain way. But if we inquire whether perception is always a mode of representing or whether a perceptual experience can ever be identified with just one way of representing the world we are at a loss on how to develop this. Intentionalism cannot meet these challenges. It takes knowledge claims, representings, as paradigms for perceptions. But it just isn't the case that perceptions are paradigmatic epistemological events.

By saying that perception is not primarily a mode of knowing I am saying that it lacks representational correctness conditions. This of course does not mean that illusions are not possible but only that it is not the representational content of experience that either determines the correctness of a perception or determines the role perception plays in connecting thought to the world. McDowell and Peacocke both want to enlist perception as a crucial link between thought and the world. On their construal perception has a representational content that, when correct, can also be the content of a belief or reason. For both this is a way of defending the correspondence theory that our experience plays not only a causal role but also and critically a justificatory role in experience. But I think this epistemological worry has caused these philosophers to misconstrue how to understand the concept of perception. Perception is not primarily a way of knowing, or a way of representing the world. When I perceive I am presented with a way things are, but this way is not representational. When

perception is a way of knowing there is an extra epistemological element involved. But this is separate from perception.

3.3. The alternative causal account

I think that the causal understanding is both intuitive and correct. So, my attempt will be to show that some general form of the causal account is necessary but not sufficient to generate a theory of perception. Unfortunately intentionalism cannot accommodate this causal account. Valberg (1992) calls the causal story “the problematic reasoning”. In its most general form the reasoning takes the form of a causal chain of events that lead from the contact of light on the retina, which excites optical nerves, and eventually dead ends in the brain. But this is not the causal account we are interested in. The causal account that matters here says that for a subject S to have an experience X it must have been caused by an object O. Negatively stated it means that S’s experience X is not possible without being caused by O. I don’t take this causal story to be problematic on its own. But, when matched with the traditional problem of illusion and/or hallucination (which we will discuss in more detail below) it generates a particular theory about how perception of the world is possible.

The theory is generated this way: First, the causal account is accepted. For S to have experience X, then O must have caused X. This is a condition for the possibility of perceptual experience. Second, one recognizes the reality of hallucination. Illusion will be discussed below, but the most difficult problem is

generated by hallucinations;⁵³ those logical philosophical possibilities philosophers think up to test their theories. If these are experiences of some kind, of S, and we may call them hallucinatory experiences, call them Y experiences, then they must have been caused. They also, as Y experiences of S, seem to meet the causal condition because they are indistinguishable from X. It follows that for S to experience Y, Y must have been caused by something. Third, add the indistinguishability criteria. The indistinguishability criteria says that whatever is seen in either veridical experiences X or hallucinatory experiences Y are indistinguishable from each other both in their phenomenal and informational content. An example from Shakespeare commonly makes the point. Whether Hamlet is viewing a real dagger or a hallucination of a real dagger is impossible for Hamlet to tell outside of reaching out and grasping for it, assuming his sense of touch is not delusive either. Fourth, this example generates the common cause thesis.⁵⁴ The common cause thesis says that since indistinguishable experiences X and Y of S are caused, it must be the same O that causes X and Y when those experiences are had.

This is a way of formulating the sense-data conclusion. Intentionalism rightly found problems with these supposed mental objects that exist whenever a phenomenal presence exists. But intentionalists did not reject the common cause thesis. They moved the common cause from an object content to a

⁵³ There is controversy amongst philosophers about whether there are indistinguishable veridical and hallucinatory experiences. Some philosophers prefer to test their theory of perception against this logical possibility, namely that two experiences might be indistinguishable and yet one be veridical while the other is hallucinatory.

⁵⁴ See Martin (2004) for further explanation of what he calls the common kind assumption.

representational content. This is why intentionalism about perceptual experience cannot be formulated as a relational view about experience.

A relational view understands experience as a two-place relation between a subject and an object. But if experience is equated with representational content, then it cannot be intrinsically a relation to objects but only to its intentional objects. In this sense the intentional theory fails as the sense-data theory did. By supporting the common cause thesis, it misses the essential point about experience that it is an interaction with the world, a double-sided consciousness as Peirce described it.

The point that matters is that the question of how experience of the world can play an explanatory role in knowledge about the world is answered by referring to a representation and not by the object that the representation represents. Even if the perceptual experience is intentional and therefore linked to an intentional object we lose some of the explanatory value of experience by losing the idea that experience is relational, not representational. If perceptual experience is representational, then the closest contact we have with the world is with intentional objects. But this does not give us the contact we know we have. When I see an object I take it that the object plays a crucial role in causing my experience of the object.

The problem is that on either the sense-data or intentionalist formulation perceptual experience is conceived of as less than interaction with the world. By appealing to mental objects or representational content even in “veridical perception” the objects are not primarily a part of the concept of perceptual

experience. The alternative formulation, and the only other one on offer, is disjunctivism.⁵⁵

Disjunctivism states that perceptual experiences are intrinsically different from hallucinations. The basic idea is to reject the common cause thesis. By doing this, the disjunctivist conceives of perceptual experience as a relation between a perceiver and an object that results in a perceptual experience. The disjunctivist will admit that hallucinatory experiences are potentially subjectively indistinguishable from perceptual experiences. What they deny is that this should be a reason to identify the two experiences as experiences of the same kind. Disjunctivism has this advantage over intentionalism and sense-data theories: Perceptual experience is a relation between a perceiver and the object perceived. It postulates no mental objects or representational content that an experience of the world in some way supervenes upon. Because I think the causal story is important I think it a good reason for perception to be viewed as a relation and not some sort of mental or intentional state common to both hallucination and perception. When I use “see” to describe an experience it is a success. When I hallucinate it is a failure to “see.” The two states have no content in common. Neither do they share a representational content.

Also, the causal story and the resulting disjunctivism should not be confused with the causal theory of perception articulated by Grice (1989). Or at

⁵⁵ Disjunctivism about perceptual experience (hereafter “disjunctivism”) has its roots in Hinton (1973). Snowdon (1979, 1990) defends a disjunctive theory of perception also. McDowell defends disjunctivism but within an intentionalist framework. This distinguishes a difference between disjunctivism about experience with object contents from McDowell’s disjunctivism about representational contents. The only type of disjunctivism that I think is a reasonable alternative to intentionalism and sense-data theories adherence to the common cause thesis is of a Hinton or Snowdon type.

least it should be noted that Grice's account is not sufficient to generate a complete theory of perception. The causal account is necessary but not sufficient for perception. Campbell has articulated a hypothesis of just how perceptual experience involves a causal account without succumbing to some version of the causal theory.⁵⁶ His main ambition is to preserve the explanatory role of experience which he argues cannot be done on any representationalist model, while incorporating the valuable work done in the descriptive sciences that show how important activity within the body (eyes, brain, nerves) is to perception. He says:

One analogy is that the Relational View thinks of perception as like viewing the world through a pane of glass. It would plainly be a mistake to hold a Representationalist View of panes of glass: to hold that the only way in which it can happen that you see a dagger through a pane of glass is by having a representation of a dagger appear on the glass itself (Campbell 2002: 118).

And further,

It is not that the brain is constructing a conscious inner representation whose intrinsic character is independent of the environment. It is, rather, that there is a kind of complex adjustment that the brain has to undergo, in each context, in order that you can be visually related to the things around you; (Campbell 2002: 119).

Why this diversion into a justification of a causal story along natural realist and disjunctivist lines? The traditional sense-data theory, including generally the views of Descartes, Locke and Hume, was the antithesis of this theory of perception. Problems with sense-data theories have led to, to some extent, the formulation of intentionalism, that the content of perceptual experience is

⁵⁶ Campbell (2002: chapters 6 and 7).

intentional and representational. My point has been to show that a theory of perception, one with a worldly-object content, need not involve either mental objects or representational content in order to provide for at least the presence of the world before the perceiver. I will argue through Peirce below that there often is a mental component to perception, but this does not involve a mental object or full-blown representational content. It is best construed as an indexing of the world closer to recognition or noting generated causally by attention to objects in the world. This is the opposite of the other theories that argue that something significantly mental produces a seeing.

Before analyzing the primary motivation for intentionalism, which I have taken to be the argument from illusion, I want to discuss McDowell's disjunctivism, which occupies a unique position between the common cause intentionalist and sense-darist and the relational view articulated on behalf of the natural realist.

3.4 Why disjunctivism cannot save intentionalism

How does McDowell fair, given his allegiance to intentionalism about perceptual experience minus the allegiance to the common cause thesis. On his version, one must appeal to the way a mature adult, well integrated into cultural and linguistic practices I suppose, views reasons in the world with their distinctively human sense.⁵⁷ McDowell states it this way:

The feature of language that really matters is rather this: that a natural language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository of tradition, a store of

⁵⁷ This distinctively human sense is conceived, by McDowell, as a "second nature" in McDowell (1996). See also McDowell (2000).

historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what (McDowell 1996: 126).

Does McDowell's position, locating representational content at the level of concepts and embracing disjunctive mental states, produce a more satisfactory concept of perceptual experience?

In McDowell's framework, conceptual capacities are drawn on passively in experience so that the world is experienced conceptually, period. But I have argued that seeing is not a mode of seeing *that p* or seeing *that such and such is so*, which is a way of representing things to be so, as McDowell needs in order for experience to play the role in stipulating how the world should be represented for experience to be veridical. McDowell is not arguing that we take the world to be *such and so* but that it is presented for taking *that way*. I do not see how disjunctivism about this intentional content can help overcome this criticism, but here is how McDowell articulates it:

But suppose we say—not at all unnaturally—that an appearance that such—and—such is the case can be *either* a mere appearance *or* the fact that such—and—such is the case making itself perceptually manifest to someone. As before, the object of experience in the deceptive cases is a mere appearance. But we are not to accept that in the non-deceptive cases too the object of experience is a mere appearance, and hence something that falls short of the fact itself (McDowell 1998a: 386-387).

It must be remembered that for McDowell talk of objects is talk of Fregean senses.⁵⁸ But one might ask what has been gained by shifting the burden of proof onto the grasping of disjunctively structured conceptual perceptual experiences?⁵⁹ I would say not much. In fact something has been lost. While

⁵⁸ See McDowell (1998).

⁵⁹ Campbell (2002) and Brewer (2006) have raised this criticism against McDowell.

disjunctivism about Fregean senses would be a better view than the common factor view if perceptual experience worked that way, perceptual experience doesn't. *Pace* McDowell, the senses are silent. And any content, even indexical, is a form of taking on the other side of sensing and does not govern sensing the way McDowell intends conceptual content to do.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to McDowell's view comes from the lack of continuity between experience of young children and animals, notably preconceptual and prelinguistic, and the perceptual experience of humans ushered into a linguistic community. The consequence of identifying experience with conceptual capacities is that the former group lacks experience. However we come to understand perceptual experience, it would seem a detriment and not a plus if one's theory prevented an understanding of experience that could be shared with pre-linguistic humans or other species.

The upshot of this discussion is not good for any version of representationalism about perceptual experience. In the intentionalist case the supposed representational content of perceptual experience is received on a common factor view. The common factor view stops short of making experience of the world objective, because experience, even when veridical, is representational and not relational. McDowell attempts to make perceptual experience objective by conceiving *seeing that p* disjunctively and not on a common factor view. But McDowell, although moving in the right direction toward disjunctivism, still leaves experience as representational and not relational. As I have argued, it is hard to see how experience might represent the

world so that some representation of it, and not a host of others, is the right way, and would lead to seeing.

While we are heading toward a new conception of perceptual experience, I think that the other intuition that has driven the representationalist model needs to be dealt with. This is the problem of motivating intentionalism by cases from illusion in perceptual experience.

3.5. Rooting out the illusion motivation for correctness conditions

I stated above that I thought there were two reasons philosophers had moved from discussion of perceptual experience as of objects to perceptual experience as a representational content. I have argued that one of these factors, the causal story, can only be preserved if perceptual experience is viewed disjunctively. There will be more on a positive theory about this below. The second factor was the problem of illusion. Let me give several examples of how the intentionalists intend their account of perceptual experience to deal with the traditional problem of illusion and how they characterize illusory perceptual states.

Armstrong (1968) says, "...an account of perception can be given in terms of acquiring of beliefs about the physical world. Many of the traditional problems of the philosophy of perception can be solved at this stage."⁶⁰ For Armstrong these beliefs are acquired by means of the senses. It follows that the acquiring of true beliefs about the environment is veridical perception and the acquiring of false beliefs through the senses is a case of perceptual illusion. "Perceptual

⁶⁰ Armstrong (1968: 208).

experience, as opposed to mere perception, is simply this flow [of information] in so far as we are conscious of it.... The content of our perceptions, which so many philosophers want to turn into a non-physical object, is simply the content of the beliefs involved.”⁶¹

Part 12 of Armstrong’s chapter on perception is crucial to his argument that his Belief Theory (a strong version of the intentionalist program) can fulfill the promissory note I originally quoted about solving the traditional problem of perception. He gives several examples of perceptual illusion including the stick in water looking bent, the visual size of the sun compared to its true size, and the dot on the horizon that someone might claim is their house seen from afar. He criticizes the traditional representative and phenomenalist theory focus on the objects of perception, and then he offers his own alternative to solve this problem of illusion.

But if we conceive of perception as nothing but the acquiring of true and false beliefs about the current state of the perceiver’s body and environment, or of mental events that resemble acquiring of such beliefs, an extraordinarily simple and natural dissolution of the problem is possible (Armstrong 1968: 242).

I will highlight his resolution to the stick partially submerged in water in order to later juxtapose my own alternative. Armstrong says “it is a fact of nature that the observer acquires a false belief that the stick is bent....”⁶² Armstrong takes it that he has brought satisfactory resolution by moving the content of perceptual experience from an object to beliefs, or some comparable mental state, acquired through the senses.

⁶¹ Armstrong (1968: 226).

⁶² Armstrong (1968: 242).

Anscombe (1981) makes a similar move in her important paper on the intentionality of sensation. She takes it that both naïve realists and sense-datists have missed the crucial point that perceptual experience is “marked by intentionality”. She offers a list of ten examples of common illusory experiences that are supposed to show the intentionality of perception including blurry vision, mirages, and ringing in the ears. But, later she offers a truer version of illusion in the sense that the object is actually there (in whatever sense an intentionalist means this):

I once opened my eyes and saw the black striking surface of a matchbox which was standing on one end; the other sides of the box were not visible. This was a few inches from my eye and I gazed at it in astonishment wondering what it could be. Asked to describe the impression as I remember it, I say: ‘Something black and rectangular, on end, some feet away, and some feet high.’ I took it for three or four feet distant, and it looked if anything, like a thick post, but I knew there could be no such thing in my bedroom (Anscombe 1981: 16).

She offers this resolution: “These were not judgments of distance based on identifications of things– the supposition of what thing it might be was based on an impression of size which went with a false impression of distance.”⁶³ Crucial to her account of perceptual experience and its intentionality is that the content that is true or false is not that of a judgment but an impression, specifically an impression of information about the environment.

Lastly, indulge me to review Searle’s (1995) account of the intentionality of perception and the impact on the issue of cases of perceptual illusion. Searle says,

⁶³ Anscombe (1981: 16).

The argument that visual experiences are intrinsically intentional, in sum, is that they have conditions of satisfaction which are determined by the content of the experience in exactly the same sense that other Intentional states have conditions of satisfaction which are determined by the content of the states (Searle 1995: 42).

Searle then goes on to enlist the help of illusions in understanding ways that the conditions for satisfaction are not fulfilled. He says, in these cases, “it is the visual experience and not the world which is at fault.”⁶⁴ In Searle’s sense our senses deceive us. He invokes several examples like the common Muller-Lyer illusion as well as one similar to Armstrong’s dot/house example where the moon is seen to be two different sizes from different places as it rises. In the moon case, the intentional contents are in conflict with our belief that the moon stays the same size, and yet the intentional contents are there none-the-less.

I think the survey of the above intentionalists’ theory of perception shows how the intentionalist invokes various cases of illusion to argue that perceptual experience has intentional content. But I want to show that this is not the only way of dealing with cases of illusion and in fact raises problems rather than resolve the issue satisfactorily. The problem with the intentionalist view is that it deals with illusion by making the most fundamental aspect of perceptual experience to be constituted representationally, whether conceptually or nonconceptually. The cases of illusion show in vivid form how the intentionalist robs experience of its fundamental power by assimilating representational thought and visual seeing. I think this is stimulated by the fundamental empiricist

⁶⁴ Searle (1995: 43).

claim that something like Russell's knowledge by acquaintance grounds inferential knowledge.

Here is how I summarize the views of the above intentionalist. First, it is asserted that illusion poses problems for natural realists⁶⁵ and sense-datumists alike. The reason is that both of these views are object-content views and cases of illusion show that it cannot be ordinary objects that are the content of visual experience. Second, the fundamental error, according to the intentionalist, is in not appreciating the basic fact that visual experience is fundamentally characterized by its intentional content usually construed as the way the world seems to the perceiver or the representing the world to be a certain way. Third, by acknowledging that visual experience is characterized by its intentional content we are supposed to understand how visual experiences can result in cases of illusion. When experience represents the world the wrong way an illusion results. When experience represents the world correctly the object is seen and the seeing is veridical.

This characterization is realized by the fundamental supposition that our senses communicate information or represent the world in a certain way, veridical when true, illusory when false. These are other ways of saying that perceptual experiences have a face value. In spite of the supposed gain in explaining cases of illusion what has the intentionalist theory lost, if anything? I think that the intentionalist theory has lost a crucially important distinction between experience, as a presentation of the phenomenal world, and thought,

⁶⁵ The term commonly used by Anscombe, Armstrong, and Searle for natural realist is naïve realist.

which is about what is presented and has correctness conditions. Another way of describing what has been lost is a distinction between the interactive double-consciousness of experience, and the indexing that takes place characteristically toward judging or characterizing the objects in view. Experience is characterized primarily in this distinction as undergoing or being imposed upon, whereas representation is something that a subject does in response to experience on the right occasion for it. In other words, it is precisely the supposition of experience as informationally rich that has robbed experience of its fundamental significance.

The intentionalist says that experience has correctness conditions that it “speaks” or “communicates” to the subject. Anscombe spoke this way when she described being impressed with false information about size and distance. Searle, too, describes the illusory experience as, in a sense, saying how the experience is the way that it is. We can see this same way of speaking about experience in McDowell and Peacocke’s more contemporary debate over the kind of representative content that perceptual experience is. McDowell says, “In the Muller-Lyer illusion, one’s experience represents the two lines as being unequally long, but someone in the know will refrain from judging that that is how things are.”⁶⁶ And we have already discussed at length the way that Peacocke uses “correctness conditions” to describe how perceptual experience represents the world in a certain way.

⁶⁶ McDowell (1996: 11).

While the case of illusion does pose a challenge to any theory of perception, I think it can be dealt with without imposing correctness conditions on perceptual experience viewed as representational content. I have argued that there is no way of understanding perceptual experience to be representational content, namely because the ways the world can be represented cannot be determined by looking alone. Another reason for finding the intentionalist motivation hopeless will be argued below.

3.6. An alternative account of illusion

Brewer (forthcoming)⁶⁷ has described how it is possible to understand the Muller-Lyer illusion without appealing to the representational content of experience. He proposes an object view holding that perceptual experience “involves a subjective experiential presentation of its object in a way in which thought does not.” Under this view the Muller-Lyer illusion is handled this way. The actual presentation of the lines is of two lines that are the same size. The context in which the lines are seen, contained by hash marks, causes the subject to take or judge the experience to be characteristic of an experience of lines of different length.⁶⁸ In this explanation of the illusion there are two factors: First there is the experience of two lines of equal length with two hash marks on the sides. Second, there is the classifying or judging by the subject of how things are

⁶⁷ “How to Account for Illusion” and “Realism and the Nature of Perceptual Experience” forthcoming. Both can be found at this web address as of 08/06:
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/philosophy/staff/brewer/>.

⁶⁸ For the full treatment of the argument about the Muller-Lyer illusion see Brewer “How to Account for Illusion”. It should be noted that I am indebted to Brewer’s development of the Object View for my later treatment of other illusory cases. For other treatment of the Object View see Brewer “Perception and Content”, Realism and the Nature of Perceptual Experience” as well as Brewer’s forthcoming book length treatment of the Object View in the tentatively titled *Perception and Its Objects*.

in the experience. What has been separated is what was conflated in the intentionalist account, namely being confronted with worldly objects such as lines on a paper, and the judging of those lines to be a certain way.

The advantage of such a view is that it preserves a characteristic of perceptual experience not preserved in the intentionalist explanation. On this view, as Travis (2004) says, taking his cue from Austin (1962), the senses are dumb. They merely provide a view to the perceiver who then takes it in. On this view there is no representational content determining, on the front end, how the world is. This determination is made by the perceiver; it is a case of taking, not of full-blooded representing. I want to apply this explanation to one other example of illusion championed by Anscombe, Armstrong and Searle.

This is the example of seeing an object from different perspectives, usually characterized by difference in position or distance. Armstrong speaks of seeing a house from a distance and acquiring the false belief that one is seeing a white dot. But, he reasons, if one is familiar with the *deception* (emphasis mine) and really knows that it is the house one is seeing, then one is able to understand the intentional content of seeing “that white dot” as speaking loosely.⁶⁹ In the same way, Searle discusses seeing the moon on the horizon and directly overhead and highlights that the intentional content of either perceptual experience is that the moon changes sizes. Here is how he describes it:

The visual experiences do indeed have as part of their respective intentional contents that the moon is smaller overhead than it is on the horizon, and the argument for this is that if we imagine that the

⁶⁹ Armstrong (1968: 242-43).

visual experiences remained as they are now, but that the beliefs were absent, that we simply had no relevant beliefs, then we really would be inclined to believe that the moon had changed in size (Searle 1983: 56).

These cases may be representative of any case where the senses function normally under normal conditions and yet the intentionalist reasons that we receive misleading information from our senses, namely incorrect representational content, and that this is the explanation of why either of two things happen: Either we are misled by our senses or the illusion persists in spite of our beliefs differing from this supposed representational content. Besides the fact that this view robs experience of its characteristic subjective presentative character, another problem arises.

The problem is that this type of view takes error to be located at the sensory level. In other words, the locus of mistake is proposed to be at a level of activity in the human animal beyond self-control. It implies that somehow the senses have presented the world potentially less than accurate. In fact, the view seems to suggest that, even before judgment or thought, error is infused at the experiential level. Peacocke and McDowell need perceptual experience to have correctness conditions for it to play a role in justifying beliefs about the world. But given that under such normal conditions and normal sensory functioning the human animal is potentially sensorily deceived, it seems hard to see how judgment could ever get a foothold. And, when pressed to give an example of when a perceptual experience would actually be accurate in any of these cases, the intentionalist is hard pressed to come up with an answer. At what point does one perceive a house or the moon or any other object veridically?

I want to linger on this point for a moment. Take Searle's example. Just because our senses provide us with phenomenally changing, perspective-sensitive views of the world, does this mean there is a correct and incorrect way to see the moon? From what perspective would a perception be correct? Do we need to specify differing representational contents to account for the difference between viewing a house from up close and from far away or to explain viewing the moon horizontally and then vertically? I think not. As I have argued previously, when our senses are working normally under normal conditions they provide the perceiver with an unmediated view of the world. No representational content need be employed in order to explain how the sensory system places the world in view.

On the other hand, if the senses are fundamentally dumb, and by that I mean silent as opposed to stupid, and all intentional content is primarily a function of taking or judging the world to be such and such, then error is put back in its proper place. Under normal conditions for viewing the world such as those mentioned in the above examples we are not at risk for confusing errors of taking the world to be a certain way with sensory experience. Sensory experience is fundamentally dumb or silent. It does not inform representationally but presents the world to the viewer. As Peirce describes the situation with a touch of metaphor:

The chair I appear to see makes no professions of any kind, essentially embodies no intentions of any kind, does not stand for anything. It obtrudes itself upon my gaze; but not as a deputy for anything else, not "as" anything. It simply knocks at the portal of my soul and stands there in the doorway. It is very insistent, for all its silence (*CP* 7.619-620).

3.7. Summary: Why we don't need representational intentionalism to perceive

I have argued that intentionalism about the content of perceptual experience is found wanting on two accounts. Intentionalism was motivated by the failure of sense-data theories about mental object-contents. The response involved shifting the content of perceptual experience to representational content of a conceptual or nonconceptual sort. This was thought to be a better account because it seemed more congenial to limit our perceptual experience, as it relates to knowledge about the world, to its informational content. Implicit in this formulation though is the idea that experience represents the world to be a certain way. Despite the different theories offered for the status of intentional content in perceptual experience, I argued that intentionalism falls short in two critical areas.

The first argument showed that intentionalism cannot accommodate the explanatory role that perceptual experience is commonly taken to play, namely that of being experience with the world. By failing to find a satisfactory articulation for the representational content of experience I opted for scrapping the idea that experience represents the world in a way that determines the correctness of that experience. This was not meant to eliminate such mental events as taking the world to be a certain way, as when I see *that such and such is the case*, but merely to understand this *taking* to be dependent on more than the world for correctness. Experience presents the perceiver with an opportunity for taking, but does not represent the world to be a certain way. Positively

stated, as far as representational content is concerned, the senses are silent. I then argued, second, that one of the major contributing motivations for intentionalism, namely the argument from illusion, can be dealt with in a satisfactory way, without theorizing about the intentionality of perceptual experience. I argued that cases of illusion can be accounted for by how we judge the world to be, which shifts the locus of error on to perceptual judgment and not experience proper.

I argued that another account of perceptual experience is needed by removing the motivation for representation in perceptual experience and showing how intentionalism failed to meet the desired explanatory role commonly thought to accompany experience. The account I now offer hopefully will meet these two challenges in a sufficiently satisfactory way. The main error, then, of intentionalism is in positing intentional content at the level of experience. I hope to show that Peirce's two-level account of perception will put the roles of experience and correctness conditions into their proper place again.

4. Resolving a Difficulty in Charles Peirce's Theory of Perception

4.1. A short introduction to Peirce's theory of perception

I want now to turn to the theory of perception espoused by Charles Peirce. I will call Peirce's theory a "Two-Level View". I think that only on such a view can the necessary distinctions be maintained between experiencing and having correctness conditions or intentionality. At the end I will suggest a way for dealing with the justificatory issue that is so compellingly raised by McDowell's account of conceptualism about perceptual experience. But this will have to remain a suggestion, because before that suggestion can be made, in spite of McDowell's arguing for the position from a transcendental ameliorative perspective, I must account for these other characteristics of perceptual experience that McDowell's account leaves out. It is this aspect that Peirce's theory so well brings in to view. The following will develop first by exploring Peirce's own theory and making clear his distinctions. Then I will apply these distinctions to the contemporary Intentionalist position, showing the contrast and also how Peirce's theory deals more satisfactorily with the issues intentionalism seeks to resolve, namely representational content and illusion.

Peirce, as early as 1864, wrote about one of the central issues in the philosophy of perception. The issue is whether perception is immediate or inferential.⁷⁰ Shortly thereafter Peirce delivered his "On a New List of Categories" where he took for granted the Kantian theory of conceptions playing

⁷⁰ *W1* (1982: 152). This essay is known as "On the Doctrine of Immediate Perception".

the role of “reducing the manifold of sensuous impressions to unity”.⁷¹ I have noted these instances in order to show that perception and experience were issues central to Peirce from the earliest years of his philosophical writing. But there is reason to leave these early writings and focus on Peirce’s Arisbe Period.⁷² I focus on this period because it is during this time that Peirce’s philosophy took on its mature form. His development of Critical Commonsensism is crucial for his mature theory of perception.⁷³ In 1903 Peirce gave his Harvard Lectures where perception featured largely in his proof of pragmatism.⁷⁴ Peirce also wrote “Telepathy” which involved his most sustained and original analysis of perception.⁷⁵ For this reason my analysis will be centered on the year 1903 and these two important texts.⁷⁶

Peirce’s theory of perception is both original, straightforward, and resembles theories put forward by contemporary philosophers dissatisfied with the contemporary intentional account of perceptual experience. It has generated a handful of articles among Peirceans and has been represented prominently in

⁷¹ W2 (1984: 49).

⁷² Fisch (1986). This period encompasses the years after Peirce moved to Arisbe, 1887-1914. Fisch notes that this period is both the longest and most productive of Peirce’s life.

⁷³ I take my cue here from Haack (1994: 10). She makes the conjecture that Kant’s influence was lessened by the increased influence of Thomas Reid in Peirce’s later years. She also shows how Peirce synthesized the elements of Kantian critical philosophy and Reid’s common-sensism in the immediate (percept) and interpretive (perceptual judgment) elements of his philosophy of perception.

⁷⁴ I was directed to this proof largely through the excellent “Introduction” from *The Essential Peirce: Selected Writings, Volume 2* written by Houser (1998: xxxiv-xxxv).

⁷⁵ CP (7.597-688).

⁷⁶ I have selected other texts from 1901, 1902, 1903, and 1906.

several chapters of book length analyses of Peirce's philosophy.⁷⁷ But it has gone largely unnoticed by the broader philosophical community concerned with these issues, in spite of its close affinity with some contemporary views.

There are currently several different interpretations of Peirce's theory of perception. Questions often arise as to apparent or real discrepancies in definitions of the percept and perceptual judgment, which are two of the central terms for Peirce's theory. Different and necessarily competing explanations have been offered to resolve these issues. In other research I am working out how to understand the error of the competing accounts that have been offered for Peirce's theory. Here I will merely mention what I take to be the strength of my understanding of Peirce's account compared with these others without spending much time on the competing accounts. My main aim is to show that Peirce's theory offers resolution to the problems that have been unsatisfactorily dealt with by the intentionalist theories discussed above. Peirce's theory also preserves what was so plausible about prior representationalist and sense-data views, namely that the content of perception is the objects viewed.

Peirce's various definitions of the percept have probably generated the most confusion in the literature, so quickly I want to establish why I take Peirce to be both clear and consistent.

⁷⁷ Articles on Peirce's theory of perception include but are not limited to Bernstein (1964), Rosenthal (1969, 1987, 2004), Hausman (1990), Almeder (1970), Haack (1994) and Ransdell (1979, 1997). Chapters on Peirce's theory of perception include but are not limited to "Perception and the Outward Clash" in Hookway (1985), "Truth and Reference" in Hookway (2000), and "The Epistemic Role of Perception" in Delaney (1993). Certainly many others have discussed Peirce's theory of perception, but the above have been helpful and central texts in my study and I am indebted to each of the authors for their insights.

4.2. An important distinction in Peirce's definition of the percept

In this section I will first analyze Bernstein (1969), Hausman (1990), and Rosenthal (1969, 2004). Each of these authors finds Peirce's terminology and various definitions at least to be problematic, to a lesser or greater degree, and, at most, to be contradictory.⁷⁸ Although the general direction and conclusions of these essays on Peirce's theory of perception has been profitable, suggesting that the discrepancies and their resolution have not led to complete misinterpretation, they have left Peirce's theory in need of some resolution as each of their interpretations excludes the others. I will offer yet another theory for Peirce's different definitions of the components of perception, one that will agree with the general characteristics of the work already accomplished by these authors, but it will be substantially different in the resolution of the problematic area, and I hope to show Peirce to be more consistent and clear than has been previously stated in other works focusing on this issue.

⁷⁸ Note these statements by these authors. Bernstein (1964: 174-175) says, "But if we collected all of Peirce's statements concerning percepts, we would find not only conflicting approaches but explicit contradictions." And later, "I suggest that the key for clearing up these ambiguities and apparent contradictions..." Also, Rosenthal (2004: 193) says, "what he says about perception is both incomplete and inconsistent," and in (2004: 194) she says "But Peirce characterizes both the percept and the perceptual judgment in quite different, often contradictory ways." I do not cite these texts as indictments but only to show how Peirce scholars have wrestled with Peirce's theory. Each author listed attempts to resolve the discrepancies and apparent contradictions. What is interesting is that Hookway (1985) and Haack (1994) who I take to have worked out Peirce's theory in a more satisfactory way do not mention the discrepancies in their work. This suggests to me that so far the issue of Peirce's different definitions has either been to some extent evaded or inadequately resolved. Although I take the issue to be largely resolved in Haack and Hookway, even if unstated, I do not find the issue completely put to rest.

4.2.1. Bernstein conflates percept and percipuum⁷⁹

Bernstein (1964) was one of the first to recognize that some account was needed for differing definitions in Peirce's theory of perception. His article was also important because it served as a reference for future scholarship on the topic. In section four Bernstein notes two different types of definitions of the percept. In one list he offers definitions that express a percept's Secondness. These definitions show the percept to be anti-general, brutally forced, and singular.⁸⁰ The second list defines the percept as a product of mental processes, of the nature of a sign, a mental construction, and the result of cognitive elaboration.⁸¹ The conclusion is inferred that the first list defines the percept as solely of the nature of Secondness while the second list contradicts this claim by defining the percept in terms of Thirdness. Bernstein's resolution of this apparent contradiction is to equate the second list of definitions with Peirce's later term percipuum. He says, "And when Peirce speaks of the percept as a sign which is not precise, as he does in the second series of quotations, it is the percept as interpreted (the percipuum) that he is speaking about."⁸²

First let me state where I agree with Bernstein. The percipuum is minimally of the nature of Thirdness, and it is the percept immediately interpreted in a perceptual judgment.⁸³ Also, Bernstein has correctly identified an important

⁷⁹ As far as I can tell, and according to Peirce himself, the term percipuum was invented by Peirce and ended with him except in research on his theory of perception. It may be equated with what he called in 1901 a perceptual fact. A perceptual fact or percipuum is the uniting of a percept (object viewed) and a judgment (classification or qualification of the object). I think it is safe to substitute perceptual fact for percipuum but will continue to use percipuum where Peirce does.

⁸⁰ Bernstein (1964: 174) specifically references *CP* 1.253, 2.146, 2.603, and 7.630.

⁸¹ Bernstein (1964: 174) specifically references *CP* 7.624, 4.542, 2.141, and 5.416.

⁸² Bernstein (1964: 176).

⁸³ *CP* (7.643).

distinction in Peirce's definition of the percept. But, more significantly I disagree that the percipuum can be used to reconcile the two lists Bernstein has juxtaposed. Here are my contentions: First, if the percipuum completely replaced the use of percept in the second list, then it would be logical to infer that it was a substitute. But in fact, Peirce refers to the percept in list two prior to and after his development of the percipuum in 1903. This is clear even from Bernstein's list. The percipuum is introduced in 1903, and Bernstein offers examples in list two from 1902 and 1905. The conclusion is that Peirce wavered or was inconsistent, instead of showing a consistent development. If this were the only option then the inference would seem more plausible, but if a better account can be found that retains both the diverging uses as well as preserving the consistency of Peirce's mature thought then it should be preferred. Second, Peirce does not, even when referring to the percept as mental, explicitly say that the percept is general or the nature of a Third. Peirce does not mean to suggest the category of Thirdness by these uses. Instead he means to speak of the percept understood psychologically within the empiricist tradition and as analyzed by the science of psychology. The exception will be when Peirce makes a semiotic analysis of a percept. In this case the percept will be a sign, but not under the psychological distinction, and not when experienced phenomenologically in perception.

My claim is that the two lists do represent a distinction in Peirce's definition of the percept, but not the one Bernstein identifies. Bernstein thinks that Peirce has identified the percept both with his categories of Firstness and Secondness in the first list and Thirdness in the second list. He also identifies

the trouble that this would cause for Peirce's system by saying, "A great deal hinges on the answer. If a percept is a sign (Third), then it might appear that Peirce, despite his protestations, is in agreement with the idealists who claim that there is *nothing but* Thirds."⁸⁴ Since the percipuum does have characteristics of thought and Thirdness, Bernstein tries to resolve the issue by the substitution of the term percipuum for the latter list. But Peirce's distinction actually involves the definition of the percept in his own system of categories, represented by the first list where the percept is of the nature of Secondness, with the percept as described by the science of psychology. Not only does this solution make more sense of some other things Peirce says of the percept, but also it makes sense of what Peirce said about the science of psychology.

4.2.2. Rosenthal multiplies Peirce's account

Rosenthal (1969) and (2004) are in many ways similar papers. They not only refer to Bernstein's work on the percept, but they suggest that even perceptual judgment and percipuum have different meanings. Since the different definitions of the percept have been mentioned above I will focus on the apparent discrepancies of perceptual judgment in Rosenthal's work. Rosenthal contends, "And conflicting claims abound in Peirce's depiction of perceptual judgments."⁸⁵ She divides definitions of perceptual judgment between those that state it to be infallible and those that state it to be fallible. She also references a parallel distinction with reference to perceptual judgment expressing either reality or

⁸⁴ Bernstein (1964: 175).

⁸⁵ Rosenthal (2004: 194-195).

appearance.⁸⁶ Rosenthal's solution to the distinction between definitions of percept and perceptual judgment is to also understand the percipuum as similarly distinguished in two different definitions. Therefore, even though Peirce only uses three names he has in mind six distinct ideas by Rosenthal's interpretation. She says, "...it can be seen that Peirce uses both 'percept' and 'perceptual judgment' in a wide and narrow sense, corresponding to the two senses of the 'percipuum'...."⁸⁷

Rosenthal offers an interpretation of Peirce's theory of perception that involves two levels of interpretation. The first level of interpretation gives rise to the second level. The first "narrow" level is characterized as "an analytic element of the perceptual experience" while the second or "wide" level is that which actually is experienced in perception.⁸⁸ Finally, Rosenthal unites the two levels into a single process by asserting that the narrow level of interpretation gives rise to the higher level.

I take issue with Rosenthal's resolution of conflicting definitions of Peirce's terms in his theory of perception for two reasons: First, she constructs in some ways a very new account of Peirce's theory of perception. I do not consider this immediately wrong except that I believe there is a simpler resolution. I hesitate to accept that Peirce, who took great care in his terminology, missed the levels of interpretation and need for a second and independent double of each one of his perceptual terms. Second, I agree that there are different uses of percept. But

⁸⁶ Rosenthal (2004: 195) references infallibility in *CP* 5.55, fallibility in *CP* 5.44, appearance in *CP* 7.626, and reality in *CP* 7.636n.

⁸⁷ Rosenthal (2004: 195).

⁸⁸ Rosenthal (1969: 304).

Rosenthal constructs a theory of perception uniting these uses under one process whereas it will be seen that Peirce considered them largely as independent uses, one phenomenologically correct and the other psychologically tentative. Third, besides the multiplying of terms and stretching of the theory to include two levels of interpretation I consider the charge of incompleteness, inconsistency, and paradox to need more satisfactory resolution, one I hope to give by clear statements in Peirce's work.

4.2.3. Hausman and the second percept

Hausman (1990) offers an alternative to Bernstein's resolution of the conflicting definitions of the percept. Hausman does not equate Bernstein's second list of definitions of the percept with Peirce's introduction of the percipuum, but holds that "percept(1)" and "percept(2)" are both distinct from the percipuum.⁸⁹ He offers this explanation:

What I think Peirce's statements suggest is that there are percepts that are the consequence of the percipuum's function in mediating percept(1) and judgment or interpretation. Percept(2) is a consequence in being the object to which the judgment as a sign stands for an interpretant (Hausman 1990: 278).

Hausman continues in his elaboration by placing percept(1) at the beginning and percept(2) at the end of the cognitive process of perception. So, percept(1) is seen as precognitive whereas percept(2) is taken to be what we experience and "see" after interpretation has taken place. Since the percipuum takes a mediating role between the percept and perceptual judgment Hausman contends

⁸⁹ Hausman (1990: 278).

that the percipuum should be seen as the immediate object, percept(2) as the immediate interpretant, while percept(1) takes on the role of dynamic object.⁹⁰

My criticism of Hausman's interpretation of the juxtaposed accounts of the percept is similar to those offered previously. First, if a simpler account is available that accords directly with Peirce's definitions of the percept as defined both ways, then it should take precedence. Second, Hausman multiplies entities by positing two distinct percepts involved in perception where Peirce has offered only one term, indicating one object, defined in two ways.

4.3. Summary of the problem and a solution

I will summarize these issues in this way. In every interpretation of Peirce's theory of perception analyzed above Peirce's different definitions of the percept have led to either replacements of one definition of the percept with percipuum or multiplication of percepts and processes of perception. Peirce explicitly offers neither of these options. Instead what Peirce offers is a single account of perception with one percept defined in two different ways. The resolution of these discrepancies will lead to a more coherent and clear picture of Peirce's account of perception. In order to resolve this confusion I will show that Peirce only posits one percept and defines it differently in different contexts. And, most importantly, when he is speaking of his theory of perception one definition is given clear precedence over the others. In other words, only one list will suit his theory of perception while the other is left to the science of psychology to wrestle with. The answer to the percept confusion lies in a distinction that Peirce makes consistently throughout his analysis. I will show this

⁹⁰ Hausman (1990: 281-285).

distinction in several ways. Clearly defining what Peirce intended as his theory of perception is important in regards to Peirce studies. It is also the groundwork for assessing its value and relevance. The question will still remain as to whether Peirce was right or how his theory of perception may have advantage over contemporary forms of intentionalism or sense-data theories. In order to assess his theory I will show how Peirce's theory of perception deals with the two factors that intentionalism failed to make sense of; namely the need for content and cases from illusion. On top of that, the common-sense aspect of Peirce's theory retains more of our everyday intuition about what it means to perceive.

The essence of the distinction I am making is between two different accounts of perception. The first account is Peirce's account of the percept, while the second account is Peirce's acknowledgement of the received psychology of his day coming down from the British empiricists. Above, I have described this theory as the representationalist theory of perceptual experience that later was named the sense-data theory. It is the theory that perception is indirect by perceiving intermediary objects that stand for the real objects in the world. I have also discussed some of the reasons for rejecting the sense-data theory of perceptual experience. While Peirce does not explicitly reject the sense-data theory by any argument he does explicitly state his unwillingness to understand perceptual experience in the sense-data fashion. What I think is crucial is that he does not allow the psychological theory to change what he takes to be the phenomenological facts of perceptual experience.

In their account of Peirce's theory of perception some philosophers have noted Peirce's distinction between the normative and descriptive account of perception. Rosenthal says that Peirce held a "radical rejection of reductionist theories of perception."⁹¹ Hookway says that Peirce's theory of perception illuminates the "phenomenology of visual experience."⁹² Haack hints at the distinction I am leading up to in this statement, " 'The first impressions of sense' as Peirce uses the phrase, refers not to percepts, but to neurological goings-on known to us only by way of sophisticated psychological theorizing."⁹³ And Delaney (1993) begins his analysis of the epistemic role of perception with an account of the "phenomenological features of perceptual experience." This emphasis on the distinction between a phenomenology of perception and a scientific (psychological) distinction are mentioned mostly in passing in the secondary literature, and yet they were a recurrent theme in Peirce's writings on perception. Below is a list of quotes from Peirce's writings. Each one, I hope, will help to show that Peirce made an important distinction between his theory of perception and a psychological theory that if overlooked will make it difficult to resolve the apparent contradictions I have noted.

Now, this home is the parish of percepts. It is not inside our skulls, either, but out in the open. It is the external world that we directly perceive... Our logically initial data are percepts. Those percepts are undoubtedly purely psychical, altogether of the nature of thought... But all that we find out afterwards (*CP* 8.144).

⁹¹ Rosenthal (1987: 33).

⁹² Hookway (2000: 131).

⁹³ Haack (1994: 14).

Here Peirce notes both that we directly perceive the external world and that we find out afterwards that it was all of the nature of thought. He is referring to what the science of psychology infers about the percept.

You may adopt any theory that seems to you acceptable as to the psychological operations by which perceptual judgments are formed. For our present purposes it makes no difference what that theory is (*CP* 5.54).

Here Peirce distinguishes the logical analysis from the theory of the psychological operations that might bring about the judgment. For his purposes the psychological aspect is not important.

In saying that perceptual judgments involve general elements I certainly never intended to be understood as enunciating any proposition in psychology. For my principles absolutely debar me from making the least use of psychology in logic. I am confined entirely to the unquestionable facts of everyday experience, together with what can be deduced from them (*CP* 5.157).

Here Peirce distinguishes between what the everyday facts of experience are and what psychology might infer. In his theory of perception he is clear that the psychological theory is not important.

Let us say that, as I sit here writing, I see on the other side of my table, a yellow chair with a green cushion. That will be what psychologists term a "percept" (*res percepta*). They also frequently call it an "image." With this term I shall pick no quarrel. Only one must be on one's guard against a false impression that it might insinuate. Namely, an "image" usually means something intended to represent,—virtually professing to represent,—something else, real or ideal. So understood, the word "image" would be a misnomer for a percept. The chair I appear to see makes no professions of any kind, essentially embodies no intentions of any kind, does not stand for anything. It obtrudes itself upon my gaze; but not as a deputy for anything else, not "as" anything. It simply knocks at the portal of my soul and stands there in the doorway (*CP* 7.619).

Here Peirce makes clear he does not accept any kind of sense-data or representationalist theory. Also important is the instance where Peirce charges Pearson with confounding psychology and logic in. He says, "Few things are more completely hidden from my observation than those hypothetical elements of thought which the psychologist finds reason to pronounce 'immediate,' in this sense."⁹⁴ Lastly I offer a quote where Peirce speaks directly of the psychologist's account:

Since 1709, they [the psychologists] have been in possession of sufficient proof (as most of them agree,) that, notwithstanding its apparent primitiveness, every percept is the product of mental processes, or at all events of processes for all intents and purposes mental, except that we are not directly aware of them; (*CP* 7.624).

And then there are Bernstein's lists which you will remember separated the percept into definitions of singularity, anti-generality, and Secondness on one side and the product of mental process, nature of a cognition, a mental construction and the result of cognitive elaboration on the other. Without understanding the distinction Peirce is making about psychological accounts of perception as opposed to his theory of perception his theory of perception would seem a very inconsistent and troublesome mixture of competing statements.

The important question is how to make sense of Peirce's seemingly disparate definitions of the percept as either the object in the world or as an idea or mental entity. I think that the different definitions can be labeled under the heading of either Peirce's theory of perception proper or the seventeenth century psychological theory, which later became known as the representationalist theory

⁹⁴ *CP* (8.144).

of perception. What is interesting to me is that Peirce resists assigning the status of the percept to a mental object. At the same time he acknowledges repeatedly that this is the standard psychological treatment of the perceptual object. I intend to separate these two ways of defining the percept. I think that Peirce's theory of perception takes the object, as it is in the external world, to be a part of the content of perceptual experience along with a perceptual judgment. He resists the representationalist theory in spite of the fact that it was the predominant psychological theory of his day.

Today Peirce's theory might be seen as acknowledging both the sub-personal level as well as the experienced level of perception. But what crucially distinguishes Peirce's theory from sense-data account is his refusal to allow a psychological concept of representation to be mixed with a semiotic concept of representation. For Peirce, whatever mental processes do, they make available a view of the objects in the world, not of representations or images of objects. This also distinguishes Peirce's theory from the intentionalists who say that perceptual experience is intentional and that the representational content of an experience determines its phenomenology and the correctness conditions for the experience. On Peirce's account perception is an interaction between two objects, subject and object, which results in a view of the world for the subject. Whatever psychology might tell us about the process it does not affect the logical understanding of thought and representation. For Peirce genuine representation does not even begin until after the perceptual judgment, which is still not full-

blown representation. But perceptual judgment is a taking of the world to be a certain way and not a content that determines one's perceptual experience.

I take this to resolve what I take to be unsatisfactory treatments of Peirce's theory of perception by Bernstein, Rosenthal, and Hausman. Each of the above quotes was taken from Peirce's theory of perception, where it should now be clear he was careful to distinguish two ways of analyzing perception and its objects. Valberg (2002) has called these two ways of understanding perception as the common sense story and the problematic reasoning. He finds in them antinomy that cannot be resolved. But Valberg had no classification of the sciences that might provide him with an insight into the way that a logic of the phenomenology of perception might govern the later science of psychology. Peirce also understood that the science of psychology did not appreciate the phenomenological position, but he steadfastly maintained that a science of psychology and the mental processes that made perception possible could not trump the primary phenomenological facts, that perception is brutal and forceful contact with a world and not some intermediaries.

5. Peirce's Theory of Perception

5.1. Peirce's terms: percept, perceptual judgment, perceptual fact

5.1.1. Perceptual fact

In my discussions of the problems encountered in a study of Peirce's theory of perception I have introduced three main terms: percept, perceptual judgment, and perceptual fact. I will continue to use these terms even though at one point Peirce uses the term percipuum instead of perceptual fact.⁹⁵ I will begin with the perceptual fact. Peirce says, "Perhaps I might be permitted to invent the term percipuum to include both percept and perceptual judgment."⁹⁶

He goes on to define it this way:

For this and other reasons, I propose to consider the percept as it is immediately interpreted in the perceptual judgment, under the name of the "percipuum." The percipuum, then, is what forces itself upon your acknowledgment, without any why or wherefore, so that if anybody asks you why you should regard it as appearing so and so, all you can say is, "I can't help it. That is how I see it" (*CP* 7.643).

So, for Peirce what is seen is the percept interpreted through a perceptual judgment. We account for what we see by describing how we take things to be.

This description indicates in propositional form the perceptual judgment. These two contents together, the object-content of the percept and the information-

⁹⁵ Peirce introduces the percipuum in his most detailed analysis of perception. He does not say that the percipuum is equivalent with a perceptual fact. But, the role that the two play is to me the same. It is also clear that Peirce does not use the two terms simultaneously. He uses perceptual fact much more in 1901 *CP* (5.568, 7.198) and 1902 *CP* (2.141, 2.144) and percipuum solely in his text on "Telepathy" in 1903 *CP* (7.629-7.677). I think that the invention of the term percipuum represents a development in Peirce's understanding of the phenomena he was describing. But, since it falls out of use outside of the "Telepathy" manuscript it is unclear whether Peirce intended his analysis to be fully resolved.

⁹⁶ *CP* (7.629).

content of the perceptual judgment make up the perceptual fact. It is crucial that Peirce understands both contents to be inseparable in the perceptual fact. It is also crucial that the perceptual judgment is a cognitive taking of the object to be a certain way. But, it is not, as the intentionalist would postulate, to be identified with some correctness conditions for the experience. The percept is seen even as one judges it to be one way or another. I will discuss this more below.

Peirce makes the distinction between these two contents in this way: “If one sees, one cannot avoid the percept; and if one looks, one cannot avoid the perceptual judgment.”⁹⁷ “But the moment we fix our minds upon it and think the least thing about the percept, it is the perceptual judgment that tells us what we so ‘perceive.’”⁹⁸ In “seeing” the percept is there. It is unavoidable. It may be characterized as qualitative and forceful, but it lacks a meaning content. In “looking” one interprets the seeing through the perceptual judgment. So, for Peirce it seems that perception is a dual-content theory. It involves an objectual and judgmental aspect. Neither type of content plays an exclusive role. Before analyzing how Peirce’s theory compares to the other major theories of perception I will define further these two contents of perceptual experience in Peirce’s theory.

5.1.2. Percept

The primary ways Peirce describes the percept are as qualitative and forceful. These two characteristics come from his categories of Firstness and Secondness. For Peirce, these are the primary characteristics of experience and

⁹⁷ *CP* (7.627).

⁹⁸ *CP* (7.643).

existence. This leads to a conception of the percept according to which it offers something positive, compels assent, and “it neither offers any reason for such acknowledgment nor makes any pretension to reasonableness.”⁹⁹ And, as for any intentional character, “We know nothing about the percept otherwise than by testimony of the perceptual judgment, excepting that we feel the blow of it, the reaction of it against us, and we see the contents of it arranged into an object, in its totality.”¹⁰⁰

Peirce’s characterization of perceptual content is in a significant way very similar to the sense-datist account and the contemporary intentionalist account. The sense-datists offered an account of object-content that relied heavily on the seventeenth century psychological account featured in Locke and Hume, and the intentionalists rejected this account and offered an information-content account of perceptual experience. Peirce’s account of perceptual experience and its content includes an object-content, but one that does not speak or inform the perceiver about its status. In this sense the perceptual object content is insistent and silent.¹⁰¹ It is not purely subjective as sense-data are, and it is not determined by a unique representational content as in the intentionalist account.

I think that this is a very important difference in Peirce’s view of perceptual experience. As we shall see it is not the whole view, because Peirce also believed that experience is often if not always also characterized by judgment. But, before moving to that aspect of Peirce’s dual content theory I want to say a

⁹⁹ *CP* (7.622).

¹⁰⁰ *CP* (7.643).

¹⁰¹ *CP* (7.619).

bit more on why it is important to maintain a separation between the object content and informational or intentional content.

Why could it be important to have in one's theory about perceptual experience a concept of content that is dumb, silent, insistent, forceful, nonpropositional, an object that offers no reason or defense for its presence as Peirce says? An example Peirce offers of what this object might be is this:

Let us say that, as I sit here writing, I see on the other side of my table, a yellow chair with a green cushion. That will be what psychologists term a "percept" (*res percepta*). They also frequently call it an "image." With this term I shall pick no quarrel. Only one must be on one's guard against a false impression that it might insinuate. Namely, an "image" usually means something intended to represent,—virtually professing to represent,—something else, real or ideal. So understood, the word "image" would be a misnomer for a percept. The chair I appear to see makes no professions of any kind, essentially embodies no intentions of any kind, does not stand for anything. It obtrudes itself upon my gaze; but not as a deputy for anything else, not "as" anything. It simply knocks at the portal of my soul and stands there in the doorway.

It is very insistent, for all its silence. It would be useless for me to attempt to pooh-pooh it, and say, "Oh come, I don't believe in the chair." I am forced to confess that it appears. Not only does it appear, but it disturbs me, more or less. I cannot think the appearance is not there, nor dismiss it as I would a fancy. I can only get rid of it by an exertion of physical force.

It is a forceful thing. Yet it offers no reason, defense, nor excuse for its presence. It does not pretend to any right to be there. It silently forces itself upon me.

Such is the percept (*CP* 7.619-622).

Do you see, as I hope, how Peirce picks a quarrel both with our sense-datists and intentionalists? His concept of the content of perceptual experience is much more "brutal" as he sometimes characterizes experience. Experience is that which imposes, disrupts and forces itself upon the perceiver. Neither is it a representative object nor a representational content. It is a silent experience of

an object. And, this for Peirce is just how visual experience can be described. From this perspective perceptual experience is not fundamentally internal or external, it is a brutal interaction between two objects that produces a seeing. The object of the seeing tells the perceiver nothing about itself, it is only to be found out or investigated. Knowledge for Peirce is fundamentally a taking things to be so and so, the status of which is dependent on the effort made. But since Peirce conceives of experience as interaction with the world in a silent and forceful way there is no problem about how one's senses deceive. The senses do not play that role and truth and falsity are not values for experiences. Finally, on Peirce's view of seeing objects in the world no questions of representation enter in to the account. One simply has a view of the world that takes it to be a certain way.¹⁰² But there is a significant difference between seeing the facts open before one and representing things to be a certain way. For Peirce, the perceptual judgment is a first premise of reasoning, but it itself is not a significant committed representation. When someone commits herself to a representation they have reasons to support it. They are responsible for its content.

5.1.3. Perceptual judgment

So, if Peirce does not think of perceptual experience as fundamentally a knowing affair, then how does knowledge enter into the picture? For Peirce, the possibility of knowledge begins with judgment. He characterizes perceptual judgment this way: It is fundamentally unlike the percept, it has propositional

¹⁰² Campbell (2002: 156) articulates a similar conclusion about his Relational View of experience. I am indebted to Campbell's work for making a way clear to me for how Peirce's view might be interpreted.

form, and it is the first premise of all our reasoning. But it does share an important similarity with the percept in that it is fundamentally uncontrollable and uncriticizable. For this reason Peirce puts the perceptual judgment within the content of his theory of perception. We are, as McDowell says, but not in McDowell's sense, saddled with content. Peirce says, "In the first place, all our knowledge rests upon perceptual judgments. These are necessarily veracious in greater or less degree according to the effort made."¹⁰³

Like the intentionalists discussed above Peirce takes there to be an intentional content in perception. But, unlike the intentionalists, Peirce maintains that any representational content of perceptual experience is fundamentally a judging affair. It is a taking things to be a certain way that the silent experience of objects themselves do not offer. The representational content is to be logically distinguished from the object content. The first is an inferential affair, no matter how automatic and uncontrollable, and the second content is experiential in a sense of interaction that is noncognized. The distinction between the intentionalist view and the Peircean view is important and worth elaborating.

As described previously, the intentionalist takes experiences to have correctness conditions. The correctness conditions of experience are specified by the representational content of the experience. Intentionalists often state that the world seems a certain way, or that experience represents the world to be a certain way. When the representational content that specifies the correctness conditions for the experience matches the way the world actually is the experience is veridical. I found two main problems with this notion of experience

¹⁰³ CP (5.119).

as representational content. First, there is no single way in which to represent the world in order to specify a unique representational content for a unique perceptual experience. Representing things to be so and so is not something experience is equipped to do. Experience does present the world, which enables the perceiver to indicate various objects in experience. But indicating is not equal to symbolical representation. In Peirce's terminology, an index is not a fully genuine triadic sign. Second, in addition to the inability to specify representational content that determines the experience, I found no evidence that experiencing was equivalent to representing things to be a certain way. In other words, close attention to experience shows experience to be attention to objects and features of objects. There is certainly attention to the facts, in the sense of seeing them, but this is not the same as specifying a representational content that determines the experience. If the only way to get at the supposed representational content is to rely on the way I take the world in experience, then we can never have a representational content that is not equivalent to a perceptual judgment. But the representational content was supposed to be the identification of the experience in its own right, which determined the correctness conditions for the experience, not a judgment based on the experience. I concluded that I could find no way of making sense of this supposed representational content.

On Peirce's account there is a declaring by the mind of what lies open to view. But this is not a content that determines whether the phenomenological content is veridical or illusory; it is based on a phenomenological content already

before the mind. The perceptual judgment is also not a representing of anything to be, but is better stated as a declaring or an indicating. It simply puts in propositional form what the mind is attending to. This perceptual judgment and the content of it play a completely different role in perception than does the representational content of the intentionalist. Instead of our senses deceiving us, it is our cognitive capacity, our initial judgment that may be either veridical or not. But this is an error of description or classification and not a correctness condition for the experience.

Peirce says this about the representational capacity of the perceptual experience. In *CP* (7.628) the perceptual judgment is described as representing the percept, but not logically, and not as a copy. It represents the percept “namely, as an index, or true symptom.” There is no rational warrant for taking the perceptual judgment to be a true symbol of the percept. It is by force and brute fact. As an index Peirce says the perceptual judgment works this way, “In fact, the perceptual judgment which I have translated into ‘that chair is yellow’ would be more accurately represented thus: ‘[X] is yellow,’ a pointing index finger taking the place of the subject.”¹⁰⁴ The subject, “that chair” is an indicator, a locator of the physical object, and does not play any conceptual role like providing meaning. Perceptual judgment is merely an existential relation to the object.

This level of content is very different from a representational content that represents the correctness conditions for the experience. Peirce is specifying a

¹⁰⁴ *CP* (7.635).

rudimentary causal process of the mind that generates initial potential facts, which can only be determined to be true and false in relation to each other. One is also reminded of McDowell's thesis that the content of experience must be conceptual in order for experience to play a justificatory role in knowledge. I do not think that experience on Peirce's theory of perception can play the role that McDowell needs. On Peirce's view perception is less than rational. The form it takes is not a conceptual one, full of meaning. Knowledge of the world is not delivered through the senses.¹⁰⁵ But the perceptual system does provide the perceiver with uncontrolled immediate access to the qualitatively rich world.

5.2. How to tell the causal story without being a sense-datist.

The causal story was more than, but rooted in, the common scientific picture of how perceptual experience takes place. The added element was that in order for experience to play a fundamentally explanatory role we needed an account that sustained the idea that experience is object dependent or relational. The sense-data theory argued that there must be intermediary mental objects between the perceiver and the real world. This is why it was labeled an indirect realist theory of perception. I also argued that the intentionalist view was unable to meet the relational requirement. On the intentionalist theory, experience, defined as representing the world a certain way, could only be related to intentional objects. On this account perception can misfire just like a belief. The intentionalist considers her view direct realism because when the supposed

¹⁰⁵ It might be suggested that this statement is contrary to Peirce's three cotary propositions found in *Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction* and *The Nature of Meaning*. I do not think this is the case because perceptual processes lack two characteristics that are necessary for knowledge namely control and criticism.

correctness conditions for an experience match the way the world is, the perceiver is in direct perceptual contact with the object. But since the intentionalist accepts the common factor view, which says that experience has a similar content in either veridical or hallucinatory occasions experience cannot be defined primarily as a relation to the objects. How well does Peirce meet the causal story requirement?

Peirce's account of the percept as the object itself in view is a critical but common sense position that understands perception to be a process whereby we are forced into contact with the world. Peirce did not speculate on an alternative psychological theory that would support his phenomenological theory of perception. In fact, on several occasions he states that the difference between his and the psychological view was resolvable or at least not a concern.¹⁰⁶

What I take to be important about Peirce's way of dealing with the difference between the psychological theory and his phenomenological theory is that he distinguished between a logical and psychological use of representation. I think this is how to understand why he didn't see the psychological theory as a threat to his theory of perception. Peirce decided that whatever inferential knowledge could be found about the psychological or mental process that resulted in viewing the world it should not result in a falling away from having a view of the world. The psychological sense of representation was not an issue for Peirce because he was convinced that what it resulted in was not a seeing of

¹⁰⁶ Note *CP* (8.144, 1.253, 2.141, 5.55, 5.157, 7.619-7.624) for some illustrations of Peirce's general dismissal of the appearance of a conflict between his account and the psychological account.

representations in a sense-datum sense or an elimination of object content in an intentionalist sense. He argued for a fundamentally common sense point. Whatever the psychological factors are, they result in the presence of a percept, an object of the world, not a mental object or a representational content.

Earlier I highlighted one example of a hypothesis that does justice to the empirical work being done in cognitive science while preserving the explanatory role of experience as fundamentally contact with objects in the world. I take my example from Campbell (2002).¹⁰⁷ Campbell describes a way of conceiving visual experience as if it were through a pane of glass or some other translucent substance. The brain's role in such a theory is to maintain translucence by being sensitive to all the details and nuances of the objects of visual experience. On such a view visual experience is a view of the world. The way to characterize such an experience is not to identify mental states but simply to put someone in the view that you are having. As Campbell says,

On this picture—on the relational view—you simply cannot ask the question that is so pressing for a representationalist, namely: ‘How is the subject representing what she sees?’...Seeing the categorical object is not a matter of consciously representing it, so there is no question to be asked about the nature of the representation (Campbell 2002: 156).

It follows that there is nothing to ask about the nature of representation because no significant representation has begun in a logical sense, and the type of computational processing that goes on in say Marr (1982) is not the type of representational content the intentionalist was interested in. On this translucence

¹⁰⁷ For a full treatment of Campbell's theory of perception see chapters 6 and 7 of *Reference and Consciousness*.

hypothesis about visual experience there is a content of perceptual experience that is a view of the world. This view is certainly brought about by significant causal factors that are investigated by the science of psychology. But this does not justify the intentionalist contention that perceptual experience be considered as a mental state like belief, having a propositional content that determines the veridicality of the experience. The advantage for the theory of perception that posits worldly objectual content characterized by qualitative and forceful silence is that the causal story about experience plays the intuitive explanatory role of there being contact with the world. Perceptual experience such as seeing, which is the characteristic sensory modality I have been using, is a relation between perceiver and object.

5.3. Overcoming the challenge of illusion

The main challenge to a view like Peirce's comes from the traditional problem of hallucination or illusion. Fortunately Peirce offers his own example of how to treat illusion and so I will begin by quoting these. It should be noted that complete phenomenologically indistinguishable hallucinatory experiences are mostly a philosopher's creation. But Peirce does treat the problem of hallucination by postulating a series of tests. The question though is how to deal with this logical possibility of indistinguishable hallucinatory experiences? How do they alter or challenge a theory of perception? They were a contributing motivation for sense-data, which are problematic in their own right. They are a motivation for the common cause factor of the intentionalist also. The intentionalist says that representational content determines phenomenology and

so two indistinguishable phenomenological experiences must have the same representational content. The disjunctivist resists the common cause factor by saying that experience is most fundamentally characterized as perceptual or hallucinatory. On this disjunctive conception of experience, no matter the phenomenological indistinguishability, there is nothing in common between perceptual experience and hallucination, intrinsically. Experience is either/or. Our perceptual systems either puts us in touch phenomenologically with the external world, or it doesn't. But the disjuncts share no intrinsic common content.

Peirce does not deal with hallucination as much as with illusion. For him, a hallucination, or where there was cause to doubt whether one was seeing, could be dealt with by a series of increasingly specific tests. The first test is to will away the percept. The second test is to inquire with a fellow perceiver as to whether they do or do not see such a percept. The third test is to conduct an experiment that will test the percept's capacity to accommodate the laws of nature.¹⁰⁸ I think it is characteristic of Peirce to resist doubt where doubt is not real or heartfelt. This is reflected in his way of dealing with hallucination. Hallucination is a natural phenomenon that can be tested when the situation is one where there is doubt. But this possibility did not cause Peirce to postulate internal mental objects or content with correctness conditions that would determine the veridicality of the perception. Crucially for Peirce representing only begins once it is needed. One only begins thought, and therefore the use of representational content when in doubt. But he would have never said that this

¹⁰⁸ Peirce describes these tests in *CP* (1.142).

was the standard situation for perceiving. Perceiving is not a mode of thinking. It is a mode of living that can be used for investigating or experimenting when a subject finds herself in a situation of doubt.¹⁰⁹

Now I will discuss his example of illusion that supports his theory of perception that the percept, or phenomenological object content of perception, is not dependent on any representational content, but is affected by cognitive effort.

The first example is this: "Sometimes when I have been seated in a railway-car that was stationary and another train has been slowly passing by, I have been vexed at the unreasonableness of its appearing to me that our train was moving and the other train was at rest."¹¹⁰ He later concludes that once one knows the right trick one may change the perceptual fact, thereby righting the illusion. The second illustration he uses comes from viewing "Schroeder's Stairs" which is a two-dimensional line drawing like viewing a set of stairs at an angle. Initially it may appear as if one is viewing the stairs from the top, and it appears this way forcefully. But, later and with some effort exerted on the percept one may come to view the stairs as from below.

Doubtless frequent repetition of the experiment would give one complete control over it. You will thus have converted an uncontrollable percipuum into a controllable imagination by a brief process of education. It is one of the recognized difficulties of all psycho-physical measurement that the faculties rapidly become educated to an extraordinary degree (*CP* 7.647).

¹⁰⁹ For more on a pragmatist understanding of the role of representation I direct the reader to the doubt/belief matrix of "The Fixation of Belief".

¹¹⁰ *CP* (7.645).

On Peirce's account of these perceptual illusions the fault or error lies in the "education" of our faculties. It is not the percept itself in view that is illusory but our taking the percept by judging it to be a case of the wrong situation. The Schroeder's Stairs appear qualitatively and forcefully. Nothing about the object changes when they are viewed differently. What changes is how I take the stairs to be either a case of viewing from below or a case of viewing from above. But, there certainly remains a level of experience that involves the postulation of a silent interaction between the viewer and the world. How might this differ from the account given by the intentionalist?

On the intentionalist's account it is our senses that deceive us. The intentionalist, viewing perceptual experience as a mental state, would specify some representational content that determined whether the perception was veridical or not. But the Schroeder's Stairs are precisely an example of perceptual experience where no one, single, representational, content could possibly be specified to determine whether the experience was correct. The percept remains unchanged whether the perceiver takes it to be one way or another. On Peirce's account our senses are silent. They merely give us a view of the world, as in the case of visual experience. On the intentionalist's account our senses are potentially in error by providing a representational content. Experience, in the sense of seeing a train in front of one or seeing a line in the shape of stairs on a piece of paper is silent. It tells us nothing. There is a relational interaction between the perceiver and the world. "It simply knocks at

the portal of my soul and stands there in the doorway.”¹¹¹ The type of inference that takes place is usually automatic and uncontrollable, which is why Peirce associates this fundamental level of mindedness with perception. But, nonetheless, it is not experience proper. It is the first steps in the creation of premises that will be the foundation of reasoning.

Peirce’s theory in a very important way is a return to the correct aspect of the sense-data theory. Perceptual experience is objectual. Perceptual judgment is a part of perceptual experience because the perceiver always views the world with attention to specific objects and qualities; the indexical relation represents this level of cognitive attention. But perception, on Peirce’s account does not state or represent the way the world is. I can note this way: “I see the dog.” I can even indicate this way: “I see that there is a dog.” But in neither case do I represent the way the world should be on any occasion for seeing a dog. What is at stake is the way the world is and not the meaning of symbols. We must find a way to understanding the difference between a situation where there is no question about what is the case, and therefore no need for an understanding, disambiguation, or resolution and the situation where these are needed as when I state something to be a certain way. These are situations where we represent the world to be a certain way.

5.4. Conclusion

I have argued that Peirce’s two-level theory about perceptual experience can deal with both the causal story that supports the explanatory value of experience as well as the problem of illusion in a satisfactory manner. For these

¹¹¹ *CP* (7.619).

reasons it is to be preferred to the sense-datum theory as well as the currently popular theory, intentionalism about perceptual experience. But these factors have focused mostly on the absence of an object relation in perceptual experience in the intentionalist view and the presence of this content in Peirce's view. What Peirce provides is an account of experience that isolates the silent but forceful way in which we interact with the world. And, when he includes judgment in his theory of perception, it is because of the way that it, too, is forced on the perceiver in most occasions, unless one exerts some effort otherwise. Isn't this precisely why McDowell categorizes perceptual experience as conceptual? Is it fair to criticize Peirce for not bridging the divide between mind and world through perceptual experience?

It is indeed for good reason that Peirce calls the part of perceptual experience that involves any intentional content judgmental. For it is our learned habits that embody the way we take the world to be. Let me formulate the challenge the way McDowell would. McDowell thinks that in order for us to understand how experience can play an explanatory role in justifying beliefs about the world we must conceive it as conceptual. We are in McDowell's terms saddled with content. But the problem I have associated with this view is that it views our sensory experience as "speaking" or providing the viewer with information about the environment instead of providing a view. I think this is precisely the way McDowell would conceive of our sensory system within a

disenchanted naturalism, a naturalism he doesn't think could provide reasons for beliefs.¹¹²

McDowell's point is that if we want to preserve the idea that experience gives us reasons we must see experience as rationally organized so that there is continuity between our mode of belief (conceptual) and what our beliefs are about (experience as conceptual). But there are two options. Either McDowell is right to redefine experience as a part of the second nature of human beings or he presents one of those ultimatums "You're either with us or against us" which misconstrue the situation as being one where either experience is conceptual or knowledge based on experience is not possible. In my view, and I believe Peirce's also, McDowell has misconstrued the situation.

Peirce says about perceptual judgment: First, "It is plainly nothing but the extremest case of Abductive Judgments."¹¹³ Second, "We thus come to the test of inconceivability as the only means of distinguishing between an abduction and a perceptual judgment."¹¹⁴ Simply put, if it is conceivable that the judgment is not a true symptom, an index of the percept, then it is an abduction, a best guess or hypothesis. But if it is inconceivable that things are not the way they appear in perception then it is a perceptual judgment. In spite of the close similarity between them, abductive and perceptual judgments are to be distinguished by the questionability or deniability of the judgment. Where the abductive judgment might be conceived as a guess or a first step in inquiry, a perceptual judgment is

¹¹² McDowell (1996: 70-71).

¹¹³ *CP* (5.185).

¹¹⁴ *CP* (5.187).

simply a classification of the phenomena based on habitualized ways of taking the world to be. Perceptual judgment is much more a part of the sensory processing of visual experience without rational self-control. Abduction however, is the birth of new inference. But Peirce considers it perceptual judgment, judgment nonetheless, because it is a habitualized way of taking the world to be. The previously given example of Schroeder's stairs exemplifies this way of dealing with perceptual judgment when Peirce describes the two ways of conceiving the matter. He says:

Both, I beg you to remark, are general ways of classing the line, general classes under which the line is subsumed. But the very decided preference of our perception for one mode of classing the percept shows that this classification is contained in the perceptual judgment (*CP* 5.183).

It is the crediting of classifying the phenomena, however uncritically or habitually, to perceptual judgment and not to experience that gives Peirce's dual theory of perceptual experience the edge over intentionalism like McDowell's. For on McDowell's view we are stuck in a rather awkward situation in describing how experience represents the world falsely. He says, "Whether we like it or not, we have to rely on favors from the world: not just that it presents us with appearances... but that on occasion it actually is the way it appears to be."¹¹⁵ While it is to McDowell's credit to take his theory to its logical conclusions, I think Peirce's conception of the reason for the illusion places the error in the correct space.

¹¹⁵ McDowell (1995: 886).

Error in perceptual experience is not, as the intentionalists say, a matter of our senses deceiving us, in any strict sense, or of the world playing us false. As Peirce says, our senses are silent and forceful. Such is experience. It is how we take, judge, classify the world to be that is the locus for error in perception. So, while perceptual judgment is forceful, even uncontrollable, this should not lead us to posit it as a way to recognize any representational content that determines the correctness of the phenomenal presentation. Peirce characterizes this type of experience in this way:

...we perceive what we are adjusted for interpreting, though it be far less perceptible than any express effort could enable us to perceive; while that, to the interpretation of which our adjustments are not fitted, we fail to perceive although it exceed in intensity what we should perceive with the utmost ease, if we cared at all for its interpretation (*CP* 5.185).

But this is not a way of saying that the representational content, truth evaluable content, determines the correctness of the perceptual experience. McDowell, in his effort to preserve a common notion about experience, that thought should conform to experience, or that experience should be a reason for belief, has argued that we must conceive of perceptual experience as conceptual all the way down. In the space of reasons there is no room for content that is not conceptual content. On this account, for any particular perceptual experience there is some one way the world is organized that the experience must match in order to be correct. When it is correct, experience provides reasons for belief. Experience has a face value, a conceptual organization, or a way it represents the world that we may either take or leave. On this way of conceiving experience, it is knowledge rich, and fundamentally identified with correctness conditions.

On Peirce's theory, perception is a natural mechanism providing a perceiver with contact with objects and features in the world. Perception does not significantly represent the way the world is, but only indicates what is to be thought about or investigated. Experience has two components: First, the perceiver is put in a qualitative and forced contact with reality. This is a fundamental level of experience that is not constrained by conceptual capacities as in McDowell's theory. Second, attention to objects provides the perceiver with a symptom of the object, a true and undeniable symptom.

While McDowell raises important questions about how to conceive mind-world relations, I think it is his attention to the epistemological problem that skews his theory of perception. Like the intentionalists as a whole, even though they postulate some level of representational content in experience, it is hard to flesh out just how experience could provide such a meaningful content. The ways of representing the world do not match the experiences we have of the world. Significantly, Peirce saw representation as relying on experience and not defining it. I think this is the primary advantage of his view. Perceptual experience does not have correctness conditions outside of the correct functioning of the sensory systems. But this is just a way of saying that to see the world one must be able to see, and to perceive the world one must be able to attend to various aspects of it. Neither of these requires representational content as the intentionalist supposes.

I have not solved McDowell's epistemological problem. But that must be the research of another thesis. What I have tried to do is to articulate a theory of

perceptual experience regardless of the epistemological problem. Isn't there reason to understand perceiving as a concept in and of itself? Throughout I have considered only realist positions about perceptual experience, namely sense-data theory, intentionalism, and disjunctivism. I have also analyzed Peirce's theory, which is in some sense a hybrid view, though in the hey-day of sense-data theory Peirce resisted supposing the percept was an image or representation of any sort. This is his fundamental insight. I think this was the main mistake of sense-data theory that the intentionalists recognized. But the intentionalist supposed using the concept of intentionality could solve the problem. I have tried to show why experience cannot be conceived as representing the world to be any certain way.

I think Peirce's theory offers the best alternative between the two. Perception, on his account, is primarily phenomenological and causal. He also maintains a significant distance between representing the world to be a certain way and perceiving the world to be a certain way. This difference was exemplified by the difference of the indexical relation, or pointing, and representing which involves an interpretation. There is much work to be done in the theory of perception that will enable an even clearer view of the relation between perceiver and the world. But as far as theories have carried us thus far, I think one along the lines of Peirce's stands the best chance of being confirmed in later research. I hope some of the reasons have become clear.

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