SENSE PERCEPTION AND THE SELF

AYŞE ÖZGE KOÇAK

BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

2007

SENSE PERCEPTION AND THE SELF

Thesis submitted to the
Institute for Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Philosophy

by

Ayşe Özge Koçak

Boğaziçi University
2007

Thesis Abstract

Ayşe Özge Koçak, “Sense Perception and the Self”

This thesis aims at analyzing the content of perceptual experience with a view to understand whether non-conceptual perceptual content is possible. To do so, the definition and the function of perception are evaluated to discern what perception really amounts to in our daily life. The notion of sensation as non-conceptual mental content is criticized in order to emphasize the role of perception in our experience. Two distinctions regarding concepts are introduced: 1) between the concept of self and the concepts about the objects of perception; 2) between linguistic and non-linguistic concepts. With these distinctions, how perceptual content cannot be non-conceptual is illustrated. The concept of ‘self’ is put forth as the minimal requirement for perception to occur, without which it is not possible to have perceptual content at all.

Tez Özeti

Ayşe Özge Koçak, “Sense Perception and the Self”

Bu tezin yazılış amacı algısal içeriğin kavramsız olup olamayacağını anlamak için algısal deneyimin içeriğini incelemektir. Öncelikle, gündelik hayatımızda algının neye denk geldiğini belirlemek üzere algının tanımı ve işlevi değerlendirilmektedir. Deneyimimizde algının rolünü pekiştirmek için kavramsız zihinsel içerik olarak tanımlanan duyu fikri eleştirilmektedir. Kavramlara ilişkin 1) algılayanın kendisine dair kavramları ve algının nesnelerine dair kavramları arasında, ve 2) dilsel ve dilsel olmayan kavramlar arasında olmak üzere iki ayrım ortaya konulur. Bu ayrımlarla algısal içeriğin nasıl kavramsız olamayacağı açıklanır. “Ben” kavramı, algının olabilmesi için en temel şart olarak ortaya atılır ve onsuz algısal içeriğin imkansız olduğu iddia edilir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are events in one's life that need celebration as well as acknowledgement, for whatever is done, is not without others' efforts and support. This thesis, along with the degree it brings, is a huge event in my humble life which obliges me to express my deepest gratitude to certain people who made it possible.

I want to thank Chryssi Sidiropoulou, whose unbelievable belief in my academic ability allowed me to spoil myself a little, and whose friendship I will forever cherish. Knowing her made me learn how important it is to believe in oneself rather than awaiting others' approval.

I am grateful to Stephen Voss who, with his inspiring stance as a philosopher, has transformed me into a more competent, more persistent and more diligent student of philosophy. Without him, this thesis would have never been written.

I would like to thank Güven Güzeldere for the support he bestowed upon me since the day we met, and for expecting better things from me.

I am indebted and thankful to Türker Armaner for his kindness, his sincerity and his assistance which came at such short notice when it was needed most.

I also want to thank Christopher Colvin, who, with little idea of who I was, was always ready to help me with the first versions of this thesis, and offered me incredible motivational support.

I owe special thanks to Ilhan Inan and Gürol Irzık for initiating me into philosophical thinking, and for allowing me to be a part of a wonderful community.

I want to thank Sibel Irzık for being the graceful professor she is and the elegant way she teaches. Without her as a role model, I would not even consider doing graduate studies.

My colleagues and friends: Omca Korugan, Tuğba Sevinç, A. Emin Orhan and also Pınar Çetinkaya. I owe them big thanks for bearing with me at my most hyper moments, listening to my crazy talk, and being so nice to me no matter how annoying I can get.

Çiğdem Şimşek, my friend, my master. I would like to thank her for always being there for me, laughing at my silly jokes, and helping me whenever I needed. Her profound philosophical discussions have cultivated me more than she can imagine.

I want to thank Işıl Uluç, my thesis-twin, for encouraging me to 'think', and for the mind-opening discussions we had.

My dear friends, Aslı Değirmenci and Neslihan Şen who love me unconditionally despite all my antics. I would like to thank them for being my pillars of strength. I do not know where I would be without them.

I would like to thank my brother, my sister-in-law and my sweetest nephew for providing me with an affectionate family so encouraging and supportive, and for bearing with my long absences.

Finally, I owe the greatest thanks to my parents for letting me go far away when all they want from me is to stay close; for allowing me to study as long as I want and never asking me to settle down and get a job; for letting me free to pursue what my heart desires. I am one lucky person because of them. To love someone so dearly, yet to leave them behind is most merciless to the ones who go away…

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The content of perceptual experience has been a matter of debate in contemporary philosophy, indeed in the history of philosophy. Philosophers have discussed whether perceptual content is entirely conceptual, partially non-conceptual or whether it can be entirely non-conceptual. I believe there is a common failure in considering the conceptuality involved in perceptual content. The failure stems from neglecting and confusing two distinctions concerning concepts. On the one hand, there is a distinction between concepts that apply to, or are about, the perceiver herself; and concepts that apply to, or are about, the objects of perception. On the other hand, there is a distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic concepts. Once these distinctions are made distinct, the problem that arises by positing sensations which take the place of perceptual experiences that seem non-conceptual seems to resolve itself and the essential condition for having a perceptual experience becomes apparent. I believe that sense perception always has a conceptual component to it, namely the non-linguistic concept of 'self', through which the perceiver is able to have contentful experiences. To set out this view, I will have to answer some questions concerning the definition and function of sense perception. When does perception begin? How does it function in our encounter with the external world? What is the relation between sensations and perception? By answering such questions, and by examining perception's relation with concepts, I

will try to disentangle the complicated nature of perception in order to resolve the question whether perception can be entirely non-conceptual.

I will proceed step by step. First, I will discuss the definition and function of perception. Secondly, I will examine sensations to see what function they serve. Then I will move on to clarify the nature of conceptual/non-conceptual content, refining the distinctions mentioned above. I will propose that perception begins with a conception of 'self' as the center of experience and action without which a contentful perception cannot occur.

I will commence my discussion with a revealing disagreement between J.L. Austin and A.J. Ayer concerning the status of the 'plain man' as the perceiver. However, my essential concern here is not ordinary language arguments, but rather perception's relation to concepts. I will continue with a traditional definition of perception from Chisholm to better accentuate the nature of perceptual experience. In the discussion of sensations, following D.M. Armstrong and Merleau-Ponty, I will elaborate the idea that what we call sensation in the traditional sense deserves to be called perceptual experiences with regard to their informational content. Later on, dwelling upon the issue of conceptual vs. non-conceptual content in the writings of thinkers like Dennett, McDowell, Dretske, Bermudez and Peacocke, I will conclude by claiming that the conception of 'self' is the ultimate starting point of perceptual experience, due to which perception cannot be entirely non-conceptual, and without which we cannot speak of contentful experiences.

CHAPTER II

DEFINITION AND FUNCTION

Perception is generally taken to be a bridge between a perceiving subject and the external world, including her own body, as the perceived object. We are informed about what is going on around and inside us via perception, and through this information, we familiarize ourselves with our own bodies and the external world; we acquire beliefs about them and learn to act accordingly. In examining the function of perception, following J. L. Austin's criticism of A. J. Ayer, we can regard the position of the 'plain man'[1]. However 'naive' it may be deemed, when the plain man perceives an object, he confronts something from the external world. Whatever the plain man perceives, once he perceives it, he interacts with the world, and thus finds a way to cope with it, be it an external object outside his body, or a bodily process, such as itching, feeling tickled or pain. As stated above, perception functions as the means of interaction between a subject and the external world. Calling perception an interaction immediately suggests that both parties, the subject and the object, are active in this relationship: the subject, via seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling and acquiring a belief or a disposition to act towards and according to the objects perceived, and the object exposing itself; appearing in ways to the subject that enable it to be perceived. The activity of the object consists in this manifestation, and of course it does not mean that objects are active in the sense in which we are active. But appearing, or manifesting oneself, is an important activity,

[1] Austin (1962), p. 9. Austin considers the position of the plain man, as opposed to the philosopher, with respect to his interaction with and experience of the world.

for it has an effect, an influence, on us the perceivers. The object's manifestation of itself may be considered a passive activity which, although it seems to be a contradiction in terms, does not require the object actively and intentionally to engage itself in some kind of activity. Here, we are of course talking of inanimate objects, for there are animate objects of perception for human perceivers such as other humans, animals and plants. The intentionality of living organisms other than human beings is a matter of debate; however their active manifestation is not questionable. When a rat quickly runs through the room, it manifests itself to the perceiver as a small running creature. But when a painting is hanging on the wall, it manifests itself as a framed work of art composed of figures and colors. The colors within the painting also manifest themselves in accordance with the lighting conditions in the environment. Even the fact that the painting just hangs there on the wall in a stable manner is a way of manifestation that is available to the perceiver. The manifestation we are considering in the case of inanimate objects, then, involves the ways the object is available to the perceiver. In other words, the mere presence of an object is itself a manifestation. The action of manifestation, hence, is of a passive mode, where the positioning, lighting, etc. of the environment in connection with the object provide various modes of manifestation, hence allow many different varieties of perceptions of the same object. Slight or radical alterations in the object or the environment that affect the object may be the result of human agents, as well as of time and other conditions. Nonetheless it is still a change on the part of the object's manifestation.

Here, we also need to keep in mind that we have a limited access to the external world, restricted by our own physical limitations. We cannot see the back of an object unless we go behind it. We cannot hear the sounds that are below a certain

threshold. Just as we are limited, so do the objects, in their manifestation of themselves, limit us to a certain extent. For on thing, they cannot manifest, or do not have the capability to manifest, their qualities and aspects all at once. If we are looking at a vase of flowers, for instance, we cannot see the base of the vase unless we hold it up and look at it. We cannot see the flowers standing in the middle or at the back. Similarly, if there is a thunderstorm outside, we may not be able to hear the sounds coming from our refrigerator in the next room. Limitation of one object by another or by different conditions, then, is another form of manifestation that objects, both animate and inanimate, possess.

Given this mutually active interaction between the perceiver and the perceived, we might analyze Chisholm's definition of what perception is, as it will be helpful in understanding the relation between the subject and the object in the phenomenon of perception. Chisholm says that

> there is something that S *perceives* to be *f* means: there is an *x* which appears in some way to S; S takes *x* to be *f*; and S has adequate evidence for the proposition that *x* is *f*.[2]

This is a definition of perception with three parts and each part should be analyzed separately. 'There is an *x* which appears in some way to S' means that we have the two proper relata of perception: the perceiving subject, S and the perceived object, *x*; that there is a relation between the two in that one appears in some way to the other or one is appeared to by the other. The nature of this appearing as yet is not determined. In the second part, S identifies *x* as something, as an *f*. There is a judgmental act, an act of discernment where S recognizes *x* as something or other. Here, what we are considering are the sensible qualities of objects[3] only, for looking

[2] Chisholm (1957), p. 3. Note that this is the propositional sense of perception, only.

[3] Even if Chisholm does not make such a distinction between qualities, I believe that such a distinction is necessary here, as what we are dealing with is sense perception. Touching a fabric, an

at a brand new hi-fi set, one cannot always be expected to take it as an 'expensive' hi-fi set, especially if she does not know anything about the market prices. But she can nonetheless take it as a huge device, as size is an immediately sensible quality. It should be noted, however, that I am not restricting *f* to only its sensible qualities here. Physical properties, i.e. the sensible qualities, of an object are in the objective realm: they are immediately accessible to everybody, for they inhere in the physical object itself, whether we perceive them or not. Size, color, shape, etc. are what makes objects the objects they are. Even though we may not be able to perceive them precisely, we would still be able to have an idea about how big a tree is, how soft a woolen sweater is, or what color the lilacs in the garden are. Qualities such as costliness, on the other hand, exist so long as we attribute them to the objects that we perceive in the light of extra information. Once the manifestation of the object is combined with the extra information, we infer qualities like costliness. In this sense, a subject may be said to be able to perceive something as a square, black box, or even as just a *thing* even though she may be unable to identify it as an expensive stereo system. For I do not think that a person, or a child who has no knowledge of money, would be able to identify anything as costly in a square box. The distinction I introduce, therefore, should only be taken as a distinction in terms of priority of accessibility, rather than of perceptibility.

---

average person would only be able to perceive the sensible qualities such as roughness, softness or smoothness of the fabric, that is, qualities that are immediately available to the sense organs. She would not be able to judge whether it is expensive or not, if she is not in the textile industry. Qualities like costliness or cheapness are not inherent in the objects; they are "secondary qualities" in that they are only attributed to objects once we acquire additional information about them. A person who knows about the textile industry would be able to perceive qualities like costliness. We infer the costliness of an object once we obtain some extra knowledge pertaining to the use, function or value of that object. In a sense, we have inferential perceptual experience with regards to these secondary qualities which is dependent upon extra information other than the information yielded by the object itself.

The third part, Chisholm says, can be explained in terms of its being reasonable for S to believe in *x*'s *f*ness[4]. Perceiving is an epistemic event like knowing or believing for Chisholm. Some perceptual propositions are more reasonable, or more evident, for S to believe, some are not. The import of this definition involves the fact that S can form beliefs about the external world with the help of evidence, perhaps from previous experiences, for it is clear that beginning with the second part, a propositional attitude develops within the subject on the basis of her perceptual experiences. This epistemic form of perception conforms to the general conception of perception as yielding belief. Later on, Chisholm gives an adequate evidence criterion for S's being appeared to in a way. When S is appeared to in some way by the object of perception, he also "has adequate evidence for the proposition that he is being appeared to in that particular way"[5]. But it is not enough for S to have this kind of evidence to have the same kind of evidence for the proposition that *x* is *f*. Only if "there are statements that are *probable* in relation to those appearing statements"[6] may a situation satisfy the adequate evidence condition. In the chapter concerning sensations, I will elaborate the idea that this being appeared to is itself a perceptual experience.

A distinction that Dretske makes between epistemic and nonepistemic perception is necessary to mention here, for, as Chisholm also states, not all perception is perceiving *that*. In other words, it is not the case that when we perceive an apple, we always perceive *that* it is an apple. The first part of Chisholm's definition of propositional perception constitutes perceiving *x* by itself. Dretske frequently mentions the difference between these two ways of perception and endorses *nonepistemic* perception as a way to understand perceiving *x*. He calls

[4] Ibid., pp. 4-27.
[5] Ibid., p. 68.
[6] Ibid., p. 68.

attention to the difference between seeing "*objects* and *things*" and seeing "*facts* about these things."[7] In this sense, we may perceive an object without being able to satisfy all three parts of the definition of propositional perception. I may be a foreigner to a mountainous area, having seen no mountains before. What is more, it may be the case that I have never been told anything about mountains. Going to a place like Tibet, I would certainly perceive Mount Everest but I would not perceive that it is a mountain, let alone that it is the famous roof of the Earth. I would, then, have no beliefs essential to, or specifically related to, my seeing Everest, yet I would see it. This, of course, is not the first time I have seen anything, but the first time I have seen a mountain, yet without knowing what I see is a mountain. I would definitely have beliefs, but they would not be associated with or related to mountains. That is why my seeing Everest does not constitute a mere sensation but a perceptual experience, and why, as Dretske puts it, a wedge is being driven between perception and conception[8]. According to Dretske, not all our perceptual experiences seem to involve conceptual facts or concepts, at least concerning the object that we perceive. However, even in the nonepistemic sense of perception, the question that comes to mind is, is it possible to perceive anything without any concepts? Or, is it possible to perceive something without conceiving anything about what is being perceived? In Chapter IV, these questions will be answered. Now, we can go on to another aspect of perception, that is, its relation or affinity with sensations.

[7] Dretske (2000), p. 98. The verb 'to see' functions here as 'to perceive'.
[8] Ibid., p. 107.

CHAPTER III

SENSATIONS

One way to distinguish sensations from perception is to say that "[s]ensations are the effects of objects on the faculty of sensibility (the sensory organs taken collectively)",[9] whereas perception involves more than mere physical effects on the sensory organs- it involves recognition, discernment, understanding. In other words, it involves a process of judgment. If what the sense organs do is just convey physical signals to the brain, then merely by having an object in our visual field we do not perceive it. It is not the sense organs that do the perceiving, something else is necessary for perception to take place. I will suggest that what is ordinarily called sensation in the psychological and philosophical terminology is indeed perceptual, owing to its informational, recognitional and discerning qualities. Let us look into a traditional description of sensation from the literature of psychology, where the distinction between sensation and perception is more clear-cut, in order to see how sensations in this traditional sense are perceptual, and why the term "sensation" should apply only to physical effects of the object on the 'faculty of sensibility'.

Hermann Helmholtz claims that "sensations do not provide direct access to objects and events but only serve the mind as signs of reality"[10]. He further divides sensations into two spheres. There are sensations which belong to different senses,

[9] Kitcher (1990), p. 36. Kitcher, interpreting Kant's analysis of perception, tells us that Kant distinguishes between sense impressions and sensory representations. While sensory representations, intuitions in Kant's terminology, are "subjectively available representations of external or internal objects produced by outer or inner sense", sensations are explained as "the effects of objects on the faculty of sensibility (the sensory organs taken collectively)" (p.36). Kant also takes sensations, which are "caused by the sensible object", as "the matter of sensory representation." Sensations, or the effects of objects on our sensory organs, are not 'standardly' perceived.

[10] Wozniak (1992), chapter II, section 3.

such as “blue, warm, sweet, and high-pitched”[11] that he says are “differences in the modality of the sensations”[12]; and there are sensations which are “of the same sense”[13], indicating a difference in *quality* such as blue and green and violet[14]. In other words, sensations are distinguished according to the sense organ they belong to, such as visual sensations and tactile sensations. They are further distinguished among each other according to the quality they yield, such as a visual sensation of blue and a visual sensation of green. Helmholtz makes this distinction in terms of the possibility of a transition from and/or comparison of one quality to another. In other words, while it is possible to “cross over from blue through violet and carmine to scarlet”, “one cannot ask whether sweet is more like red or more like blue”[15]. This is not to say that the two classes of sensations overlap, it is rather to divide and sub-divide sensations. Sensations of color constitute one class, and under it sensation of blue, green and yellow fall. So while a sensation of blue is different from that of sweet, which is a sensation of taste, it is also different from a sensation of green, with which it falls under the same class. The difference is that a transition from and/or comparison of blue to green is possible, whereas such a relation does not hold between blue and sweet.

According to Helmholtz, every sensory nerve, "when excited even by the most varied stimuli, produces a sensation only within its own specific circle of quality".[16] That is, when one receives an auditory stimulus, one has auditory sensations, not visual or tactile ones. However, as may be the case with prosthetic

[11] Helmholtz (1878), p. 2.
[12] Ibid., p. 2.
[13] Ibid., p. 2.
[14] Ibid., p. 2.
[15] Ibid., p. 2.
[16] Ibid., p. 2.

devices, one sensation may be translated into another[17]. For Helmholtz, sensations constitute a necessary step on the way to perception. He says perception "requires an active, unconscious, automatic, logical process on the part of the perceiver which utilizes the information provided by sensation to infer the properties of external objects and events"[18]

This account raises the question: how can one be aware of having this sensation rather than that sensation, and hence make such a rational inference, without already perceiving the kind of sensation she has? In other words, if it is not through a magical process that I know that I am having a blue sensation, I must surely have some perceptual knowledge or awareness of the sensation I am having. Sensation does not seem to yield anything – there is no story to tell, no explaining to do, if there is sensation all by itself, without the subject perceiving that she is having that sensation. In other words, if I do not perceive that I am having sensations of such and such quality, information about the so-called sensations would not even be allowed as premises in my unconscious inference to what I perceive. For I have to have knowledge of my sensations in order to make use of them as premises of my perceptual inference. Unless an account of my knowledge of my sensations can be given in another way, it will remain as a magical step. From the fact that these sensations must be perceived in order to play an inferential role, sensations become perceptual experiences, and consequently do not play the role assigned to them by Helmholtz. The perceiver, first of all, will perceive that she is 'sensing' something inside or outside herself. She will also perceive the quality of that sensing, but this

[17] Dennett (1992). Dennett explains, sketching the experiments by Bach-y-Rita, how prosthetic vision is made possible for blind subjects via low-resolution cameras whose signals are spread over the back or the belly of the subject, 'in a grid of either electrical or mechanically vibrating tinglers called tactors." (p. 339). The subjects, it is said, learn to interpret these tactual sensations as visual ones in a matter of hours.

[18] Wozniak (1992), chapter II, section 3.

perception would make what she experiences not a sensation, but a perception already. In short, sensation never remains a mere sensation in the Helmholtzian account if it is to be part of an experience. To be a part of an experience is to be apprehended in one way or another. And in the case of perceptual experiences, sensations are incorporated via the act of perceiving. Sensation becomes the object, rather than a cause of perception in this sense.

Merleau-Ponty is a thinker who assumes a suspicious attitude towards sensation as conceived by Helmholtz, with regard to its pure and isolated status as a step to perception. At the very beginning of his investigation in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he contends that we should not "feel justified in *theory* in distinguishing within experience a layer of 'impressions.'"[19] His example is a white patch on a homogeneous background. In the elementary perception of this white patch, each part of the shape arouses the "expectation of more than it contains," such as belonging to the background, being different from the background, being placed on the background, so that it is already "charged with a meaning"[20]. One cannot discern a pure, isolated sensation in this sense. What is more, a pure quality like white is not an element of perception. Like Dretske in *Naturalizing the Mind*, and unlike Helmholtz, Merleau-Ponty stresses that "red and green are not sensations, they are the sensed (*sensibles)* and quality is not an element of consciousness but a property of the object."[21] The qualities that we associate with sensations are nothing but "an element in a spatial configuration"[22]. As Taylor Carman says, in considering Sellars's and Heidegger's criticism of the *given*,

> [i]t is a mistake… to construe the qualities of things in the perceptual environment as qualities of experience itself, and then suppose that we have

[19] Merleau-Ponty (1962), p. 3.
[20] Ibid., p. 4.
[21] Ibid., p. 4.
[22] Ibid., p. 4.

> an immediate epistemic acquaintance with those inner qualities on the basis of which we must infer or construct our knowledge of the world.[23]

Disposing of 'pure, isolated' sensation as Merleau-Ponty does, for "[t]his pure sensation would amount to no sensation, and thus to no feeling at all."[24], we can move on to another account which allows sensations to be content and information bearing perceptual states, like that of D. M. Armstrong.

Armstrong argues that bodily sensations, such as our tactual sensations, are indeed 'bodily and tactual perceptions'[25] in the sense that we "gain information about the current state of our material environment and our body", and "the current state of one particular material object."[26] The sensation one has of pain carries the information that there is a 'bodily disturbance', for instance, and causes the organism to react so as to relieve it. It may be the case that one feels pain when there is no reason to feel it, or feels no pain when one is seriously wounded. In both cases, we are being deceived by our perceptions. Yet deception is not the crucial point here. It is the information and response in turn that concern us. For even when we are deceived, our sensory nerves are excited and neurons are fired, yet in a mistaken fashion. If perception is what allows us to gain information about and respond to things and events around us (including our bodies)[27], so-called sensations such as pain or itching do deserve to be called perceptual experiences, for they convey a meaning to the subject having the experience. What is called a sensation of pain, in that sense, is already a perception for the subject, for she perceives a bodily disturbance. The fact that pain is felt means that pain is necessarily perceived by the

---

[23] Carman (2004), p. 53.
[24] Merleau-Ponty (1962), p. 5.
[25] For a more recent discussion on bodily perceptions, see M. G. Martin's "Bodily Awareness: A Sense of Ownership" in *The Body and the Self*. (1995).
[26] Armstrong (1993), pp. 306-307.
[27] As Armstrong observes: "the biological function of perception is to give the organism information about the current state of its own body and its physical environment, information that will assist the organism in the conduct of life." (1993), p. 209.

subject, and that it carries the information, the meaning, that there is some bodily disturbance that needs to be relieved. In Merleau-Ponty's words,

> [o]nce the prejudice of sensation has been banished, a face, a signature, a form of behavior cease to be mere 'visual data' whose psychological meaning is to be sought in our inner experience, and the mental life of others becomes an immediate object, a whole charged with immanent meaning. More generally it is the very notion of the immediate which is transformed: henceforth the immediate is no longer the impression, the object which is one with the subject, but the meaning, the structure, the spontaneous arrangement of parts.[28]

Merleau-Ponty's notion of a perceptual field is also significant for seeing why we cannot consider sensation prior to perception. In describing what vision or a field of vision would be like, were it only an "effect of a discrete stimulus"[29], he states that

> [w]e ought, then, to perceive a segment of the world precisely delimited, surrounded by a zone of blackness, packed full of qualities with no interval between them, held together by definite relationships of size similar to those lying on the retina. The fact is that experience offers nothing like this, and we shall never, using the world as our starting point, understand what a *field of vision* is.[30]

In other words, our experience is never as clear-cut as a sensation would be. A sensation, as understood by Merleau-Ponty, is limited to one unique quality; isolated; and unique in itself. It is 'fine-grained' and easily discernible. In experience, however, so-called sensations are merged into each other; they are present as a whole, and they are not easily discernable to the untrained eye (or the ear or the tongue, for that matter). We do not have an experience of every single tint of blue, but an entire sky when we look above. It is not as if we experience "blue shade no. 1" followed by "blue shade no. 12", etc. separately and then bring them together. A blue of a unified quality is manifested to us within which we can scrutinize different

[28] Merleau-Ponty (1962), p. 58.
[29] Carman (2004), p. 54.
[30] Merleau-Ponty (1962), p. 5.

shades only if we look closely enough, or if we try to analyze it. We cannot, therefore, get away with just saying “I have a sensation of blue” when we are speaking of sensations, for the notion of sensation implies a precision that is lacking in our experience. I have a sensation of blue when I experience two blue objects such as the sky and the sea, but they would be different from each other, which would not be captured or explained away with the same blue sensation. Nor does our visual field represent its edges to us as black or gray[31], and exclude what lies beyond as mere blankness.

The reason for bringing up sensations was to clarify the reason why sensations are posited in the first place: to function as sensory experiences which do not seem to involve concepts. For it is quite common to call our perceptual experiences of known/unknown objects or properties "mere sensations".[32] In what follows, I will try to elucidate the two distinctions concerning concepts and the possession of concepts to see whether, in what way and to what extent the content of perceptual experience is conceptual.

[31] Ibid. p. 6.

[32] If the notion of sensation is to be retained, however, I would accept a definition of sensation which is restricted to the physiological processes of an organism. For it cannot be denied that an organism responds to various stimuli in various ways, sometimes even in mistaken ways. The study of these sensations, then, would not be the concern of philosophy but of natural sciences, such as biology, neurology, physiology, and chemistry. Nonetheless, once these physiological stimuli are interpreted so as to allow the subject of the experience to distinguish among these stimuli, they rise to the perceptual domain and can no longer be called sensations.

CHAPTER IV

CONCEPTUAL VS. NON-CONCEPTUAL PERCEPTUAL CONTENT

Thinkers like Dennett and McDowell have argued that the content of perceptual experience is always conceptual. On the other hand, Bermudez, Dretske, Peacocke and several other thinkers maintain that perceptual content is not always conceptual. I will not repeat the complete flow of arguments produced on either side. My concern is rather with the question of which concepts we are talking about. Are concepts linguistic only, or can they also be non-linguistic? Are we concerned with the concepts that apply to or are about the objects of perception only? Or are we also considering the concepts that the perceiver, the subject, has about herself? Once these issues are clarified, we can go on to discuss whether perceptual content is conceptual, partially non-conceptual or whether it can be fully non-conceptual.

In what follows, what I mean by *concept* or *possessing a concept* will become clear as I make the distinctions set out above. First of all, I believe there to be a distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic concepts[33]. Linguistic concepts, articulated or not, are capable of being rendered into words in a language. To have linguistic concepts, one has to have the capacity to have a language. Non-linguistic concepts, on the other hand, come with a recurring feeling of discrimination and recognition, and cannot or do not find expression in verbal language. These are feelings which recur through time, and which the subject recognizes as they recur.

[33] Bermudez suggests such a distinction and a shift in the philosophical account of what it is to possess a concept in his "Nonconceptual Mental Content". However he does not go into detail. See Bermudez (2003).

Animals and newborn human infants do have such concepts that they acquire without having the linguistic means to think about or articulate them.

The account of concepts that I would like to offer is more or less captured in the writings of Ruth Millikan. Millikan discusses what a concept is in terms of its being a capacity and in relation to the concept of a substance. For her,

> a 'substance' is something about which one can learn from one encounter things to apply on other occasions *where this possibility is not coincidental but grounded*. That is, there is an explanation or cause of the sameness.[34]

A substance for Millikan is a concrete thing, or even an event a child comes to distinguish in thought and in ability. The "concept" of a substance, on the other hand, is "the capacity to represent the substance in thought for the purpose of information gathering and storage, inference, and ultimately the guidance of action."[35] With these two definitions in hand, one can say that concepts are what allow us to work on the materials given to us, to represent them in thought and guide our actions. As Millikan also suggests, "The substance concept is distinguished by the role it is ready to play, accumulating additional means of identification, and anticipating certain kinds of inductions as likely to hold."[36] It is not the case that we immediately construct complex concepts for substances, but the complexity develops gradually. This kind of acquisition and development of substance concepts can be applied to concepts in general, but I believe Millikan's choice of substance concepts is due to the fact that substances are the basic, fundamental things we encounter in the world, such as chairs, tables, glasses, beds, etc. It is mainly the practicality of the use of concepts that she is interested in, as is clear from her definition above. For, what purpose would a concept serve, were it not to involve some information about the

[34] Millikan (2000), p. 530.
[35] Ibid. p. 530 – 31.
[36] Millikan (1998), p. 8.

thing it is a concept of, hence allow us to infer other things from this concept, and act accordingly? Substance concepts, in this sense, come in handy, since what we fundamentally encounter in our daily life is mostly substances. In our daily encounter with individual objects, we never see the whole picture before us all at once. In other words, we do not see an object from all different angles and aspects, nor do we know how it behaves under different conditions. We may encounter a yellow sponge under lamplight in a room for the first time, yet in order to learn how it behaves in water, how it looks in dark, or what happens when it is worn out, we need to experience these individual situations. As we experience, we also enrich our concept of a sponge. Non-linguistic concepts of the sort that young infants begin to acquire as soon as they are born, could be considered as such substance concepts that develop into complex and linguistic ones as they grow up.

Identification is another important aspect of concept acquisition, where recognizing one substance as the same substance under different conditions is important. Not all conditions under which objects manifest themselves to us are satisfied at once when we experience an object, which means one is liable to err in identifying a substance before having experienced it in an adequate number of different situations in which one learns different things about the object. One may confuse a real flower with a fake one for a while before she learns that fake flowers do not fade away yet the real ones do. The concept one has of a flower, thus, develops into a complex one with knowledge and experience. Prior to that, all the plants and plant-like things that have petals, leaves and a stem would be identified as simply ‘flower’. As Millikan puts it, the point is that

> filling out the concept into a more and more adequate one happens in degrees. There is no special thing that gets added at some later point that suddenly makes it into a "real concept". It can be filled out more; it can

> get better and better. But there is no magic moment when it has attained some essence required for true concepthood.[37]

In the following pages, I will develop a similar theory for concepts in general where I will call these complex concepts full-fledged, while maintaining that it is not necessary to have full-fledged concepts in order to have perceptual experiences with conceptual content.

The concept of 'self' is one concept which is non-linguistically conceptualized before it is also linguistically acquired. We often think of animals like cats and dogs as acting out of mere instinctual urges. However, for a cat to be able to distinguish itself from other cats, or human beings, or the environment, it has to possess a non-linguistic concept of 'self'. With this recurring, persistent feeling of the 'self', the cat is able to survive, and maneuver through things. Human infants begin to acquire this non-linguistic concept of the 'self' as opposed to things outside themselves as soon as they find themselves in the world. There is non-verbal thinking going on in the acquisition of this concept. In other words, infants unify the recurrent feelings of the 'self' as opposed to others. They thus possess the non-linguistic concept of the 'self' as a unity, as distinct from the *other*. This conception of 'self' is not merely confined to an intelligible realm; it has a physical, material dimension, as well - namely the body. The body plays a crucial role in the formation of the concept of 'self', for it is only through *this* body and not another that I experience and respond to the world; it is only when *this* body sees or touches the walls that I see and feel the room I am in. The body, as Merleau-Ponty also stresses, is "our general medium for having a world"[38] at the center of which one's body stands.

Once this non-linguistic concept of 'self' is acquired, one is in a position to distinguish herself from *others*, through which distinction come the non-linguistic

[37] Millikan (1998), p. 14.
[38] Merleau-Ponty (1962), p. 146.

concepts for objects and events. However, this is not to say that acquisition of the 'self' concept is independent from 'other'. This point will be clarified when discussing Fichte's notion of 'I'. And when language is acquired, these concepts gradually begin to attain a linguistic status as well, though they need not. The recurring feelings begin to be associated with verbal expressions that replace the non-linguistic thought. Once they are in use, they influence the way one experiences, expresses, or judges one's states. The non-linguistic concepts, however, may still remain in one's experience without finding expression in words. It may be claimed, in this sense, that the non-linguistic concepts' transformation into linguistic ones is also an improvement, a development in concept-building. That is to say, a concept becomes more of a complex one once it becomes lingual.

With regard to linguistic concepts, then, our experiences contain non-verbal, non-linguistic concepts that most contemporary thinkers who accept non-conceptual content would regard as non-conceptual. Applying the distinction above, we can say that they are both right and wrong in their claim. They are right that these experiences are non-conceptual in the sense that their content is not verbal or linguistic. But they are wrong, because if the feeling of recurrence or recognition occurs, these experiences are already conceptual, even though non-linguistically. In *Remarks On Colour*, Wittgenstein says that "[i]n everyday life we are virtually surrounded by impure colors. All the more remarkable that we have formed a concept of *pure* colors."[39] The fact that we have associated a color, say red, with a general concept *red* does not and should not commit us to the idea that unless we also have a verbal concept for a particular shade as well, we do not perceive shades or impure appearances of the color red. Non-verbally we may already, and we

[39] Wittgenstein (1977), p. 25e.

usually do, have such color experiences the recurrence of which we do recognize. We just do not always capture the exact sense of that experience in a linguistic manner. This is the idea, I believe, that underlies some of the arguments in favor of the non-conceptual content of perception, especially the arguments concerning rich representational content of experience and fine-grained representational content[40]. I will examine this issue within the contemporary discussion in more detail below.

Recognition of the recurrence is crucial in acquiring non-linguistic concepts. But what if this recognition has not occurred yet? Or what if the subject who already has a grasp of the concept of 'self' (linguistically or non-linguistically) is encountering an object, a property or a relation for the first time? The acquisition of the concept of 'self' is singled out here, for I surmise and argue in the Addendum that without the concept of 'self' being acquired, no further concepts can be acquired, nor can there be any experience. Christopher Peacocke considers these matters and concludes that the representation of an object or a property that has been encountered for the first time constitutes the non-conceptual content of perceptual experiences, for it cannot be captured by recognitional concepts[41]. Such content, according to Peacocke, still constitutes the fine-grained representational content of experience. He does not say that this experience is entirely non-conceptual, but partially so. It may be true that the subject does not yet have an adequate concept of the perceived object or the property - a full-fledged (complex) concept which captures the perceived entity as a unity, as a whole. However, there is a sense in which the subject already has some concepts concerning that object or property: that it is *something,* that it is not known, in other words, it might be a case of recognition via negation. This representation is not, therefore, non-conceptual. Perception still

[40] See esp. Peacocke (2001).
[41] Ibid., p. 7.

occurs, for a meaning is being conveyed by the experience even when something is being encountered for the first time, and the subject is able to distinguish the object of perception as something other than herself and also from the things she already has a concept for. Peacocke is right that none of the concepts she has adequately captures, or corresponds to the entirety of this newly-experienced object. Peacocke's example is a subject's experience of a pyramid which does not include the concept of a pyramid in its representational content, for the subject is seeing a pyramid for the first time[42]. The subject, it appears, does not have a concept that properly corresponds to a concept in this scenario, which is why the experience is partially non-conceptual for Peacocke. But this is not enough to show that the experience is non-conceptual. A subject perceiving an object for the first time would not be immediately able to judge precisely what she is perceiving. In other words, she would be perceiving the object without constructing an adequate concept (linguistic or non-linguistic) for it in the first place. Yet, she will have a conceptual experience of it which will capture this first experience. However, a meaning, a piece of information, will be conveyed to her in that she will apprehend it as something to be perceived, then to be known; as something belonging to the external world; and more importantly as a thing. Therefore the subject in Peacocke's example, especially if we consider her to have concepts regarding various other shapes, will of course have perceptual content which is conceptual in the case of a pyramid seen for the first time, as well. After all, if concepts are learnt and improved upon, we would not expect anyone to have concepts that exactly correspond with all that the object of experience consists of, i.e. all its features, its implications, connotations, associations and relations with other things. We either fill in the concept, that is, load it with more

[42] Peacocke (2001), pp. 15-16.

detailed meaning, or split it to make way for new concepts. It is, as Millikan says, just an added frill[43]. So far as the concepts that apply to the object of perception are concerned, perceptual experience will be partially non-conceptual, since there will not be any proper concepts in the conceptual vocabulary of the subject that could refer to the experienced object as a whole, or identify the nature of the object. The object will not have its own proper concept *per se*, in that no concept would be able to refer to an object in its entirety. This relaxed notion of non-conceptuality, that is, the lack of a proper - or holistic - concept, would comply with Peacocke's defense of non-conceptual perceptual content, which he maintains to constitute the 'rich representational content' of perceptual experience not captured by concepts.

It also seems that if a concept is to properly correspond to its object in order to make the content of our perceptual experience conceptual, almost all our experiences of the external would be non-conceptual, for we usually do not have enough information about the things we encounter in life. For instance, my concept of a 'car', to be a proper concept, needs to contain all the properties that make up a car. Yet all I know about cars is that they have motors, wheels, and a steering wheel and that when you turn the key, it runs. I have no idea about the mechanism that makes a car run, nor what a carburetor is. With the car concept that I have, it seems that I would have a partially non-conceptual perceptual experience of cars forever. We are not able to know every little detail of the things we perceive, therefore the concepts we have of them are mostly deficient. We keep improving the concepts we have of things, but we rarely end up with ones that completely correspond to them. On the other hand, every time we encounter new objects or events, or re-encounter them with the accompaniment of different ideas, information or knowledge, we do

[43] Millikan (1998), p. 3.

have adequate concepts concerning them for that time, for we can refer to them adequately. Next time, we may improve upon our concepts with more experience and information, and the concepts we have would be adequate again. We acquire and develop concepts as we experience, hence we cannot rigidly detach what is conceptual and what is not from the content of our experience. A concept is not a static notion, it is enhanced. What it refers to may not change, but how it refers to it does. In this respect, we cannot say that our experience has non-conceptual content through looking back to it from the most advanced, or complex concepts we have of things.

Contemporary discussions of perceptual content revolve around the fine-grained content of perceptual experience, where discrimination rather than recognition of the perceived quality occurs. Whether such content has a conceptual character is a matter of disagreement, and unclarity about what is meant by 'conceptual content' also blurs the issue. Peacocke takes 'conceptual content' to mean the kind of content "that can be the content of judgment and belief"[44]. Here he includes demonstrative and indexical concepts, too. Being able to discriminate a shade of blue once, yet not being able to recognize the same shade later, would make one's perceptual content non-conceptual, since recognition is an essential constituent of concept-formation. However, I believe that this argument is objectionable in one way. By making recognition an essential constituent of concept formation, Peacocke asks us to think of concepts as enduring in time; that is, having a temporal consistency. But conceptualization in terms of recognition can also be considered time-specific if we take discrimination in a broad sense. Being able to discriminate a shade of blue at time *t* implies that the perceiver also recognizes that shade at *t* as a

[44] Peacocke (2001), p. 5.

shade, as a shade of blue, and what is more, as a shade of blue different from the other shades of blue that she knows of. At *t*, then, she can be said to have both discriminated and recognized that shade, even if for only a specific period of time, and even if she cannot recognize it the second time she sees it as the same shade she had seen before. But the recognition would occur once again the second time. Consistent recognition in the perception of such fine-grained qualities over time would come through training and memory, I believe. What happens with patients suffering from short term memory loss, after all, is much like the phenomenon explained above. They have to re-learn everything over and over again, once their attention is distracted and they forget what they are doing. They are introduced to the same people over and over again, but each time, even though they can discriminate them as 'people', they fail to recognize who they are. By the same token, one can discriminate and recognize a shade of blue for brief periods, yet not be able to recognize the shade as the same shade when she sees it for the second time. These may be termed 'temporary' conceptualizations. McDowell refers to such conceptualizations which persist "possibly for quite a short period"[45] as recognitional. Peacocke objects to McDowell's notion of recognitional concepts on the grounds that "there cannot be recognition when the perceptual property is encountered for the first time in a given way"[46]. Here he seems to regard recognition as identification proper rather than as simple acknowledgement. One can perfectly well acknowledge a property encountered for the first time, as distinct from a manifold of other similar qualities, without having the means to identify it as *that* property. As such, for a short period of time this recognition would allow the

[45] McDowell (1994), p. 172.
[46] Peacocke (2001), p. 14.

perceiver to make a judgment or form a belief, even if the judgment or the belief is also short-lived. Hence his perception becomes conceptual in Peacocke's sense.

What is more, it can be said, following Millikan, that "[i]dentifying things the same way that someone else does is an added frill, more clearly labeled as having the same "conception" rather than the same "concept".[47] Conception is about the way people conceive things and events, and form ideas about them. And for having conceptions, I assume that we need to experience several instances of the same thing or event. In Millikan's terms:

> The conception one has of a substance is the ways one knows to identify that substance plus the disposition to project certain kinds of invariances rather than others from one's experiences with it.[48]

She explains concepts, on the other hand, by referring to ecological psychology, and says that they serve a functional role, that of identifying and classifying, and the "relation of the conception to the extension of the concept is not a logical one but, in the broad sense, historical."[49]

Think of the colors that people confuse all the time, about whose quality they even argue with friends. Some people, for instance, identify turquoise as a shade of green while some others think it is a shade of blue. It is not easy to convince people about the quality of turquoise once they have made up their minds. I believe the conceptions people have of green and blue are sometimes so radically different from each other that they do not always make the same identification about colors like turquoise. For instance, if I am familiar with more shades of green and have been exposed to green things under different conditions, I would be likely to identify

[47] Millikan (1998), p. 3.
[48] Ibid., p. 3.
[49] Ibid., p. 6.

turquoise as green. Some of the shades I experienced were perhaps very similar to turquoise in quality.

Another consideration that should be mentioned is the quality of these concepts. In speaking of non-conceptual content, I believe that the defenders of the theory mistakenly compare the concepts different people have. This mistake is captured by Millikan in her distinction between conception and concept. I believe that we cannot use the same conceptual considerations to compare the experience of an infant and an adult of the same thing. For once, concepts are acquired and are always in the process of development. The more experience one has of the same object or event, the more fine-grained her concepts that apply to this object or event become. We cannot expect, therefore, the infant's concepts to match the quality of the concepts of an adult. But this should not commit us to call the infant's experience non-conceptual.

We learn interesting facts about infants' perception of the world and of themselves from developmental psychology which should be incorporated into the philosophical discussions of concepts. Meltzoff and Moore discuss the infants' understanding of physical objects in a way that makes it difficult to deny the significance of early experience of infants. They consider the objects that are in an infant's conception of objects 'proto-objects', as they agree that "the infants' earliest conceptions of objects are not the same as adults', but only early steps toward the mature attainment"[50], since they are simple and primitive. We learn that infants are able to maintain the identity of these proto-objects for a steady state of the visual world between 0-4 months of age[51], which is considered as the first level of development; that is, they "can reidentify a proto-object as the same one across two

[50] Meltzoff and Moore (1995), p. 44.
[51] Ibid., p. 45. Table 1.

encounters without their requiring that it followed a continuous space-time path between the encounters."[52] Even at this early stage of development, it is clear that infants sustain the conceptual abilities an adult has, yet in a simpler manner. The identity is 'unique' as is the case with adult perception, and works for the infant to maintain a steady view of the world. Meltzoff and Moore call this identity "unique" to make clear that the "identity referred to is the object's unique or essential identity and not featural sameness."[53] In connection with the arguments concerning concepts in this chapter, it is clear that there should be no denial of conceptual content to infant perception. Furthermore, toward the end of their 9-18 period, which constitutes the third developmental level, infants manifest the behavior showing that they "restructure their concepts of objects."[54] They begin to maintain identity in 'transformations for producing occluded objects"[55]. Infants' exhibition of concept-acquisition and concept-building behavior at this early stage agrees with Millikan's and my own view on concepts.

To add a quick note here in order to prevent the private language argument, I assume that we share a common form of life and a language game with most biological beings (in various manners and to different degrees), especially with the ones of our own species. Hence, when we speculate on the behavior of infants, I believe that we attribute to them more than just biological similarity. We also allow a common platform upon which we all interact with and relate to each other. After all, the coping skills of infants and adults are not so different. What is more, I believe that it is a mistake to always look from the adult human perspective and pass judgment on beings that are not thus. Rather, we should at least keep in mind that the

[52] Ibid., p. 44.
[53] Ibid., p. 45.
[54] Ibid., p. 60.
[55] Ibid., p. 45. Table 1.

core or the foundation of adult perspective and coping skills lies in the more primitive infant perspective and coping skills.

It is true that identification plays an important role in conceptualist theories of perceptual content. For Dennett, for example, to perceive a thing is to identify its nature. Hence the statement "seeing is believing"[56]. If perception is identification proper, that is, being able to judge that the perceived object is an apple, then perceiving an object for the first time would require a previous encounter with that object on the basis of which to identify the present object of perception. In other words, if this is the first time I am seeing an apple, I cannot identify it as an apple, for I have no basis on which to judge what I see as an apple. Without there being such a previous encounter, all first perceptions would count as non-conceptual. However, in first perceptions, there is apprehension and acknowledgement of the object of perception. Acknowledgment would allow the perceiver to gradually acquire a proper concept about the nature of the perceived object or quality as a whole. Dennett proposes "micro-cognitions" as capturing what he means by seeing is believing. He does not necessarily imply identification proper. These micro-cognitions help us recognize, discriminate or identify, or "in some way 'judge' the presence of something"[57] but not necessarily as a thing of a certain kind. As such, he includes acknowledgement in his notion of identification. Dennett's theory strengthens the view that perception cannot be non-conceptual, and at the same time the view that there can be perceptual experiences where a full-fledged concept applying to the nature of the perceived object as a whole is lacking. Considering these facts about concept possession and concepts, it seems clear to me that a non-conceptual perception (whether linguistic or non-linguistic) is impossible.

[56] Dennett (1992), p. 362.
[57] Dennett (1994), p. 514.

What is more, perceptual experience cannot commence without a minimal conceptualization of 'self'. As Peacocke maintains, I believe that "no creature can be in content-bearing states unless it grasps that the distal environment has a minimal degree of objectivity and is able to successfully re-identify particular locations within it", and that "this would be impossible for a creature that lacked a concept of the first-person."[58] Even in its most primitive stage, perception includes at least a non-linguistic conceptualization of the 'self' as the reference point through which the perceiver apprehends the external world, with or without making advanced judgments about the perceived objects, properties or relations.

Merleau-Ponty says that

> to perceive in the full sense of the word... is not to judge, it is to apprehend an immanent sense in the sensible before judgment begins. The phenomenon of true perception offers, therefore, a meaning inherent in the signs, and of which judgment is merely the optional expression.[59]

Perceptual experiences, therefore, do not always include full-fledged concepts and advanced judgments and identifications, but this does not make their content non-conceptual. All these experiences are made possible through an elementary conception of 'self'. In the Addendum, I will elaborate on the idea that conception of 'self' is the basic necessary condition of perceptual experience.

[58] Bermudez (2003) quoted from Peacocke (1992).
[59] Merleau-Ponty (1962), p. 35.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Bermudez uses the phrase "the idea of a way of representing the world that is not constrained by conceptual capacities"[60] to describe the formal notion of non-conceptual content. My principal endeavor throughout the thesis has been to characterize the content of perceptual experience in order to investigate whether perceptual content can be non-conceptual in the sense Bermudez and Peacocke maintain. I have offered several reasons why perceptual content cannot be non-conceptual, and tried to show in what ways it is conceptual. I asserted that the concept of 'self', be it a non-linguistic or a linguistic concept, is a necessary component of perception, and on that basis I argued that perceptual content cannot be non-conceptual. On that account, I maintained that our experience cannot represent what is not within our conceptual capacities, for with the concept of self, there unfolds the whole conceptual dimension of perceptual experience. Moreover, by arguing that even when a subject encounters a thing for the first time, conceptualization occurs if there is discrimination and recognition of this new object, I also argued that identification proper is not necessary for conceptualization, as that would eliminate the possibility of perceiving a thing the first time one experiences it. Asserting that identification proper is not necessary allows perception of things for which we do not have specific concepts, for a subject can and does have perceptual experiences of the external world, including her own body, without having an

[60] Bermudez (2003).

adequate stock of full-fledged concepts that apply adequately to the perceived object, relation or property. The fact that one already possesses the means to recognize or discriminate among these objects, relations and properties - and does so when encountering the world - allows her to perceive things and have perceptual, content-bearing experiences of them. For perception to be a bridge between ourselves and the world, that is, for perception to function properly, our perceptual experiences must have the conceptual content described above.

CHAPTER VI

ADDENDUM:

'SELF' AS THE INCEPTION OF PERCEPTION

In this Addendum chapter of the thesis, I would like to elaborate on the concept of 'self' that I have introduced in the previous chapters as a prospective outline for further reflection. I believe that the concept of 'self' propounded in this thesis is the inception point without which perceptual experiences have no content. To be able to acknowledge any experience, the subject has to be able to acknowledge herself as the entity experiencing. Possessing the concept of 'self' non-linguistically is enough for her experience to be called perceptual and content-bearing, for through this concept comes the apprehension of one's immediate environment as a separate entity. It is through the conception of the 'self', and owing to the position of the 'self' in the world, that experience surpasses mere physiological stimuli. Even new experiences which do not involve any concepts specific to the object *per se* would be unavailable without the concept of 'self' in the first place. A subject lacking a concept of 'self' would be unable to make the least discrimination required for perception, that of the subject as distinct from the object. Fichte, in his rigorous analyses to lay the foundations of the Science of Knowledge, argues that 'I' is the foundational principle that makes all knowledge possible. Fichte's 'I-hood' is the 'self' which is the reciprocal interdetermination of 'I' and 'not-I', in that once the 'I', the 'Ego', posits itself, the 'not-I' "forces the recognition that it is distinct from the Ego."[61] And with

[61] Helmholtz (1878), p. 6.

the conception of 'I', "we contrast ourselves to everything outside us, and not simply to other persons"[62]. I argued previously that perception was an interactive phenomenon. Here, in Fichte's philosophy, we can observe that it is not only the 'I' that is active by positing itself, but also the 'not-I', which forces itself upon the perceiver as distinct from the 'I'. 'I' makes, not only knowledge, but also experience possible.

Going back to developmental psychology, one point is especially worthy of notice: the infant's perception of human bodies as opposed to other things, and imitation of human behavior, which begins as early as the first minutes of birth. Meltzoff and Moore draw four inferences about imitation in infants based on recent research in the field:

> (a) the ability to imitate is innate, (b) it is not automatic but is under intentional control, (c) it is not purely rote but reveals infants' interpretations of social encounters, and (d) it is mediated by an internal representational system. In particular, the representational system is one that does not operate on sensory specific, but uses a modality-independent or 'supramodal' code that links acts that are seen and those that are done.[63]

It is observed in many experiments that infants imitate other beings as opposed to other animate beings or objects. There does seem to be recognition in infants concerning their resemblance to human beings rather than toys. Three pieces of evidence lead the researchers to suggest that there is "a differentiation in the supramodal system such that the representation of the other's body is separate from the representation of one's own body…. They are not confused."[64] One evidence is that given the voluntary nature of their response, infants store and access the information given in perception at a later time. Secondly, they correct their imitative act. And lastly, they show interest in being imitated themselves, that is they

[62] Fichte (1982), p. 74.
[63] Meltzoff and Moore (1995), p. 49.
[64] Ibid., p. 53.

recognize when they are being copied.[65] The awareness on the part of infants of their own bodies, and at the same time of others', is a very substantial hint for arguing that they have a primitive conception of self. Millikan considers the case of infants conceiving themselves as substances and developing a concept about themselves as such:

> "me" conceived as a substance begins with perceiving my body, then there is no particular problem about how a self concept begins. It rides on grasp of the substance template for persons, who are tracked in the first instance by their bodies.[66]

These results also immediately hint at the Fichtean discussion of the 'I' and 'not-I' which is shown to emerge very early, almost immediately after birth. As Meltzoff and Moore observe, "there is a primordial connection between self and other".[67] The infant knows its body through imitating others. In Fichtean terms, the 'I' posits itself through the 'not-I'.

Some, such as Bergson, might argue against Fichte by asserting an immediacy preceding possession of the concept of 'self' in which "there is no separation of subject and object"[68]. Merleau-Ponty calls such a notion a mistake committed by "believing that the thinking subject can become fused with the object thought about, and that knowledge can swell and be incorporated into being"[69]. Just as it was clear to Fichte when he posited the 'I' as the first principle without which experience and consequently knowledge would not be possible, so also Merleau-Ponty stresses the fact that "[a]s thinking subject, we are never the unreflective subject that we seek to know"[70]. This is not to entirely deny the existence of a purely unreflective stage with no concepts. It is to affirm the idea that we can never have

[65] For further discussion, see Meltzoff and Moore (1995), pp. 53-55.
[66] Millikan (1998), p. 10.
[67] Ibid., p. 53.
[68] Lewis, C. I. (1929), p. 46.
[69] Merleau-Ponty (1962), p. 62.
[70] Ibid., p. 62.

any knowledge about such a stage. Wildon Carr writes in explanation of what Bergson meant by pure perception that we "take an instant of conscious life, suppose memory entirely suppressed, so that the instant yields only the immediate experience it actually contains", but, Carr adds, we then have "neither selection nor contraction and consequently no image."[71] Can such an instant contain or yield perception? If we suppress the subject's entire memory, of herself as well as of the external world, we would be suppressing conscious life, too[72]. I believe there to be no perception at such an instant. If the subject cannot differentiate herself from the object at this instant, then perception cannot take place, since this immediate experience would be a blend, and would not contain the two relata of the perceptual phenomenon as distinct entities. Bergson describes what he calls pure perception in these words:

> a perception which exists in theory rather than in fact and would be possessed by a being placed where I am, living as I live, but absorbed in the present and capable, by giving up every form of memory, of obtaining a vision of matter both immediate and instantaneous.[73]

If we assume this being also deprived of a sense of 'self', however, we would not leave any room for perception, either. Bergson needs to grant that the sense of self is not suppressed in this perceiver, if he is to escape Merleau-Ponty's criticism.

The concept of 'self' advocated here has its origins in one's perception of one's own body as the location of experience and action. In one's concept of 'self', body plays a crucial role, in that it is through one's own body that one comes to experience oneself. Merleau-Ponty calls the body the natural self, and the subject of perception, for we "perceive the world with our body."[74] In so far as we are aware of this fact, we construct a concept of 'self' that applies to the owner of this body, and make a major discovery which accompanies all our perceptual experiences. Not all

[71] Carr (1918)., p. 473.
[72] Here, if I am not mistaken, consciousness is not used in its medical sense, but as reflectivity.
[73] Bergson (1911), p. 26.
[74] Merleau-Ponty (1962), p. 206.

thinkers would agree that the perceiver has a conceptual attitude about the 'self'. The notion of self is regarded by many as a pre-conceptual perceptual consciousness that accompanies or allows concept-use. I contend that self is conceptual, for it is the most elementary and primordial discrimination one makes, which constitutes the subject's experience, and influences her experiences from the very beginning. What is more, one identifies one's self constantly as "the one who experiences" at different times. I believe that this conceptualization of the 'self' accompanying all of one's experiences satisfies all the criteria put forward by various thinkers for what is required by a concept. This fact, I believe, can be clearly seen in infants' use of imitation and their apprehension of their own body. Such a fact would not have been possible, if the infant did not have a notion of self that serves every function that we would expect a concept to serve. It comes with recognition and differentiation. It involves the identification of 'self' as the same 'self' through time. Moreover, it is the basis of the further conceptual content in our experiences that is required for judgment and belief.

REFERENCES

Armstrong, D. M. (1968, 1993). *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*. London: Routledge.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *Sense and Sensibilia*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bergson, H. (1911). *Matter and Memory*. London: George Allen and Unwin

Bermudez, J. (2003). "Nonconceptual Mental Content", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Edward N. Zalta (ed.) Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2003/entries/content-nonconceptual/>

Carman, T. (2004). "Sensation, Judgment, and the Phenomenal Field", *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty.* Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://cco.cambridge.org/extract?id=ccol0521809894_CCOL0521809894A004>

Carr, H. W. (1918). "What Does Bergson Mean By Pure Perception?", *Mind,* New Series. Vol. 27, No. 108. pp. 472-474.

Chisholm, R. M. (1957). *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Dennett, D. (1992). *Consciousness Explained*. Boston: Little Brown and Company.

_____. (1994). "Get Real". *Philosophical Topics.* Vol. 22. No. 1&2. pp. 505-568. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/getreal.htm>

Dretske, F. (1997). *Naturalizing the Mind*. Palatino: MIT Press.

_____. (2000). *Perception, Knowledge, and Belief: Selected Essays*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fichte, J. G. (1982). *The Science of Knowledge: With the First and Second Introductions.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Horstmann, R-P. (2000). "The Early Philosophy of Fichte and Schelling", *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*. Karl Ameriks (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Helmholtz, H. (1878). "The Facts of Perception", *Selected Writings of Hermann Helmholtz*. Wesleyan University Press. Retrieved November 15, 2006,

from <http://www.psych.upenn.edu/backuslab/psyc739PL/materials/Helmholtz_FactsOfPerception_1878.pdf>

Kitcher, P. (1990). *Kant's Transcendental Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lewis, C. I. (1956). *Mind and the World Order: Outline of A Theory of Knowledge.* New York: Dover Publications

Martin, M. G. (1995). "Bodily Awareness: A Sense of Ownership", *The Body and the Self.* J. L. Bermudez, A. Marcel, N. Eilan (eds.). London: MIT Press.

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

Meltzoff, A. N., M. K. Moore (1995). "Infants' Understanding of People and Things: From Body Imitation to Folk Psychology', *The Body and the Self.* J. L. Bermudez, A. Marcel, N. Eilan (eds.). London: MIT Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception.* London and New York: Routledge.

Millikan, R.G. (1998). "A More Plausible Kind of 'Recognitional Concept'". *Concepts: Philosophical Issues.* E. Villanueva (ed.). Vol. 9, pp. 35-41. Atascadero CA: Ridgeview Publishing. Retrieved March 15, 2007, from < http://www.philosophy.uconn.edu/department/millikan/fodor.pdf >

_____. (1998). "With Enemies Like these I Don't Need Friends". *Behavioral and Brain Sciences.* Vol 22.1, pp. 89-100. Retrieved March 15, 2007, from < http://www.philosophy.uconn.edu/department/millikan/enemies.pdf >

_____. (2000). "A Common Structure for Concepts of Individuals, Stuffs, and Real Kinds: More Mama, More Milk, and More Mouse". *Concepts: Core Readings.* E. Margolis and S. Laurence (eds.). Cambridge: MIT Press.

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

_____. (2001). "Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?", *Journal of Philosophy 98,* pp. 239-264. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://humanities.ucsc.edu/NEH/peacocke2.pdf#search=%22does%20perception%20have%20a%20nonconceptual%20content%22>

Wittgenstein, L. (1977). *Remarks On Colour.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

Wozniak, R. H. (1995). *Mind and Body: René Descartes to William James*. Bryn Mawr College, Serendip. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/Mind/>