

# Perceptual Reasons

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ABSTRACT: According to Conceptualists like John McDowell and Bill Brewer, the representational content of perceptual experiences is wholly conceptual. One of the main—and only—arguments they advance for this claim has to do with the epistemological role of perceptual experiences. I focus on Bill Brewer's (1999) version of the argument. I show why Brewer fails to satisfactorily motivate the premises of his argument, and suggest that opponents of Conceptualism could accept these premises without thereby endorsing the conclusion. Finally, I consider whether the conclusion really supports Conceptualism.

Consideration of the epistemological role of perceptual experiences has been taken by some to teach us an important lesson about the nature of experience. In this paper, I look with some care at the argument allegedly bringing about such a lesson. The lesson is Conceptualism about perceptual experiences—the doctrine that the representational content of such experiences is *fully conceptual* (McDowell, 1994; Brewer, 1999). The argument exploits the claim that perceptual experiences provide reasons for beliefs, together with certain constraints on what reasons are supposed to be.

The suggestion that a certain conception of perceptual reasons supports Conceptualism immediately raises two questions: (1) What does it mean for the content of a psychological state like a perceptual experience to be ‘fully conceptual’? And (2) how is it that such a conception of reasons supports Conceptualism? To the first question, I can briefly answer now. The rest of the paper develops an answer to the second question. That answer, I should warn, is entirely negative.

## 1. Concepts & Experiences

Conceptualists, like their opponents, take perceptual experiences to be representational psychological states—they represent objects, properties, relations, events, states-of-affairs, etc., in the immediate environment of the perceiver. In this sense, perceptual experiences can be said to have a

*representational content*—something like a set of conditions determining whether an experience accurately represents parts of the environment.

Conceptualism is often phrased in terms of the now familiar slogan that the representational content of experience is ‘wholly conceptual’. But the view can be stated more precisely:

**Conceptualism:** if a subject *S* has a perceptual experience *e*, then, for any object *o*, property *f*, relation *r*, ..., that *e* represents, *S* must possess a concept for *o, f, r, ...*

This is slightly more precise—though it’s incomplete. According to Conceptualists, possession of concepts is only a *necessary* requirement on the content of experience. There are other requirements—for instance, about the deployment of those concepts. For the purposes of this paper, however, this condition about concept-*possession* should suffice.

Note also that the characterisation above does not explicitly mention the representational content of experience. Unfortunately, it’s no easy matter to specify the connection between (i) this requirement that perceivers must possess concepts and (ii) the claim that the content of experience *is* conceptual. I shall assume that the following, at least, is true: the representational content of an experience can be said to be conceptual *only if* it satisfies the condition above.

Still, if it’s slightly more precise, the above characterisation of Conceptualism is not terribly precise. One would like to hear (a) what it means to “possess” a concept, and (b) what concepts are. Unfortunately, Conceptualists like McDowell and Brewer have little to say about these questions. And so, the sketchy remarks that follows result from my own guesswork.

### 1.1. *Concepts*

Conceptualists, it seems, make a claim about the nature of perceptual representation. They say that the representational content of perceptual experiences is of a certain kind—that experiences have a certain type of representational properties. In this respect, the conceptualist doctrine has its place in the philosophy of psychology. It is concerned with the nature and properties of a *type* of psychological state. Hence, if the Conceptualists’ claim that perception requires the possession of concepts is meant to reveal something

important about perceptual experience *qua type* of psychological state, it seems that concepts must have some psychological reality (for some other options, see Byrne 2004).

They must also be representational. After all, the conceptualist project looks like an attempt to account for the representational properties of perceptual experiences in terms of the representational properties of something else—namely, concepts. Perhaps, then, concepts are a special kind of representations in the subject’s brain. Such representations are likely to play a particular role in relation to some of the subject’s psychological capacities—thinking and reasoning abilities, that is. Indeed, concepts seem to be the sorts of things subjects typically deploy while thinking and reasoning.

### 1.2. *Concept-possession*

Now that we have a very rough idea about the kind of things concepts are supposed to be, we can ask what *possessing* a concept amounts to? As we have just seen, it seems reasonable to expect some kind of connection between concepts and certain types of psychological capacities. Perhaps, then, to possess a concept *C* just *is* to have the relevant capacities relative to *C*. But which capacities, exactly?

Again, capacities that play some *crucial* role in thinking and reasoning. A rough list might go like this. In order to possess a concept *C*, a subject must be *able* to (i) identify and re-identify objects which fall under *C*; to (ii) discriminate between instances of *C* and things to which *C* does not apply; to (iii) draw inferences involving *C*; and to (iv) be able to apply *C* to a whole range of different objects, in a variety of contexts—along the lines of Evans’ (1982) Generality Constraint. Perhaps, the subject must also be able to apply *C* to an object *o in absentia*, when *o* isn’t to be found in the subject’s immediate environment. Perhaps, the list goes on. Perhaps, different lists must be drawn for different types of concepts (allowing some overlap).

In any case, it seems that the capacities in question must amount to more than just the ability to represent objects and properties in the environment, or the ability to perceptually discriminate between different objects or properties. If the representational content of experience was conceptual in the sense that, in order to experience an object *o*, a subject must be able to represent *o* and discriminate it

from other objects, Conceptualism would be trivial—and unopposed.<sup>1</sup> But Conceptualism is far from trivial—quite the opposite, in fact. Hence, Conceptualists must have something more substantial in mind about the conceptual capacities possession of which, on their view, is necessary to perceive things.

On the other hand, Conceptualists had better not associate too tightly the possession of concepts with the ability to express such concepts in natural language. As is often pointed out, this would preclude a variety of creatures (infants, animals, aliens, ...) that clearly have perceptual states—but no natural language—from having representational states. In general, there is no evidence that concept-possession necessarily requires mastery of a natural language, or even membership in a linguistic community—although it might be that such membership facilitates conceptual deployment, as well as contributes to the wealth of conceptual repertoire (see McDowell, 1994: 124-6).<sup>2</sup>

No doubt, much more needs to be said about concepts, the possession of concepts, how concepts relate to the representational content of a particular psychological state, and about other commitments Conceptualists might take on board. In order to clarify the conceptualist doctrine, unfortunately, one has to address a range of difficult issues in the philosophy of cognition. For the purposes of this paper, however, the few superficial remarks above should suffice—nothing in what follows hangs on a particular elucidation of one of these issues.

### 1.3. *Why Conceptualism?*

Aside from the argument which is the focus of this paper, it's unclear what might support the conceptualist conception of experience. Every now and then, one comes across various intuitions allegedly explaining adherence to such a conception. One of them is a prejudice towards a general conception of mental representation, according to which the only interesting kind of mental representation there is requires possession of concepts.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Andy Egan for discussion of this point. See also Smith (2002: 111).

Conceptualists sometimes say things like the following. In order to be in a certain mental state *M* with a representational content *P*, a subject must be able to ‘appreciate’ what that content is (Peacocke, 1983: 7; Noë, 1999).<sup>3</sup> By ‘appreciation’, I take it, Conceptualists mean that the subject is able to understand *P*, in such a way that she can form further beliefs and thoughts about the objects and properties represented by *P*. And, the assumption goes, understanding, believing, and thinking are paradigmatic conceptual activities.

But why think that subjects must be able to ‘appreciate’ what their psychological states represent, in this sense? Here, another aspect of the Conceptualists’ prejudice reveals itself. Mental representation, on their view, is essentially linked with a certain kind of consciousness. For a psychological state to be conscious is not essentially a matter of it having a certain phenomenology—or a certain ‘feel’ to it. Rather, a conscious mental state is one which at least (i) influences the thoughts and actions of the subject, (ii) can play a role in the subject’s reasoning, and (iii) can be an object of self-reflection. In this sense, Conceptualists think of ‘conscious mental representation’ very much in terms of Ned Block’s (2002) notion of ‘Access-consciousness’.

Hence, for Conceptualists, representational psychological states are essentially linked with the subject’s (a) consciousness and (b) rationality. They are linked with the former in the sense that such states can be the objects of the subject’s thoughts. They are linked with the latter due to the role they can play in reasoning. And presumably, both self-reflection and reasoning essentially involve the exercise of concepts. Mental representation, then, is conceptual—and *only* conceptual. Conceptualism about the representational content of perceptual experiences just is an instance of this more general claim.

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<sup>2</sup> Despite claims to the contrary (Ayers, 2002: 8; Crane, 2001: 153; Luntley, 1999: 304), there doesn’t seem to be any textual evidence that Conceptualists like McDowell (1994, 1998) and Brewer (1999)—or their opponents, for that matter—rely on such a linguistic conception of concept-possession (see, e.g., Peacocke, 1992: 3; 2001: 243).

<sup>3</sup> Note that Peacocke (1992, 2001), having acknowledged the error of his ways, is now a leading opponent of Conceptualism.

So much for this (incomplete) elucidation of the conceptualist position.<sup>4</sup> I now turn to the central question to be considered in the remainder of this paper: how the fact that perceptual experiences provide reasons for beliefs is supposed to support Conceptualism.

## 2. Brewer's Argument

According to John McDowell (1994) and Bill Brewer (1999), Conceptualism has to be true because (a) perceptual experiences provide reasons for certain empirical beliefs, and because (b) reasons require conceptual contents. This is the main argument these two philosophers advance for their conception of experience—the only argument, so far as I'm aware.

In this paper, I shall focus on Bill Brewer's version of the argument—which he presents as a reconstruction of McDowell's (Brewer, 1999: 149, n. 1).<sup>5</sup> Let's call it 'Brewer's Epistemic Argument' (BEA). Here is my best shot at reconstructing the argument:

- (1) a perceptual experience of a subject *S* can provide her with a reason *R* for her empirical belief that *P*.
- (2) *R* is a reason for *P* only if *R* is inferentially related with *P*.
- (3) *R* is a reason for *S*'s belief that *P* only if *S* recognises *R* as her reason for *P*.
- (4) *R* can be (i) inferentially related with *P* and (ii) recognised as a reason for *P* only if *R* is the conceptual content of a mental state.
- (5) ∴ reasons require conceptual contents.

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<sup>4</sup> I have more to say about it elsewhere. See also Byrne (2004) and Heck (2000). For a little more about Non-conceptualism, see section 5 below.

<sup>5</sup> So as to facilitate things somewhat: it shouldn't be too controversial to say that it is far from clear how McDowell's version of the argument proceeds, given his heavy reliance on kantian metaphors in *Mind and World*. Brewer, on the other hand, at least tries to specify what premises are being used in the argument. In any case, if Brewer does a good job at reconstructing McDowell's argument, what I say about Brewer's version of the argument ought to be relevant to McDowell's version. For some critical discussion of McDowell's argument and of the very terms in which he sets up the argument, see for instance Brandom (2002), Heck (2000), Sosa (1997), Stroud (2002), Vision (1998), and Wright (1998, 2002).

- (6) ∴ perceptual experiences must have a conceptual content.

Although neither Brewer, nor McDowell, are explicit about this, their recipe for defending Conceptualism encompasses a mixed bag of ingredients, and reveals their commitment to various philosophical doctrines—some more controversial than others, as we shall now see.

### 2.1. *Perceptual Reasons?*

Premise (i)—depending on how it is construed—seems the least controversial of the lot. Admittedly, perceptual experiences play *some* role in our knowledge of the external world. No matter where your theoretical preferences lie in epistemology, there must be some sense in which perceptual experiences can justify, ground, warrant, motivate, provide a reason for, beliefs about the environment.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps, reasons are supposed to stand out from this list of epistemic terms. But what are they? Surprisingly, except for the few constraints he imposes on reasons (see below), Brewer has little to say about such a notion—and even less about its justificatory aspects. In the rest of this paper, I shall assume that reasons amount at least to the following. Among the various considerations, propositions, facts, circumstances, or mental states (pick your favourite), which can serve to *justify* a subject's particular belief, one of them might at least be causally responsible for the subject's endorsement of that belief—if things go well, that is. In this sense, the subject's belief is *based upon* one such justifying consideration (fact, circumstance, etc.): her reason for that belief. The belief itself is justified because it is grounded—or based—in such a way (see, e.g. Audi, 1993; Pryor, 2001, 2004). It seems helpful to think of epistemic reasons as whatever realises the function just described.

Note that opponents of Conceptualism tend to agree that perceptual experiences provide reasons for beliefs (see, e.g., Peacocke, 1992: 80; 2001: 253-9; Heck, 2000: 501). The crucial point, of course, is whether they conceive of

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<sup>6</sup> Thus, for instance, advocates of what Jim Pryor (2004) calls “Pure Coherentism”—a well-known representative is Davidson (1981)—could accept premise (i). After all, Coherentists admit that (i) perceptual experiences *cause* beliefs, and that (ii) such beliefs *are* reasons for other beliefs: in this indirect sense, perceptual experiences do *provide* reasons for beliefs.

perceptual reasons in exactly the same way as Brewer. In this respect, however, premise (1) is fairly uncontroversial in part because it is silent about what it means for experiences to “provide reasons”. The next two premises, on the other hand, each encapsulate a particular constraint Brewer imposes on the notion of ‘reason’.

### 2.2. *Reasons and Inference*

Premise (2) has a certain ‘Neo-Humean’ flavour—it can be regarded as summarising two familiar ‘Neo-Humean’ considerations about reasons. First, reasons for beliefs are essentially considerations, or facts, which make the beliefs in question *rational*. Second, something makes a belief that *P* rational only if it is *inferentially* related with *P*. By “inferential relation”, Brewer means the sort of (logical) relation that underpins “a deductive argument, or [...] an inference of some other kind (e.g. inductive or abductive)” (Brewer, 1999: 149).

Presumably, this is where some opponents of Conceptualism will part company with Brewer’s notion of ‘reason’. Non-conceptualists like Peacocke (1992: 80; 2001: 254-5) accept that, if perceptual experiences provide reasons for beliefs, there are *rational* or *epistemic* relations between such reasons and the beliefs for which they are reasons. Rational or epistemic relations, however, need not be reduced to *inferential* relations, they insist.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.3. *Recognition of Reasons*

Premise (3) gives voice to an Internalist commitment about reasons. That is, if something is a reason for a belief, such a reason—or something about that reason, or the fact that it is a reason, or both—is *accessible* in one way or another to the subject for whom it is a reason. There are many different ways to spell out such an Internalist commitment—depending mainly, but not only, on what sort of accessibility is at play (see, e.g., Alston, 1989; Pryor, 2001). Brewer appears to favour a rather strong reading: it’s not just that a believer’s reason must be

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<sup>7</sup> Other epistemologists have maintained that “recognition of reasons that are neither inductive nor logical entailments” represent “one of the most important advances of contemporary epistemology” (Pollock and Cruz, 1999: 36). For instance, as James Pryor (2004) observes, it seems that my feeling of pain might provide me with a reason to believe that I am in pain. Such a feeling, however, doesn’t seem to be the sort of thing—namely, a proposition—that can be inferentially related to other propositions.

“recognizable by her as such” (1999: 163), but also that they are “necessarily recognized as such” (1999: 165).<sup>8</sup>

Obviously, such a premise is likely to leave proponents of Externalist accounts of justification or reasons unimpressed. For instance, Tyler Burge denies that perceptual experiences provide reasons in the sense of “reason” constrained by premise (3). For him, perceptual experiences supply some kind of warrant or “entitlement”, which “need not be fully conceptually accessible, even on reflection, to the warranted individual” (Burge, 2003: 504, 547).<sup>9</sup> In fact, even advocates of Internalist theories of justification may not go all the way with premise (3). They accept that something is a reason for a subject *S* only if it is something that is at least *accessible* to the subject. This doesn’t mean that the subject has to *actually recognise* her reason, nor that she has to recognise it *as a reason*.

#### 2.4. *Conceptual Contents*

What about premise (4)? Here, Brewer seems to presuppose something like a Fregean picture of content, according to which there is an intimate connection between the inferential relations connecting certain propositions and the concepts that structure such propositions. For instance, suppose you believe that *there is a red car in front of you* and that *there is a green car in front of you*. On such a view, it’s because the propositional contents of your beliefs involve the same concepts—structured *in the same way*—that you can validly infer from those two beliefs that *there are at least two cars in front of you—one green and one red*. This inference—and its correctness—depends in part on the concepts you exercise in entertaining the contents of these beliefs (see, e.g., Crane, 1992: 147).

Admittedly, such a conception of content and inference raises a variety of tricky questions—especially about the idea that concepts structure the contents of

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<sup>8</sup> Brewer is here explicitly taking his lead from Internalist accounts of *practical reasons* rather than from Internalist accounts of epistemic justification or reason. Traditionally, according to the former, a subject’s practical reason for an action *necessarily motivates* the subject to act (see Smith, 1994; compare the perplexing comments Brewer makes about this—1999: 154). Perhaps, the Internalist conception of practical reasons is connected with the epistemic view in the following way: a reason can motivate a subject only if that reason is accessible to the subject.

<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Burge’s notion of perceptual “entitlement” plays a very similar role to Brewer’s notion of “reason”. Such entitlement (i) can serve to motivate (causally) the formation of a belief, (ii) it plays a justificatory role, (iii) can be defeated, and (iv) is “determined”—but not “guided”—by epistemic norms (*ibid.*).

beliefs (see Byrne, 2004; Heck, 2000; Stalnaker, 1998). But I shall ignore them here.

### 2.5. *Reasons and Concepts*

Finally, the combination of premises (2), (3), and (4) is supposed to entail (5). This intermediate conclusion, note, seems equivalent to McDowell's (1994) slogan that "the space of reasons" coincides with "the space of concepts". In turn, (1) and (5) allegedly entail (6). This, in essence, is Brewer's Epistemic Argument for Conceptualism (BEA).

Clearly, there is a sense in which this argument presupposes some commitment to particular—and, sometimes, contentious—views about (i) perceptual experiences, (ii) reasons, and (iii) the nature of the representational content of psychological states. Here, however, I shall not question any of these assumptions. What I will question is whether these assumptions alone suffice to entail Conceptualism—as Brewer seems to think.

The remainder of this paper is solely concerned with an attempt to show how Brewer's version of the argument can be resisted. I argue that it fails in quite a few respects: (a) the premises are unmotivated, (b) they do not entail the conclusion, and (c) the conclusion itself doesn't really support Conceptualism *per se*. In the next section (§3), I review Brewer's unsatisfactory attempt to motivate the premises of (BEA). The following section (§4) sketches how opponents of Conceptualism might accept all the premises in (BEA) and still reject the conclusion. The final section (§5) argues that the conclusion (6) of Brewer's argument amounts in fact to something weaker than Conceptualism.

## 3. **Why Believe the Premises?**

As we shall now see, Brewer doesn't entirely succeed to make clear why one should accept the various considerations he exploits in (BEA). I shan't discuss his reasons for the first premise—that perceptual experiences provide reasons for beliefs. The main reason for this omission is relevance: as I said, most opponents of Conceptualism grant the first premise of (BEA). The crucial questions, rather, are (i) what *reasons* are supposed to be, and (ii), depending on how Brewer unpacks

such a notion, whether it is plausible to think that perceptual experiences *provide* reasons.

### 3.1. *Motivating the Second Premise*

Why think that:

- (2)  $R$  is a reason for  $P$  only if  $R$  is inferentially related with  $P$ .

is true? In other words, why believe that the reasons subjects have for their beliefs are essentially connected by inference to such beliefs? And what exactly is the nature of such a connection? Call the constraint premise (2) imposes on reasons the “Inferential constraint”. Here is what Brewer has to say in its support:

To give a reason [...] is to identify some feature of the subject’s situation which makes the relevant judgement or belief (or perhaps action) appropriate, or intelligible, from the point of view of rationality. [...] making something intelligible from the point of view of rationality in this way necessarily involves identifying a valid deductive argument, or inference of some other kind, which articulates the source of the rational obligation (or permission) in question. This constitutes an explicit reconstruction of the reasoning in virtue of whose correctness this obligation (or permission) is sustained. [...] Hence, in making essential reference to the relevant valid inference, giving a reason involves making essential reference to its premises and conclusion, and so, trivially, to the kind of things which can serve as the premises or conclusion of some kind of inference (Brewer, 1999: 150-1).

The first point Brewer seems to be making is that reasons have something to do with rationality. Such a connection, he appears to suggest, is brought to light by the fact that subjects are normally able to give, cite, or express, their reasons, and often do so in order to explain why it is rational for them to hold a particular belief.<sup>10</sup> Thus,

- (2a)  $R$  is  $S$ ’s reason for her belief that  $P$  only if  $R$  makes  $S$ ’s belief rational.

Brewer’s second point concerns the link between rationality and inference (or argument). Here, he appears to rely on the suggestion that, when giving reasons,

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<sup>10</sup> Tyler Burge denies that perceptual experiences are reasons in this sense. He observes that adult subjects never cite their perceptual experiences as reasons for their perceptual beliefs. Rather, they cite beliefs *about* their experiences, Burge points out (2003: 529). This is made clear by the fact that one can be further questioned about the justification for such beliefs, which wouldn’t be possible if one gave one’s experiences as reasons (assuming that experiences themselves aren’t the sorts of things that are justified).

subjects often resort to arguments. This is because, in his own words, arguments serve the purpose of *articulating* the “source of the rational obligation” that lies behind a subject’s reason for her belief.<sup>11</sup> This seems to mean that, if they are to make a certain belief rationally intelligible, reasons are to be expressed or *articulated* in a particular way—a way that essentially involves reference to arguments.<sup>12</sup>

But then, Brewer comes to make what sounds like a much stronger claim. He writes as if arguments mentioned in giving reasons explicitly reconstruct “the reasoning in virtue of whose correctness this obligation [...] is sustained”. In other words, arguments don’t just serve an *expressive function*. What is thus expressed is a *reasoning*, the validity of which is alleged to be *constitutive* of, either the reason itself, or the normative force of that reason. Presumably, the thought here is that such reasoning *determines* whether believing that *P* for reason *R* is *rational*. Thus,

- (2b) *R* is *S*’s reason for *P* only if there is an argument *A* in virtue of which it is rational to believe that *P* for the reason *R*.

The intended outcome of these remarks is easier to reconstruct—it is what James Pryor (2004) calls the “Premise Principle”. In Brewer’s words:

[...] successfully giving such a reason makes essential reference to the premise of an inference of some kind, whose conclusion is appropriately related, most likely by identity, to the content of the belief for which the reason is being given (Brewer, 1999: 154).

More precisely:

- (2c) if *R* is *S*’s reason for *P*, *R* can figure as a premise in a valid argument *A* for the conclusion that *P*.

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<sup>11</sup> Two exegetical difficulties. First, I take it, talk of “rational obligation (or permission)” is meant to suggest the normative aspect of reasons. In another passage, Brewer explicitly mentions the role of norms in “reason-giving explanations” (1999: 165). Second, it is unclear what Brewer means exactly by “the source” of a “rational obligation”. Does such a source consist in (a) a general norm of rationality—say, that one must have reasons for one’s beliefs? Or in (b) the source of the reason itself—for instance, the fact that Pauline’s reason for her belief about a kangaroo originates from her perceptual experience of a kangaroo?

<sup>12</sup> This might sound very much like the requirement of *articulability* of reasons often attributed to McDowell (1994: 165): see Byrne (2004), Heck (2000: 520), Peacocke (2001: 257), Pryor (2004).

Hence, premise (2) in (BEA). If reason *R* figures in a valid argument *A* for the conclusion that *P*, *R* and *P* are *inferentially related*.

If accurate, such a reconstruction of Brewer’s motivation for premise (2) raises more questions than it answers. To begin with, the sorts of considerations Brewer advances for the claims in (2a) and (2b) are essentially descriptive. True, normal subjects often cite their reasons when prompted. And they sometimes resort to arguments when expressing their reason for a certain belief. But how does this entail (2b) that arguments—or the corresponding reasoning—are *constitutive* of the rationality of a subject’s reasons and beliefs?

Even if it were true that reasons are always expressed in terms of arguments, this would only support a claim about the activity of *giving* and *reconstructing* reasons. It might be that the *description* of a reason has to be inferentially related *via* some argument with the *expression* of the belief for which it is a reason. This alone, however, need not entail that reasons themselves are inferentially related with the contents of certain beliefs—as premise (2) would have it.<sup>13</sup>

And even if the arguments subjects sometimes use in making their reasons explicit were *constitutive* of the rationality of such reasons (and the beliefs for which they are reasons), it is unclear why this should hold for *all* reasons. Surely, believers don’t always resort to argument in giving their reasons. In perceptual cases, in particular, it seems as though they typically mention what they perceive, or the fact that they perceive it—and that’s it! Thus, the considerations Brewer advances *describe* a certain conception of reasons. So far, however, nothing has been said to support the truth of such a conception.

Another difficulty concerns what Brewer means by “inference”, “argument”, and “reasoning”. When Pauline forms the belief that there is a kangaroo in front of

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<sup>13</sup> Compare Pryor’s (2004) discussion of the relationship between the “dialectical” and the justificatory notion of a reason. Another way to see this same point is by considering the distinction between (i) a reason and (ii) facts which *make it the case that R* is a reason for the belief that *P* (see, e.g., Pryor, 2001, 2004). Such *reason-making* facts might include (a) facts about perceptual experiences, (b) general facts about reasons, and perhaps (c) facts about the links between all these other facts. It could be that an argument for a certain belief that *P* might only mention such reason-making facts as premises. Perhaps, the reason itself is embedded in premises about such facts, but never appear as a premise in its own right. In which case, it’s unclear why the reason itself should be inferentially related with the content of a belief for which it is a reason.

her for the reason that she experiences such a kangaroo, it seems highly unlikely that the psychological transition from her experience to her belief rests on a conscious reflective process of going through the steps of an argument. Most of the time, at least, transitions of this kind seem inference-free. Subjects automatically come to believe what they perceive, without reflection (see, e.g., Burge, 2003: 528). Hence, it seems, Brewer owes us an account of what he means exactly by his use of these terms.

In this regard, there is a distinction to be made between “reasoning” and “inference” on the one hand, and “argument” and “inferential relation” on the other. While the former refer to some psychological process, the latter concern a certain kind of abstract relation or structure, which underpins such processes. Hence, to say that a reason *R* is inferentially related to the content of a belief that *P* is to make a *structural* point about the logical (or epistemic) relations between *R* and *P*. It need not say anything about the psychology of the believer. In particular, it is not to say that such a believer draws the corresponding inference when she forms a belief that *P* for the reason *R* provided by her experience (Audi, 1993: 238; Pryor, 2004).

Nevertheless, Brewer does suggest that arguments serve to reconstruct some *reasoning* in virtue of which the subject’s reason makes her belief rational. Perhaps, all Brewer demands is that the subject *be able* to engage in such reasoning, but doesn’t have to actually draw the corresponding inference. Alternatively, Brewer might have a rather minimal conception of reasoning in mind. The subject’s psychological transition from her experience to a belief might be caused in such a way that is *guided*—in some sense—by the existence of an inferential relation between *R* and *P*.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps, this is all it takes for the transition in question to amount to some inference or reasoning of some kind.

So much for Brewer’s defence of premise (2), which seems far from cogent. If it isn’t too clear what considerations exactly Brewer is appealing to, it’s even less clear that such considerations suffice to motivate such a premise.

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<sup>14</sup> Compare Brewer (1999: 165; and 1995: 241-2).

### 3.2. *Motivating the third premise*

What about Brewer's own brand of Internalism about reasons—the Recognition Constraint?

- (3)  $R$  is a reason for  $S$ 's belief that  $P$  only if  $S$  recognises  $R$  as her reason.

According to Brewer, such a premise is supported by the following line of thought:

[...], we are interested [...] only in reasons *for the subject* to do these things, to take things actually to be the way he believes them to be. These must be the subject's *own* reasons, which figures as such *from his own point of view*. It follows from this, first, that the subject's having such a reason consists in his being in some mental state or other, [...]. For any actually motivating reason *for the subject* must at the very least register at the personal level in this way. Second, it also follows that it cannot be the case that the proposition, reference to which is required by the first premise above in characterising the reason in question, can merely be related to this mental state of the subject's *indirectly*, by the theorist in some way. Rather, it must actually *be* the content of his mental state [...] (Brewer, 1999: 151-2).

The general idea behind premise (3) is that, since a reason for a belief is a reason *for the subject* who forms such a belief, that subject must, not only be *able* to 'appreciate' or 'recognise' her reason *as a reason*, but she must actually exercise that ability (see Brewer, 1999: 155, 163-5).

The first point Brewer insists upon in the passage above as follows: if the subject must be able to appreciate or recognise the "status" of her reason for her belief, the fact that the subject *has* a reason "consists in" her being in some mental state. Such a mental state must be available to the subject "at the personal level"—this, I presume, is meant to ensure that the subject *can* recognise *her* reason. Thus,

- (3a)  $S$  is able to recognise  $R$  as *her reason* only if  $R$  consists in some mental state  $M$  of  $S$  (where  $M$  registers at the personal level).

Brewer's second point is that reasons play a motivational role: the subject's reason for a given belief *motivates* her to form or endorse that belief:

- (3b)  $R$  is  $S$ 's *own reason* for  $P$  only if  $R$  motivates  $S$  to believe that  $P$ .

Such a requirement is explicitly linked with the claim that the mental state mentioned in (3a) must "register at the personal level": only such mental states, I take it, can "motivate" in the appropriate sense, according to Brewer. In addition,

it seems that the motivational role of reasons is to be understood in causal terms, at least in part (see also Brewer 1995: 238):

[...] reason giving [...] is only appropriate when the stated reason's status *as a reason* is casually [sic] explanatory; and this in turn depends upon the subject's recognition, or appreciation, in some sense, of its status as a reason, which essentially involves his having an appropriate mental state (Brewer, 1999: 155).

Presumably, the thought is that a reason can't play such motivational-causal role, unless the subject recognises her reason for what it is.

Brewer's final point relates to his defence of premise (2). Since, according to (3a), the subject's reason consists in a mental state of the subject, premise (2) requires that it is the *content* of that mental state which must be inferentially related to the content of a belief. That is,

- (3c) if *S*'s reason *R* for her belief that *P* can be inferentially related with *P* & *R* consists in a mental state *M* of *S*, then *M* has a content *C* which can be inferentially related with *P*.

The idea behind (3c), it seems, is that the content of such a mental state—rather than the state itself—is the only thing which *can* be inferentially related with some other content.

Brewer's defence of premise (3) raises, too, a number of questions—some of a clarificatory nature, others more critical. What is immediately surprising is that, instead of advancing considerations in favour of such a premise, Brewer appears to take it as his starting point to develop a conception of reasons in which this Recognition constraint plays a central role.<sup>15</sup>

But it's unclear why, in order to have a reason for one's belief, one must *recognise* that reason *as such*. Granting with (3b) that, if *R* is the subject's own reason, it motivates her to believe that *P*, couldn't she be motivated by her reason without necessarily *recognising* it as a reason? It depends, of course, on what "recognising a

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<sup>15</sup> There is a sense in which premise (3) connects with McDowell's (1994: 52-3, 166) requirement that reasons can be the object of "self-scrutiny", self-reflection, or rational evaluation (see Byrne, 2004; Heck, 2000: 512-3; Peacocke, 2001: 255-6). At least, (3) seems to be presupposed in such a "self-scrutinizing" requirement: in order to be able to self-reflect about one's reasons and evaluate them rationally, I take it, one must first be able to recognise them as such.

reason *as a reason*” means. Although Brewer uses such a phrase recurrently, he is of very little help in determining its exact content. Does the recognition of a reason *as a reason* require (i) possession of the concept of *REASON*, which must be correctly applied to the reason thus recognised? Is (ii) recognition of reasons factive, such that if one recognises one’s reason *R*, it is a fact that one has *R*? Does (iii) recognition of a reason *R as a reason* involve the recognition that one’s reason for *P* makes it rational to believe that *P*? The list could go on.

Another issue in need of clarification is Brewer’s claim in (3a) that recognition of a reason involves some mental state of some kind. Here, Brewer might seem to be making two different points. First, he might be saying that having a reason for a belief “consists in” a certain mental state of the subject *because* reasons for beliefs are supposed to be the subject’s *own reasons*. At this point, though, it’s not too clear whether (i) a reason must involve some mental state *of the subject* so that she recognises the reason *as her own*. (But then, why does it have to be a *mental state* of the subject, rather than some other property of the subject’s situation, say?) Or, perhaps, (ii) a reason must be some mental state of the subject so that she *can recognise* it as a reason? The latter is plainly false: in order for recognition of *x* to be possible, it isn’t required that *x* itself is a mental state. I can recognise kangaroos, although kangaroos aren’t mental states.

The second point Brewer might seem to be making with his talk of “an appropriate mental state” required to satisfy the Recognition constraint is that the subject must have some mental state of recognition. Indeed, it should be uncontroversial that recognition typically consists in some psychological state—regardless of how to specify such a mental state exactly. But, of course, a recognitional state is distinct from whatever is being recognised. Hence, if recognition of reasons requires recognitional states, it doesn’t follow that reasons themselves *are* mental states of the subject. In which case, it also becomes difficult to make sense of the claim in (3b) that reasons motivate subjects to form/endorse certain beliefs. One might ask what causes the subject to be motivated to believe that *P*. Is it her reason *R* for *P*? Or is it rather her recognitional state that *R* is a reason for *P*? If the latter, reasons themselves don’t really motivate: the *recognition* of reasons plays this motivational role. On the other hand, if reasons themselves

motivate, there doesn't seem to be any need for an additional mental state of recognition of a reason. Insofar as *motivation* is concerned, recognition is redundant.

No doubt, Brewer's defence of premise (3) requires more clarification. Some will be provided below. Again, it is important to underline that Brewer offers few reasons to accept (3) and considerations (3a)-(3c). Worse, it's not clear that one can make sense of such considerations in an entirely coherent way.

### 3.3. *In defence of (4)*

Time to look at the third crucial premise in Brewer's argument:

- (4)  $R$  can be (i) inferentially related with  $P$  and (ii) recognised *as a reason* only if  $R$  is the conceptual content of a mental state of the subject  $S$ .

Premise (4) encapsulates two points: namely, that (i) only conceptual contents are inferentially related; and that (ii) only conceptual contents can be recognised as reasons.<sup>16</sup> Again, Brewer has little to say regarding the first point:

A mental state is *conceptual* if and only if it has a representational content that is characterizable only in terms of concepts which the subject himself must possess and which is of a form that enables it to serve as a premise or the conclusion of a deductive argument, or of an inference of some kind (e.g. inductive or abductive) (Brewer, 1999: 149).

Here, he might be relying on two further assumptions (Brewer, 1999: 151):

- (4a)  $R$  can be inferentially related with  $P$  only if  $R$  and  $P$  are propositions.  
(4b) if  $R$  and  $P$  are propositions,  $R$  and  $P$  are conceptual contents.

In turn, (4a) and (4b) entail:

- (4c)  $S$ 's reason  $R$  for her belief that  $P$  can be inferentially related with  $P$  only if  $R$  and  $P$  are conceptual contents (of  $S$ 's mental states).

But why accept (4c)? Admittedly, it might seem implausible to deny that the conceptual contents of psychological states like beliefs can be inferentially related with one another. But this leaves it open that other kinds of contents, which aren't

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<sup>16</sup> Note that Brewer has a tendency to pack the considerations in favour of this fourth premise into premises (2) and (3). For the sake of clarity, I have tried to keep them separate.

conceptual, can be inferentially connected with other—both conceptual and non-conceptual—contents. It seems that this possibility is what Brewer needs to rule out in order to show that (4c) is true: namely, that *only* conceptual contents can be inferentially related. Yet, Brewer merely asserts that conceptual contents can be inferentially related to one another.

Even granting (4a) that only propositional contents can be inferentially related, Brewer fails to show that (4b) propositional contents are *all* conceptual. Perhaps, the thought is that propositions can be the contents of mental states, only if such propositions are conceptual and the subjects of such mental states possess the relevant concepts. But this point remains a matter of controversy (see Byrne, 2004; Stalnaker, 1998).

As for the second point in premise (4)—namely, that only conceptual contents can be recognised as reasons, Brewer presents it as follows:

[...] it cannot be the case that the proposition [...] characterising the reason in question, can merely be related to this mental state of the subject's *indirectly*, by the theorist in some way. Rather, it must actually *be* the content of his mental state in a sense which requires that the subject has all of its constituent concepts (Brewer, 1999: 152).

The line of thought behind this second claim appears to derive from Brewer's defence of premises (2) and (3). Assuming with (3c) that reasons are the *contents* of a subjects' mental states, the idea seems to be that in order to be recognised by that subject, her reasons must be the contents of those psychological states that "register at the personal level". This, in essence, is what consideration (3a) above says. And perhaps, Brewer assumes, only psychological states with conceptual content can "register at the personal level" (see, e.g., McDowell, 1994: 55):

(4d) a mental state *M* with content *C* is available at the personal level only if *C* is conceptual.

In turn, the combination of (3a), (3c) and (4d) entails:

(4e) *S* is able to recognise *R* as *her reason* only if *R* is a conceptual content (of a mental state *M* of *S*, available at the personal level).

Again, though, if Brewer's second point is based on an assumption like (4d), he doesn't offer any consideration in support of this additional claim.

Worse, the assumption in (4d) appears to be question-begging, since it is one of the very claims that opponents of Conceptualism explicitly reject (see, e.g., Peacocke, 2001: 253). As we have seen (in section 1.3), Conceptualism is an instance of the more general view that only psychological states with conceptual content are conscious—or available “at the personal level—and can make a difference to the subject’s rationality. In this sense, (4d) is nothing less than a commitment to Conceptualism. It presupposes the sort of claim Conceptualists ought to establish by argument.

*Wrapping up:* We saw earlier how controversial some of the premises in Brewer’s argument seem to be. Most rely upon particular conceptions of reasons and of the representational content of psychological states, which are at the centre of various philosophical disputes. In this light, it would seem natural to expect that Brewer provide substantial back-up for the premises of (BEA). He doesn’t. Most of the considerations he advances don’t clearly support the premises of his argument.

For instance, the mere fact that we sometimes mention arguments in citing our reasons seems hardly sufficient to show that the “rational credentials” of *all* reasons are constituted by arguments. Nor does the assumption that beliefs have conceptual contents, which can be inferentially related with one another, suffice to establish that only conceptual contents can be so related. All this suggests that Conceptualists have more work to do, if the premises of (BEA) are to be at all credible. Perhaps, the thought is that these premises are intrinsically plausible and that, when combined, they make it inevitable that Conceptualism is true. I shall now argue that even this is a mistake.

#### **4. Is the Argument Valid?**

So far, we have seen that the premises of (BEA) are neither uncontroversial, nor well-grounded. At this point, then, one might feel vindicated in claiming that Brewer’s argument is unsound: at least one of the premises has to be false. But there is some respect in which this easy way out is unsatisfactory too. Even though Brewer fails to motivate the premises of (BEA), one shouldn’t rule out that it’s possible to do better. The worry at this point is that the evaluation of Brewer’s argument could easily lead to a stalemate about the truth of one (or more) of the premises. Conceptualists could come up with additional arguments in support of

(2), (3), and (4). In turn, their opponents might try to disarm such arguments, and provide arguments of their own against the premises of (BEA). Hence, if one is after a more compelling resolution of Brewer's argument, another kind of response might seem desirable.

I will sketch two such responses, both of which grant (almost) all the premises in (BEA). Not that I think premises (2), (3), and (4) should in fact be granted. But for the sake of argument, granting the premises helps to see where Brewer's argument really goes wrong—and in an interesting way. The first response questions the validity of (BEA)—that is, whether premises (1)-(5) actually entail the conclusion (6). The second response considers whether the conclusion (6) really supports Conceptualism. In both cases, the answer seems to be 'no'.

In this section, I will outline a *possible* version of Non-conceptualism, which takes all the premises of Brewer's argument on board, but rejects the conclusion. I do not mean to suggest that such a conception of the non-conceptual content of experience (and of the role it plays in providing reasons for beliefs) is the best option on the market—let alone a plausible option. For one thing, such a version of Non-conceptualism turns out to be manifestly quite complex—although I have tried to keep things as simple as possible. The important point is that the availability of such a non-conceptualist position in logical space shows Brewer's argument to be invalid.

This kind of response to (BEA) presents a dilemma for Brewer and fellow Conceptualists. It suggests that the argument is too weak to support Conceptualism. Of course, Brewer could strengthen his argument, either by (i) adding a premise, by (ii) making one of the premises stronger, or by (iii) specifying the premises in such a way that their interaction does entail the conclusion of the argument. I shall briefly review the main option Brewer considers, and argue that such a modification of (BEA) remains unsuccessful. At this point, another worry surfaces: that is, either amendments to (BEA) are themselves too weak, or they end up making the argument too strong, to the effect that even Conceptualists cannot accept all the premises in Brewer's argument. It will turn out that, insofar as the premises of (BEA) are concerned, Conceptualists and their opponents find themselves in a very similar quandary.

#### 4.1. *Conceptual Reasons with Non-conceptual Content*

Suppose that Conceptualism is false—suppose it is false in an absolute way. It's not just that *some* experiences *might* have a *partly* non-conceptual content—so that *not everything* the perceiver experiences requires possession of concepts. (Of course, that much would suffice to falsify Conceptualism.) Rather, perceptual experiences require possession of *no concept whatsoever*. Their representational content is entirely non-conceptual. It looks as though the non-conceptualist theorist can go along with all the premises in Brewer's argument, and coherently so. Here is how (very sketchily).

First, such a theorist can agree that:

- (i) a perceptual experience of a subject *S* can provide her with a reason *R* for her empirical belief that *P*.

On her view, premise (i) is true in the following way. It is a *fact* that the subject has a perceptual experience with non-conceptual content representing, say, a kangaroo in front of her. Such a fact can be described, for instance, by the following proposition:<sup>17</sup>

I have a visual experience of a red kangaroo in front of me.

The fact described by this proposition *is* the subject's reason to believe the proposition that

There is a red kangaroo in front of me.

The subject's experience *provides* her with such a reason in the sense that her experience makes the fact that she is having such an experience accessible in some way or other to the subject. The subject's reason can also be said to "consist" in her experience—insofar as such an experience is a constitutive part of the fact that it occurs in her.

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<sup>17</sup> Note that such a proposition isn't the content of the subject's experience, but a proposition describing a fact *about* the subject's experience: that it occurs in *S*. Of course, the proposition in question also embeds a certain description of the non-conceptual content of the subject's experience. That a description of such non-conceptual content is available and itself uses concepts doesn't make such a content itself conceptual, though.

Our Non-conceptualist can also accept the Inferential Constraint in premise (2)—as well as some of the considerations Brewer mentions in its support.

- (2)  $R$  is a reason for  $P$  only if  $R$  is inferentially related with  $P$ .

For instance, it is true on her view that a subject can cite the *fact* that she is having an experience of a kangaroo as her reason for believing that there is a kangaroo in front of her.

The Non-conceptualist can also say that a subject's reason makes her belief *rational*—consideration (2a). Even (2b) might be true, on such a view. The subject's reason makes her belief rational, due to the existence of some argument in virtue of which it is rational for her to believe that there is a kangaroo in front of her because she is having an experience of such a kangaroo. Of course, the fact that she is having such an experience may not literally *figure* in the argument in question. Rather, a proposition *describing* such a fact figures as a premise in such an argument. Nevertheless, it is true that the subject's reason—the fact that she is having an experience of a kangaroo—can be mentioned in the premise of an argument.

In which case, consideration (2c) is true too, on this non-conceptualist picture. As premise (2) requires, the subject's reason can be inferentially related with the content of her belief—*albeit* indirectly. The proposition above describes the subject's reason—the fact that she is having an experience of a kangaroo. This proposition can be inferentially related, *via* an argument, to the conclusion that there is a kangaroo in front of her—the propositional content of the subject's belief.

Next, this possible non-conceptualist theorist can accept that the fact that the subject is having an experience of a kangaroo is a reason for the subject to form the relevant belief, *only if* she recognises that fact as a reason. Hence, our Non-conceptualist will assent to premise (3):

- (3)  $R$  is a reason for  $S$ 's belief that  $P$  only if  $S$  can recognise  $R$  as her reason.

Presumably, the subject's recognition that the perceptual fact in question is a reason for her will involve some recognitional state—like a belief—with the content that

The fact that I have a visual experience of a red kangaroo in front of me is a reason for believing that there is a red kangaroo in front of me.

In this regard, the non-conceptualist theorist will also endorse consideration (3a): namely, that reasons, if they are to be recognised as such, "consist" in some mental state of the subject. In fact, this will be true on the Non-conceptualist's story in at least two ways. First, as we have seen, the subject's reason is in some way constituted by her perceptual experience—a mental state. Of course, the fact that she is having such an experience isn't itself a mental state: it's a fact about the occurrence of a mental state. Nevertheless, the subject's reason "consists"—at least partly—in a mental state of hers, since her experience is constitutive of that fact. Second, the subject's recognitional state—her belief that she is having an experience of a kangaroo, which is a reason for her belief about a kangaroo—is also a mental state.

Similarly with (3b): the fact that the subject has an experience of a kangaroo motivates her to believe that there is a kangaroo in front of her. Such motivation is at least causal. The subject's reason—the occurrence of an experience of a kangaroo—causes her to form a belief that there is a kangaroo in front of her. Admittedly, certain background conditions are required for such a causal relation to hold between the occurrence of the subject's experience and her belief. Such conditions are likely to include, for instance, the subject's recognitional belief. Thus, the fact that she has a belief that there is a kangaroo in front of her may be counter-factually dependent, not just on the fact that she is having an experience of that kangaroo, but also on her belief that having such an experience is a reason for her belief.

The Non-conceptualist can also make sense of consideration (3c)—according to which the subject's reason consists in a mental state, the content of which can be inferentially related with the content of her belief about a kangaroo. For one thing, the content of the subject's recognitional belief can be inferentially related with the content of her belief that there is a kangaroo in front of her. Obviously, the content of such a recognitional belief refers, among other things, to the subject's reason—the fact that she is having an experience of a kangaroo. More importantly, the representational content of the subject's experience is likely to be

described by the proposition reporting such a fact. And so, the representational content of the subject's experience can be inferentially related with the content of her belief—*albeit* indirectly, *via* the content of her recognitional belief that her having such an experience is a reason.

Finally, our theorist can agree with premise (4):

- (4)  $R$  can be (i) inferentially related with  $P$  and (ii) recognised *as a reason* only if  $R$  is the conceptual content of a mental state of the subject  $S$ .

Like many Non-conceptualists and Conceptualists, she shares the combination of assumptions summarised in (4c)—to the effect that only conceptual contents can be inferentially related. In other words, the proposition describing the subject's reason and the content of the subject's experience can be inferentially related with other propositions. And propositions have conceptual content, on this view. Accordingly, the subject's recognitional belief has a conceptual content. But this doesn't entail that the fact reported in such a content—including the content of the subject's experience—is itself conceptual. To repeat, the fact that a recognitional belief has conceptual content need not imply that what is being recognised is conceptual or has a conceptual content.

On the other hand, this putative non-conceptualist theorist is likely to maintain against consideration (4d) that experiences with non-conceptual content *are* available at the personal level. On her view, it is false that only conceptual contents can be so available. And so, she might reject consideration (4e) that a reason can be recognised as such only if it has conceptual content. The recognitional belief by which a subject recognises her reason has conceptual content, but not her reason—the fact that she is having an experience of a kangaroo. Facts aren't conceptual, on such a view.

Nevertheless, our Non-conceptualist can accept the conditional in premise (4), insofar as she accepts the first conjunct in the antecedent of (4), together with its consequent. In other words, she accepts the first clause in the antecedent of (4)—equivalent to (4c)—but not the second clause. Still, it seems as though (4c) is sufficient to entail (4). If it is true that the Inferential Constraint on reasons entails that reasons require conceptual contents, it must be true that the

Inferential Constraint on reasons, when supplemented with the Recognition Constraint, entails that reasons require conceptual contents.<sup>18</sup>

Now, given her acceptance of premises (2), (3) and (4), our theorist will be led to agree with the intermediate conclusion in Brewer's argument:

- (5) reasons require conceptual contents.

In fact, she can accept (5) in more ways than one. First, there is a sense in which (5) is trivially true. This Non-conceptualist accepts that (i) perceptual experiences provide reasons *for beliefs*, and that (ii) beliefs have conceptual content. In which case, she obviously endorses the view that reasons "require" —in one sense—conceptual contents (see, e.g., Heck, 2000: 516). In a less trivial sense, such a theorist also believes that the recognition of a reason involves a belief about an experience. Such recognitional belief, she admits, has a conceptual content. Finally, the conjunction of premise (2) with (4c)—the claim that only conceptual contents can be inferentially related—suffices to entail (5). And since the Non-conceptualist I have described endorses such a conjunction, (5) should raise no difficulty for her.

What our Non-conceptualist denies is that perceptual experiences have a conceptual content—the conclusion of (BEA).

- (6) perceptual experiences must have a conceptual content.

But since she accepts all the premises in Brewer's argument, this strongly suggests that such an argument is invalid. That is, the combination of premise (1) and (5) fails to entail (6). True, perceptual experiences provide reasons for beliefs and such reasons require conceptual content. But this need not entail that perceptual experiences themselves must have a content which is conceptual.

If the premises of Brewer's argument do not support its conclusion, there must be something wrong with this set of premises. One obvious problem, it appears, has to do with premise (5) that reasons *require* conceptual content, as well as premise (1) that perceptual experiences *provide* reasons for beliefs. In the way Brewer phrases these two claims—namely, without much specification—they are

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<sup>18</sup> Likewise, assuming that "if it rains, the roads are wet" is true, so is "if it rains and it's foggy, the roads are wet".

compatible with a variety of interpretations. These include the possibility that perceptual experiences aren't identical with reasons, or that reasons themselves don't have conceptual content.

Of course, if perceptual experiences *were* reasons and reasons *had* conceptual content, it might follow that perceptual experiences have conceptual content. Indeed, I take it that Brewer conceives of premises (2) and (3) in such a way that there ought to be just one mental state—in this case, a perceptual experience—which suffices to satisfy all the constraints he imposes on reasons. And since, according to (5), reasons require conceptual content, he concludes that such a mental state has to have conceptual content.

But as the possible non-conceptualist account of perceptual reasons just sketched illustrates, the premises of (BEA) do not themselves require that they must be true of a unique mental state. The Non-conceptualist thus appeals to a variety of *distinct* mental states so as to make sense of all the constraints Brewer imposes on reasons. In particular, she exploits the subject's recognitional belief, which has conceptual content, but is distinct from the subject's experience. Such a state can account for the various considerations associated with the Recognition constraint, while the content of that belief—the proposition describing the subject's reason—can accommodate the Inferential constraint on reasons.

To repeat, the Non-conceptualist story just outlined might strike many as implausible. But plausibility is not the issue, here. The point is that such a story presents a *possible*—and apparently coherent—way to make sense of Brewer's premises. If a Non-conceptualist can do this without accepting the conclusion of (BEA), it should look as though the premises of Brewer's argument do not entail such a conclusion.

#### 4.2. *Against Second-order Explanations*

Can Brewer block the non-conceptualist response sketched in the previous section, according to which (BEA) is invalid? He certainly seems aware at least that opponents of Conceptualism might interpret one of his constraints on reasons in a way that is more congenial to their own view. And he considers how a Non-

conceptualist like Peacocke (1992) might account for perceptual reasons. I shall adapt his remarks to the version of Non-conceptualism sketched above.<sup>19</sup>

Recall that, according to our Non-conceptualist, the Recognition constraint on reasons is met by the claim that subjects have recognitional beliefs with the content that their having a certain experience is a reason for a certain belief. Such recognitional states, we have seen, are supposed to be mental states available at the personal level, which contribute to motivate the subjects' beliefs about their environment. At this point, an additional constraint Brewer imposes on reasons becomes relevant.

He writes:

I call any account [...] a *second-order* account [...]. Its defining feature is the idea that the recognition requirement upon the provision of reasons for empirical beliefs by perceptual experiences is a matter of the subject's second-order reflection upon the credentials of her first-order method of belief acquisition, where the first and second orders are independent [...]. (Brewer, 1999: 129)

As the name suggests, the idea behind *second-order* accounts of reasons appears to be that the subject's second-order beliefs about her own experiences and their role as reasons play a central role in the way she recognises those experiences as reasons. It isn't entirely clear (a) what the contents of such second-order beliefs are supposed to be, nor (b) what exact role these beliefs play in the subject's recognition of her reasons. But what seems crucial for Brewer is that, on such accounts, subjects are able to recognise their experiences as reasons, *only because*

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<sup>19</sup> Another response Brewer considers is the suggestion that such a non-conceptualist explanation is only a "quasi-rational" explanation of perceptual reasons: the point seems to be that, for the Non-conceptualist, a perceiver is a bit like a skilled cyclist who adjusts the angle with which she takes a turn—and seem to do so without reason (Brewer, 1999: 160; after McDowell, 1994: 163). There are too many problems with such a response, which is why I shall ignore it here. One problem is that it's not clear what the point of the analogy with the skilled cyclist is really supposed to be. Another is that it is highly unfortunate that Brewer puts the point the way he does: he seems to be suggesting that the skilled cyclist doesn't have any reason to lean the way she does, because she does it "without reflection". But surely, Brewer does not mean to say that perceptual experiences provide reasons because subjects of experience form perceptual belief on the basis of their reflection upon their experiences and their role as reasons—as was pointed out several times, such a requirement seems psychologically implausible (although this seems to be a recurrent slip: compare Brewer, 1999: 166). Of course, perceivers might be able to

they have second-order beliefs about *what makes it the case* that perceptual experiences provide reasons—I presume that this is more or less what he means by the “credentials” of a “method of belief acquisition” (*ibid.*). Hence, it seems, the beliefs in question aren’t just about the fact that experiences provide reasons, but about how they do so.

So, what’s so bad about second-order accounts of perceptual reasons? One problem, apparently, has to do with the role played by second-order beliefs in the subject’s recognition of her reasons.<sup>20</sup> Brewer characterises second-order account of reasons as being committed to the idea that “the recognition requirement upon the provision of reasons [...] is a matter of the subject’s second-order *reflection* upon the credentials of her first-order method of belief acquisition [...]” (*ibid.*, my emphasis). As was noted above, normal perceivers don’t usually seem to engage in any reasoning or reflection when they are motivated by their perceptual experiences to form certain beliefs. Of course, it might sometimes happen that one reflects about whether one ought to really believe what one has just seen. But the point is that reflection of this kind is neither necessary, nor common, with perceptual beliefs. Hence, if subject’s recognition of their experiences as reasons is what motivates them, such recognition ought not to require any reflective process on the subjects’ part.

It’s unclear, however, why Brewer thinks that, on second-order accounts, recognition of one’s reason *has to* involve some reflective process. The mere fact that the subject’s recognition of her reason is dependent upon—or consists in—a second-order belief need not entail that such recognition is *reflectively* dependent on her second-order belief. Perhaps, the fact that the subject is disposed to recognise her experiences as reasons is constitutively linked with her disposition to entertain such second-order beliefs about reasons. Such a subject, however, need

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reflect *retrospectively* about their reasons. But then, it seems, the skilled cyclist can do the same. After her ride, she can reflect about what drove her to take the turn at the angle that she did, for instance.

<sup>20</sup> Another problem, mentioned very briefly by Brewer, is that young children seem to have perceptual experiences which provide reasons for their beliefs. And yet, Brewer seems to think, if second-order accounts were true, they would entail that children cannot have such reasons (Brewer, 1999: 106). Why? Presumably, because the sort of second-order beliefs that second-order accounts appeal to are beliefs which young children cannot entertain—or something to that effect.

not consider the content of her second-order beliefs consciously, and then reason her way to beliefs about her environment.

Brewer is more explicit about another problem which, on his view, second-order accounts of reasons have to face. He argues:

[...] a second-order account [...] appears committed to the view that satisfaction of the recognition condition upon the provision of reasons is in every case quite independent of the existence of the determinate empirical beliefs themselves. In the end, I think that precisely this tension is what is fatal to any second order approach (Brewer, 1999: 130).

This worry about the putative *independence* between the subject's first-order and second-order beliefs seems to go like this. If the subject's second-order beliefs about her perceptual reasons are independent from her first-order beliefs about the environment, it should be possible for that subject to have an experience of a kangaroo without thereby having a reason to believe there is a kangaroo in front of her. That is, it is possible that the subject lacks the relevant second-order beliefs about reasons, due to the independence between such beliefs and the subject's beliefs about her environment (see also Brewer, 1999: 162, n.12). In which case, it seems, the subject's experiences alone may not provide her with reasons. Rather, whether the subject has reasons for her first-order beliefs will depend on both her experiences and her second-order beliefs about the reason-providing role of such experiences. On this ground, Brewer urges that so-called 'first-order accounts' of perceptual reasons be sought (1999: 130).

Now, if Brewer is right about this, our Non-conceptualist would seem to be in trouble. Recall that the possible non-conceptualist position I outlined above resorted essentially—and *deliberately* so—to the subject's recognitional beliefs about her reasons, in order to account for the Recognition constraint. This appeal to the subject's recognitional states ought to suggest that the Non-conceptualist is committed to a second-order account of reasons. Indeed, Brewer claims that, in general, non-conceptualist accounts of perceptual reasons must resort to such second-order accounts (Brewer, 1999: 163-8). Otherwise, he says, Non-conceptualists cannot make sense of the Recognition constraint on reasons.

Supposing for the moment that this point is correct, how does all this rescue (BEA) from the charge that it is invalid? Perhaps, this requirement that no second-

order account of reason is satisfactory ought to be regarded as the missing premise in Brewer's argument:

- ( $\zeta^*$ )  $R$  is a reason for  $S$ 's belief that  $P$  only if  $R$  motivates  $S$ 's belief that  $P$  without relying upon any second-order belief, or instrumental reasoning, about  $R$ 's status as a reason.

However, even if ( $\zeta^*$ ) did figure in Brewer's argument, it remains unclear how this extended set of premises anymore succeeds to entail the conclusion (6). There doesn't seem to be any straightforward deductive entailment from (1)-( $\zeta^*$ ) to (6). Perhaps, at this point, Brewer's argument is best construed as an abductive argument. Rather than claim that the premises of (BEA) deductively entail the conclusion (6), Brewer sometimes writes as if Conceptualism—as opposed to Non-conceptualism—is what best makes sense of the constraints he imposes on reasons.

Does Brewer's argument succeed in this form? There are at least three reasons to doubt it. First, one might have reservations about ( $\zeta^*$ ) that second-order accounts of reasons aren't acceptable. For instance, there might be second-order accounts of reasons which do not face the difficulties Brewer alleges are encountered by all second-order accounts. In what follows, however, I shall grant Brewer's point that second-order accounts are unsatisfactory—for the sake of argument, merely.

Second, one might wonder whether non-conceptualist accounts of perceptual reasons really have to be second-order ones. Brewer hardly provides an argument—let alone a satisfactory argument—for such a claim. He just claims that Peacocke's account of perceptual reasons is forced towards such a second-order account. But, in fact, it seems as though Peacocke does have the resources to avoid such a consequence.<sup>21</sup>

More interestingly, one might suspect that Brewer himself is forced towards a second-order account of perceptual reasons. If so, it isn't true that Conceptualism

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<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Peacocke (2001: 257-9). According to Peacocke, recognition of experiences as reasons requires a *conception* of the relationship between the contents of experiences and those of beliefs—i.e., concepts constituting those contents. Such a conception isn't second-order, Peacocke points out, because it's not about experiential and doxastic states, but only about their contents (*ibid.*). Other recipes may be available to the Non-conceptualist to avoid this problem (see, e.g., Heck, 2000: 519-20).

best explains perceptual reasons and the constraints Brewer imposes on such reasons. In the next section, I look at the details of Brewer's own account. I argue that if Brewer's account isn't a second-order account of perceptual reasons, neither is the possible Non-conceptualist account outlined previously.

#### 4.3. *Tu Quoque?*

Let us assume that second-order accounts of perceptual reasons are a no go. On this ground, Brewer argues that Conceptualism fares better than Non-conceptualist accounts of perceptual reasons. That's because, he claims, non-conceptualist accounts of perceptual reasons are forced to resort to second-order accounts (Brewer, 1999: 168). Assuming—again for the sake of argument—that this too is correct, I consider whether, in fact, Brewer's account fares any better.

On Brewer's own brand of Conceptualism, it is the conceptual content of a perceptual experience that constitutes a perceiver's reason for her empirical belief.<sup>22</sup> According to Brewer, the *content* of experience can figure as a premise in an argument for the conclusion—this is how Brewer thinks perceptual reasons satisfy the Inferential constraint.

Thus, suppose that Pauline sees a red kangaroo in the bush. Her experience has the content that:

- (i) there is a red kangaroo in front of me.

An experience with that content, it seems, can be a reason for Pauline's belief that:

- (ii) there is a red kangaroo in front of me.

Pauline's reason—the content of her experience in (i)—clearly satisfies the first constraint Brewer imposes on reasons in premise (2) of (BEA). Surely, there can be an inferential relation between the propositions expressed in (i) and (ii), just as *P* trivially entails *P*.

But does this satisfy the other constraints Brewer imposes on reasons? For instance, how does Pauline's reason in (i) motivate (causally and rationally) a belief with the content that (ii) in such a way that Pauline *recognises* (i) as her reason for (ii)? For one thing, (i) and (ii) hardly make up an argument for the conclusion that

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<sup>22</sup> As Martin (2001: 442) notes.

(ii), which ‘articulates’ the source of Pauline’s reason—let alone articulate why it is rational for Pauline to believe (ii) on the basis of (i).<sup>23</sup> Suppose that, instead of being the content of Pauline’s perceptual experience, (i) expresses the content of a hunch—or any content which the subject entertains ‘out of the blue’ as it were, and to which she isn’t quite prepared to commit herself yet. Nothing in the way (i) is specified makes it the content of an experience rather than that of a hunch. But if it is the content of a hunch, it seems as though (i) shouldn’t be a reason for Pauline’s belief that (ii). Surely, hunches aren’t usually regarded as providing reasons.

Perhaps, then, it is better to articulate Pauline’s reason *via* the following argument:

- (i\*) I have a visual experience that there is a red kangaroo in front of me.
- (ii) ∴ there is a red kangaroo in front of me.

where (i\*) does express a reason to believe (ii). And so, the argument above does ‘articulate’ the source of Pauline’s reason—even if it doesn’t explicitly articulate why it is rational for Pauline to believe (ii) on the basis of (i\*). In this sense, it seems, Pauline might recognise (i\*) as her reason—she might even cite the fact expressed in (i\*) as her reason. The problem for Brewer, however, is that (i\*) doesn’t look like it expresses the content of a perceptual experience. Rather, it expresses the content of a belief *about* a perceptual experience.

At this point, Brewer might insist that the representational content of experience is essentially demonstrative. Perhaps, then, the argument articulating the rationality of Pauline’s reason goes as follows:

- (i\*\*) this is a red kangaroo.
- (ii) ∴ there is a red kangaroo in front of me.

Again, though, nothing in the way (i\*\*) is specified makes it the content of an experience. Again, it could be the content of a hunch.<sup>24</sup> However, this is precisely

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<sup>23</sup> As Brewer (1999: 184-5) himself seems to be aware.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Martin (2001: ).

what Brewer seems to deny. For him, there is something special about the demonstrative contents of perceptual experiences:

The suggestion [...] is that a proper account of what is involved in [the subject's] *grasp* of such perceptual experiential contents, as revelatory of the way things are with persisting objects and their properties in the mind-independent world around him, illuminates the source of a person's epistemic, albeit defeasible, right to endorse those very contents in belief. [...] Perceptual experiences are essential to a person's grasp of certain demonstrative contents, whose reference to particular mind-independent objects and properties is achieved in such a way that his simply entertaining these contents gives him a reason to endorse them in belief (Brewer, 1999: 186).<sup>25</sup>

The idea, it appears, is that the demonstrative content expressed in (i\*\*) is not *any* demonstrative content. Rather, it is the demonstrative content of the subject's experience, the grasping of which is constitutive of the subject's "apprehension of the facts": her "*epistemic openness* to the way things mind-independently are out there" (1999: 204).

But how does this help with the Recognition constraint? Brewer does not say. But some of the things he says are suggestive. For instance, he is explicit that, in order to have reasons, a subject must have a conception of reasons:

Coming to believe something *for a reason* [...] essentially involves some conception of what one is up to in doing so, some sense of why this is the right thing to do. Thus, if a person's reasons are to be cited as *her reasons* for believing or doing what she does, then she necessarily recognizes them as such (1999: 165-6).

But what kind of conception is that—and what is its content? In the case of the demonstrative content of perceptual experiences, Brewer suggests that the subject's conception must involve at least the following:

[...], a perceiving subject of such [perceptual demonstrative] contents necessarily recognizes that the way things currently appear to him is the joint upshot of the way things are anyway, in the mind-independent world around him, and his current point of view upon them and the other relevant circumstances of perception. He is necessarily alive to the possibility of alternative presentations of *that very thing's being thus*, from different points of view or in different circumstances. It is this, I claim, which provides him with a reason to endorse those very contents in belief (1999: 203-4).

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<sup>25</sup> See also Brewer (1999: 204-5).

Hence, such a conception, it seems, must amount to the subject's realisation that her grasp of a perceptual demonstrative content results from her own interaction with the world—that her having perceptual experiences with such contents 'reveals' the world (or immediate environment) to her. (Or to put it in Brewer's preferred terms, a conception of the subject's own *epistemic openness* to the facts, *via* the demonstrative contents of her experiences—or something to that effect.)

But this is starting to sound very much like a second-order account of reasons. A subject can recognise the demonstrative content of her experience as a reason just because she has a conception (believes?) that her experiences constitutes her epistemic openness to her environment. This is a conception or belief about experiences and their epistemic role: in this sense, it seems to be a second-order belief or conception.

Furthermore, Brewer appears to suggest that, when the subject entertains the demonstrative content of her experience, it is her grasp of that content, *together with* her conception of such contents, which makes it possible for her to recognise the content of her experience as a reason. Hence, it seems, merely having an experience with a demonstrative content isn't sufficient to recognise it as a reason. For such recognition to take place, one must have a conception of why the demonstrative contents of experiences provide reasons. But then, one might ask whether such a conception is not itself independent from the subject's beliefs about her environment.

Brewer seems aware of this worry—i.e., that the 'independence worry' could be raised against his own account. But, he insists, his account of the Recognition constraint in no way commits him to a second-order account of reasons:

[...] my account is indeed first order in the relevant sense. A person's recognition of the reasons which are provided by his perceptual experiences for his perceptual demonstrative beliefs, as the reasons which they are for him to believe such things, is, on my account integral to his very understanding of the contents in question, so integral to his possession of empirical beliefs with such contents, and absolutely not derived from any independent

reflection upon the general reliability of the method by which such beliefs are acquired (1999: 219)<sup>26</sup>

The crucial point, I take it, is the claim that the subject's recognitional state of her experience as a reason is "integral" to her first-order belief. What does this mean? Brewer is not, I assume, denying that the subject's conception of what it is for her to have a perceptual reason is *about* reasons, experiences, and how experiences provide reasons for beliefs. And if *being about* such things is all it takes for a state to be second-order, then Brewer isn't denying that a second-order conception ought to play some role in the way subjects recognise their experiences as reasons.

What he is rejecting is a certain description of the role played by such a conception. By claiming that the subject's conception of reasons is *integral* to her beliefs about the environment, Brewer apparently takes himself to be denying that the subject's conception of reasons is independent from such beliefs. The point is, that a subject does not form empirical beliefs about her environment on the basis of an *inference*, which starts with the recognition that she has a certain experience, *via* her conception that perceptual experiences like the one she's having provide reasons for certain beliefs, to the belief itself. Rather, Brewer seems to think, the subject's conception of how experiences provide reasons is *constitutive* of what it is to understand the content of her belief about the environment.

Hence, the point isn't so much about whether the Recognition constraint is to be accounted in terms of *second-order* conceptions, beliefs, or recognitional states.<sup>27</sup> The point is whether such second-order states are *independent* from the reasons, recognition of which they are supposed to make possible—and from the empirical beliefs for which such reasons are reasons. Brewer's own solution to that problem is to say that the subject cannot grasp the demonstrative content of a perceptual experience—and entertain such a content in belief—without having a conception of how such demonstrative contents provide reasons by making the subject epistemically open to the world.

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<sup>26</sup> Compare also the puzzling comments Brewer makes at (1999: 238-9).

<sup>27</sup> If so, then Peacocke's response to Brewer might not be entirely satisfactory (see note 21).

But now: if this claim suffices to make Brewer's account of perceptual reasons an appropriate first-order account, then the same kind of claim seems available to the Non-conceptualist. She, too, can claim that the subject's recognitional state of her experience of a kangaroo as a reason is one of the components underlying her capacity to form the belief that there is a kangaroo in front of her. For instance, she might say that beliefs about the environment come in a package together with beliefs about experiences and their epistemic role. For instance, it might be that a subject cannot understand the proposition that:

There is a red kangaroo in front of me.

Without being *able* to grasp (i) another proposition about her experience,

I have a visual experience of a red kangaroo in front of me.

as well as (ii) one about the epistemic role of her experience:

That I have a visual experience of a red kangaroo in front of me is a reason for believing that there is a red kangaroo in front of me.

In other words, she cannot understand what it means for a kangaroo to be in front of her without some grasp of what it is to perceive a kangaroo and how perception of a kangaroo guarantees the truth of a belief about the presence of a kangaroo. In this sense, the subject's recognitional state of her reason is integral, or constitutive, of her belief about the environment.

If this is correct, Brewer's second-order challenge falls short of raising any serious trouble for Non-conceptualists. For whatever resources are available to Brewer to escape that challenge appear to be available to the Non-conceptualist too. In which case, this second-order challenge certainly seems insufficient to block the charge that the Non-conceptualist can accept all the premises of Brewer's argument whilst denying its conclusion—and hence, that Brewer's argument is invalid.

*Wrapping up:* I have argued in this section that Brewer's argument for Conceptualism is invalid. This is illustrated, I have claimed, by the availability of a non-conceptualism position which accepts all the premises of Brewer's argument, but not its conclusion. I have also tried to show why Brewer's second-order

challenge—the challenge that Non-conceptualists must appeal to second-order states to explain how perceptual reasons can be recognised—does not really threaten Non-conceptualists.

### 5. Conceptualism Really?

Finally, I want to outline one last respect in which Brewer's argument seems to fail. Even if the premises of (BEA) were well-motivated and the argument valid, a remaining worry still hangs over the conclusion:

- (6) perceptual experiences must have a conceptual content.

The worry is: does such a conclusion really support the conceptualist view of experience, as I described it in the first section?

**Conceptualism:** if a subject  $S$  has a perceptual experience  $e$ , then, for any object  $o$ , property  $f$ , relation  $r$ , ..., represented by  $e$ ,  $S$  must possess a concept for  $o, f, r, \dots$

So far, notice that attention has been almost entirely focused upon Conceptualism. Except for the possible Non-conceptualist response sketched in (§4), I have said hardly anything about the Non-conceptualist side of things. Presumably, there are many ways in which to be a Non-conceptualist—that is, many ways to oppose Conceptualism and the various considerations associated with it. In this regard, Non-conceptualism can be characterised in an essentially negative fashion. And the incomplete specification of Conceptualism used throughout this paper offers two ways to be a Non-conceptualist—or two versions of Non-conceptualism.

According to the strongest form of Non-conceptualism, the negation of Conceptualism is given a narrow scope:

**Strong Non-conceptualism:** if a subject  $S$  has a perceptual experience  $e$ , then, for any object  $o$ , property  $f$ , relation  $r$ , ..., represented by  $e$ , it is *not* the case that  $S$  must possess a concept for  $o, f, r, \dots$

On this view, the representational content of perceptual experiences is entirely non-conceptual. Of course, subjects possess concepts; and the various thoughts and beliefs that might accompany their experiences can have conceptual content.

But experiences themselves require possession of no concept whatsoever.<sup>28</sup> (The possible Non-conceptualist response sketched in section 4 was meant to be an instance of such a view.) Many, I take it, will find Strong Non-conceptualism to be just as extreme as the Conceptualist view.

There is, of course, a weaker version of Non-conceptualism, championed by the likes of Block (2002), Fales (1996) Martin (1992), and most importantly, Peacocke (1992, 2001). On this version, the negation of Conceptualism takes wide scope:

**Weak Non-conceptualism:** if a subject *S* has a perceptual experience *e*, then, it is *not* the case that, for any object *o*, property *f*, relation *r*, ..., represented by *e*, *S* must possess a concept for *o, f, r, ...*

According to this form of Non-conceptualism, it may be that parts of the content of experiences are conceptual—where the “parts” in question just are the objects, properties, relations, represented in the content of experience, for which the subject must possess concepts, while some objects, properties, relations, etc. are represented non-conceptually. Thus, Non-conceptualists of this kind agree that possession of concepts might determine the representational content of experience. They only deny the claim that this holds across the board—namely, that everything which is represented in experience requires possession of concepts, or that all aspects of perceptual representation are thus conceptualised.<sup>29</sup>

Now to our problem: no matter how this weak form of Non-conceptualism is construed exactly, its availability in logical space undermines the assumption that the conclusion (6) of Brewer’s argument actually supports Conceptualism. For it seems as though advocates of this weak form of Non-conceptualism can accept the conclusion of Brewer’s argument. Of course, they would have to say that only perceptual experiences, the content of which is conceptual, in fact provide reasons. (Or perhaps, that only parts of the representational content of

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<sup>28</sup> Proponents of Strong Non-conceptualism might include Bermúdez (1998), Dretske (1981, 1993), Evans (1982), and Tye (1995).

<sup>29</sup> There may be different versions of this weak form of Non-conceptualism, depending on whether (i) it is *necessary* for at least some objects, properties, and relations that their representation in experience requires possession of at least some concepts, or whether (ii) it is entirely contingent that a given object or property gets represented in experience *via* a concept.

experiences—namely, those parts which are conceptual—provide reasons.) I presume that not all proponents of Weak Non-conceptualism will be prepared to grant that much. Peacocke (2001), for instance, insists that experiences with non-conceptual content can provide reasons.

Nevertheless, some of them might accept that perceptual experiences provide reasons insofar as their content is conceptual. This is entirely consistent with thinking—and having arguments to the effect—that the representational content of perceptual experiences isn't completely conceptual. In other words, it is possible to reject Conceptualism as I characterised it above and still accept the conclusion (6) of Brewer's argument. Assuming that that argument worked, its conclusion clearly rules out the strong version of Non-conceptualism—as well as some versions of Weak Non-conceptualism. But it doesn't entail the truth of Conceptualism, since it is compatible with a certain kind of Weak Non-conceptualism.

Of course, the kind of Weak Non-conceptualism in question will impose some sort of restriction upon which parts of the content of perceptual experiences provide reasons. In accordance with (6), the Weak Non-conceptualist might say that:

- (1\*) for any object  $o$ , property  $f$ , relation  $r$ , ..., which is represented in  $S$ 's experience  $e$ ,  $e$  provides  $S$  with a reason for a belief about  $o, f, r, \dots$ , only if  $S$  possesses a concept for  $o, f, r, \dots$

Such a claim captures the sense in which the relevant kind of Weak Non-conceptualist might accept premise (1) in Brewer's argument.

Perhaps, Brewer might try to retort that nothing warrants such a restriction. That in fact, every object, property, and relation represented in the content of a subject's experience provides at least a reason for some belief or other—whether or not she in fact forms or endorses such beliefs. Thus, Brewer might attempt to replace (1\*) with:

- (1\*\*) for any object  $o$ , property  $f$ , relation  $r$ , ..., which is represented in  $S$ 's experience  $e$ ,  $e$  provides  $S$  with a reason for a belief about  $o, f, r, \dots$

Of course, Brewer might be right about this—and many Non-conceptualists will surely agree with him on this point.

The problem for Brewer, however, is that he himself is in no position to argue that, while (i\*\*) is true, (i\*) isn't. By Brewer's own lights, (i\*) has to be true. And so, Brewer cannot really argue that premise (i) shouldn't be restricted along the lines of (i\*). He himself must believe that, in fact, (i\*)—and not (i\*\*)—captures what premise (i) in (BEA) really means.

If this is correct, then (BEA) does not in fact support Conceptualism. Even if Brewer's argument worked, it would only establish that some versions of Non-conceptualism are unacceptable. But *not* that all are! And if (BEA) is supposed to be the main argument for Conceptualism, one would hope that it establishes more than that.

## **6. Conclusion**

Brewer's Epistemic Argument (BEA) for Conceptualism teaches us no lesson at all—or at least, not the lesson it was supposed to teach. I have tried to show that such an argument fails in at least three important respects. First, the premises of the argument are poorly motivated. Second, the argument appears to be invalid. Third, the conclusion of the argument doesn't really seem to support Conceptualism.

Of course, I have only shown that Brewer's version of the argument—and the way he actually defends it—is unsatisfactory. Perhaps, it is possible to offer better considerations in favour of the premises of (BEA), and to add certain—well-motivated—premises to make the argument valid. It might also be possible to find additional arguments against the weak form of Non-conceptualist compatible with the conclusion (6), so as to rule out such a view as a relevant alternative to Conceptualism. Nevertheless, at the moment, I don't really see how this can be done. In any case, the onus is on Brewer and his fellow Conceptualists to show how what is allegedly the main argument advanced for their view can fare any better than in its present version.

Perhaps, there are other arguments for Conceptualism. (I can think of a few putative considerations which one might try to work out into an argument for Conceptualism.) Surprisingly, however, Conceptualists like Brewer and McDowell

don't seem prepared to explore such avenues. They really seem to think that the epistemic role of perceptual experiences is the sole—and inevitable—reason in support of the conceptualist doctrine. If so, it really looks as though Conceptualism is in a dreadful situation, in the sense that it remains entirely unmotivated.

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