

University of Virginia  
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AMBIGUITY IN THE BACKGROUND OF EXPERIENCE:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ARGUMENT FROM FINENESS OF GRAIN

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PHIL 836: Experience

by

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# I

An exciting new perspective on mental content, *nonconceptualism*, has recently been gaining adherents. It offers a fresh perspective on old problems within the philosophy of mind and cognition, and many philosophers have seized upon this new tool in attempts to solve several long-standing problems.<sup>1</sup> As might be expected, however, this has stirred the pot.

Within the philosophy of perception, intentionalists have begun to ask the question, “Can perceptual experience, and the objects, properties, and relations that are featured within it, be fully explained by the possession of concepts?”<sup>2</sup> Some have answered in the affirmative, these have been labeled conceptualists.<sup>3</sup> Some have denied that concepts possession can fully explain the same, these have been labeled nonconceptualists.<sup>4</sup>

These contending parties enter into discussions according to the following conflict: the exciting and new problem-solving abilities of nonconceptualism versus the epistemological cost that conceptualists have come to think is at stake. Specifically, conceptualists worry that empirical justification might be lost if nonconceptual perceptual content is allowed. When Gareth Evans introduced the idea of nonconceptual content in 1982, McDowell reacted against the idea because of an epistemological concern that he had:

The process of conceptualization or judgement takes the subject from his being in one kind of informational state (with a content of a certain kind, namely, non-conceptual content) to his being in another kind of cognitive state (with a content of a different kind, namely, conceptual content).<sup>5</sup>

- Evans

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<sup>1</sup> José Bermúdez and Arnon Cahen, “Nonconceptual Mental Content,” the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, 2008), available < <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/content-nonconceptual> > (5 March, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> This is a paraphrase of a combination of several definitive comments regarding Conceptualism. See Charles Pelling, “Concepts, Attention, and Perception,” *Philosophical Papers* 37:2 (2008): 213. See also John, McDowell, Gareth Evans, Christopher Peacocke, and Charles Pelling, as cited below.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the leading conceptualists include: John McDowell, Charles Pelling, and Philippe Chuard.

<sup>4</sup> Some of the leading non-conceptualists include: Gareth Evans, M. G. F. Martin, Christopher Peacocke, Jérôme Dokic, and Sean Dorrance Kelly.

<sup>5</sup> Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 227.

According to Evans, conceptual capacities are first brought into operation only when one makes a judgement of experience, and at that point a different species of content comes into play... According to the picture I have been recommending, the content of a perceptual experience is already conceptual. A judgement of experience does not introduce a new kind of content, but simply endorses the conceptual content, or some of it, that is already possessed by the experience on which it is grounded. [FN 6:] ... The judgement that things are thus and so can be grounded on a perceptual appearance that things are thus and so. This does not obliterate the characteristic richness of experience (especially visual experience).<sup>6</sup>

- McDowell

Sean Dorrance Kelly interprets the situation in the same way:

McDowell ... [is] not motivated by the phenomenology of perception. Rather, [he is] motivated by a certain kind of epistemological concern. In particular, [he is] motivated by the need to make sense of our capacity to have beliefs with empirical content—that is, beliefs that are grounded in, or justified by, experience. [He believes] that in order to make sense of this capacity, we must find perceptual content to be characterized in conceptual terms, since only conceptually articulated contents can justify one another.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, McDowell, along with other conceptualists, is motivated by the desire to retain the epistemological justification for empirical beliefs that comes from perception. McDowell has argued for a Kantian strategy within which the world is delivered to experience as already being conceptual. Concepts (what Kant called “spontaneity”) and the actual, physical world (“receptivity”) together are capable of explaining how experience can be an empirical source of knowledge. This is how perceptual experience is able to provide reasons for beliefs about the world.

The original Kantian thought was that empirical knowledge results from a co-operation between receptivity and spontaneity. (Here ‘spontaneity’ can be simply a label for the involvement of conceptual capacities.) ... The relevant conceptual capacities are drawn on *in* receptivity... We should understand what Kant calls ‘intuition’—experiential intake—not as a bare getting of an extra-conceptual Given, but as a kind of occurrence or state that already has conceptual content.<sup>8</sup>

And,

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<sup>6</sup> John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 47-49.

<sup>7</sup> Sean Dorrance Kelly, “Demonstrative Concepts and Experience,” *The Philosophical Review* 110:3 (2001): 402.

<sup>8</sup> McDowell, 9.

To avoid making it unintelligible how the deliverances of sensibility can stand in grounding relations to paradigmatic exercises of the understanding such as judgements and beliefs, we must conceive this co-operation in a quite particular way: we must insist that the understanding is already inextricably implicated in the deliverances of sensibility themselves. Experiences are impressions made by the world on our senses, products of receptivity; but those impressions themselves already have conceptual content.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, it is easy to see why McDowell would think that nonconceptual intentional content in perception is a threat. Without the conceptual nature of perceptions, he loses his justificatory link with the objective world.

Within his view, perception must be passive—it must be a “deliverance”—and it must be in a conceptual state “already.” In other words, it is a reception without any creative activity and it is received as conceptual. Perceivers are “saddled” with the content perception provides without any willful activity.<sup>10</sup> These two properties, spontaneity and receptivity, come together in a single entity. Nonconceptualism, if applicable, would remove one of these two properties and eliminate the mediating function of this unique entity.

Despite the concerns that conceptualists have raised, nonconceptualists have put forward at least four significant challenges to conceptualism. They are, to list them briefly, first, the *waterfall illusion* and other illusions of this type that seem to indicate that, “the contents of perception exhibit certain features that cannot be exhibited by the contents of the propositional attitudes.”<sup>11</sup> Second, there seem to be negative implications for conceptualism if it is true that experience is essentially analog while concepts involving propositional attitudes are digital.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>11</sup> Bermúdez.

<sup>12</sup> Fred Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), Ch. 6, as cited in Bermúdez.

Third, if the content of perception is *unit free*, then it seems difficult to account for such content, “in purely propositional terms.”<sup>13</sup>

Most of the arguments against conceptualism, however, have involved the fourth challenge. It has been called *the richness argument*, or *the argument from fineness of grain* (FGA). It is first put forward by Evans:

No account of what it is to be in a non-conceptual informational state can be given in terms of dispositions to exercise concepts unless those concepts are assumed to be endlessly fine-grained; and does this make sense? Do we really understand the proposal that we have as many colour concepts as there are shades of colour that we can sensibly discriminate?<sup>14</sup>

Based on the amount of discussion it has generated, the FGA appears to be the most serious of the four major problems that conceptualists face. The dominant response, almost the only response, involves demonstrative concepts (such as “that color”) that can operate in place of general concepts (such as “red”) within the conceptual content of a visual experience. The demonstrative strategy was included as part of McDowell’s original formulation in his 1994 monograph:

One can give linguistic expression to a concept that is exactly as fine-grained as the experience, by uttering a phrase like “that shade,” in which the demonstrative exploits the presence of the sample.<sup>15</sup>

Even within the same paper, however, McDowell introduces a feature of the demonstrative strategy that has become its Achilles heel, the need for a *recognitional capacity*, which has resulted in the *re-identification condition* (RIDC).<sup>16</sup>

It has been thought that the demonstrative concepts that arise in perceptual experiences are required to last a certain amount of time in order to play their essential role in answering the

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Peacocke, “Analogue content,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 60 (1986): 1-17. And, “Perceptual Content,” In J. Almog, J. Perry, and H. Wettstein (Eds.), *Themes from Kaplan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Both as cited in Bermúdez.

<sup>14</sup> Evans, 229.

<sup>15</sup> McDowell, 57.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly, 399.

FGA in defense of conceptualism. The RIDC has been developed at considerable length most notably by Dokic, Kelly, and Brewer.<sup>17</sup> Briefly, an inability to reliably re-identify, for example, an exact color shade indicates that the subject lacks the relevant concept in much the same way that a child's inability to distinguish between kangaroos and other kinds of animal after visiting a petting zoo would indicate the lack of the concept of a kangaroo. The child might be capable of tracking the animal while it is in view, but would not be able to pick it out of a group of horses, goats, and cows after having lost sight of the animals for a period of time, for example. Philippe Chuard uses the example of a man selecting a paint color in a hardware shop to make the same point with adults.<sup>18</sup> After having picked out a specific color on a chart with scores of very similar color squares, a man accidentally drops the chart and loses track of which color he had selected. We would expect that he would have difficulty quickly re-identifying the color he had chosen before he dropped the chart. Clearly, the more similar in hue any two colored surfaces become, the more difficult it is to distinguish them. Moreover, as the FGA concludes, at the limits of our ability to perceive a difference at all, it is hard to imagine that normal human subjects are capable of possessing this vast number of unique color concepts that seem to be present in experience.

Chuard, in defense of conceptualism and in opposition to the FGA, has suggested that the recognitional capacity and the RIDC may reasonably be abandoned even while continuing to employ the demonstrative strategy. He has argued that the reasons for holding to the RIDC are not valid. He collects the various arguments into three categories and shows how each is insufficient.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jérôme Dokic and Élisabeth Pacherie, "Shades and Concepts," *Analysis* 61:3 (2001): 193-202. Kelly, 397-420. Bill Brewer, "Perceptual Experience Has Conceptual Content," in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, ed. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 225.

<sup>18</sup> Philippe Chuard, "Demonstrative Concepts Without Re-Identification," *Philosophical Studies* 130 (2006): 163.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-177. These three reasons are, i) the distance requirement, ii) the generality constraint, and iii) Kelly's intuitive example.

This is where the contemporary discussion rests. Evans, McDowell, Kelly, Dokic, and Bill Brewer<sup>20</sup> think that the RIDC is an appropriate condition limiting proper application of demonstrative concepts. Of these, Evans, Kelly, and Dokic think that the RIDC cannot be met by demonstrative concepts. McDowell and Brewer think that RIDC can be met. Currently, Chuard is the only philosopher proposing that the RIDC may be abandoned entirely. In Chuard's view, the demonstrative strategy successfully defends conceptualism against the FGA in the absence of the RIDC.

Despite being in the minority, Chuard's response seems to work best, and so, the demonstrative strategy without the RIDC is an adequate response to FGA. This approach is capable of protecting the overall Kantian strategy that McDowell employs. Not everyone will be so inclined, however, and therefore it appears that there is good reason to look for additional ways to oppose the FGA. That will be the purpose of this paper, to provide a new way of approaching the FGA in order to bolster the conceptualist position. That is, I will be proposing an additional reason to think that the FGA is not a successful defeater. Those philosophers who are not convinced by McDowell, Brewer, or Chuard, may yet be convinced by this distinct argument.

## II

To start my own argument in this discussion, I first want to take a certain perspective on the FGA that is somewhat unusual. From the nonconceptualist position and the manner in which the FGA is presented, that which is experienced and yet not conceptualized is "missed" in the sense

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<sup>20</sup> Bill Brewer, "Perceptual Experience Has Conceptual Content," in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, ed. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 224-226. The other philosophers are cited above.

that it is not properly utilized and/or remembered. Recall the way that Evans introduces the FGA, “Do we really understand the proposal that we have as many colour concepts as there are shades of colour that we can sensibly discriminate?”<sup>21</sup> This provides us with three categories. First, I take the “sensibly discriminated” to be synonymous with everything that is experienced (in the narrow sense). This set is further divided into two sub-sets delineated according to whether or not the members have been conceptualized. The implication is that some content is conceptualized, but the remainder is not. The nonconceptualized content, therefore, cannot be remembered in conceptual form. Concepts relevant to the perception, in these cases, are missed. Fine color discriminations, for example, require concomitant conceptual differences if they are to be used at a later time. In cases where memory is incapable of delivering concepts that allow for the relevant discriminations, it is presumed that a prior conceptualization has not taken place. An inability to re-identify not only *reveals* a lack of conceptualization but it establishes the essence of nonconceptual content as incompatible with personal-level memory of relevant concepts.<sup>22</sup> Those concepts that are not generated, are thus not remembered.

We see this point being made in Evans, as a critic of conceptualism, but we also see it in McDowell and most other conceptualists. Nonconceptualists argue that if aspects of the experience had been conceptualized, even as demonstrative concepts, then a capacity to later recognize or re-identify would be present. This capacity is largely absent in various test cases, as it is with the man in the hardware store who drops the paint-color chart and is unable to quickly re-identify which color he had chosen only a moment before. Using my own terminology, I would say that the paint selector has *missed* something in the original perceptual experience

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<sup>21</sup> Evans, 229.

<sup>22</sup> Pelling, 225-230, speculates briefly on sub-personal memorial function as a way to explain remembering what was never experienced. Because of this, I am here specifying that nonconceptual content is incompatible with *personal-level* memory.

when he fails to re-identify the color. With both McDowell and Evans agreeing about the tie between memory and content of experience (despite the disagreement of Chuard) I take this to be uncontroversial. In my own words, then, returning to the aspect that I wish to focus upon, “missed” content means both *not-conceptualized* and *not-remembered*. This not only emphasizes the tie between memory and conceptualization, but it will also allow for my subsequent argument to have a more intuitive appeal.

One might protest that I have not adequately discussed memories of nonconceptual content. This kind of memory appears to be what M. G. F. Martin has in mind when he says, “The thoughts that one can reason with are restricted to those for which one has a conceptual ability; how things can appear to one is restricted rather by one’s sensitivity to the world.”<sup>23</sup> Yet, there is a sense in which every aspect of perception is either a learned category, or an innate category. At a young age, one learns to see areas of color as physical, three-dimensional objects, and only after that time is one able to remember seeing objects. This is certainly a more primitive example than the ones Martin puts forward, but it is the same kind of learning experience. In one of his examples, a woman named Mary learns what a dodecahedron is and is then able to recall having seen one. Yet, Mary already knew what a three-dimensional object was. Martin does not suggest that this ability is a conceptual addition to the pristine and direct “sensitivity to the world.” But, if not, why? And if he says yes, then how far back does the investigation need to go before pure sensitivity is found?

According to the current discussion, then, Mary misses the dodecahedron if she fails to perceive it in the form of the concept “dodecahedron.” In this case, she fails to conceptualize and remember the object as a dodecahedron. Similarly, if she fails to conceptualize and remember an object, perhaps even the same object, then she misses it as an object.

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<sup>23</sup> M. G. F. Martin, “Perception, Concepts, and Memory,” *Philosophical Review* 101:4 (1992): 763.

According to conceptualists, in contrast with Martin's position, all experience is conceptual. Some aspects of experience take the form of general concepts like "red," but most take the form of demonstrative concepts, like "that color." To the conceptualist, then, *nothing is missed*. McDowell had pointed out, to paraphrase, that a recognitional capacity would establish that the essential concept had not been missed.<sup>24</sup> To use later terminology, if demonstrative concepts were to meet the RIDC then they can play a role that would allow conceptualism to successfully overcome the FGA. Lastly, to complete my rephrasing of the relevant discussions according to the "missed" terminology, Chuard, by rejecting Kelly's distance requirement and generality constraint, has shown that it is quite possible that a part of experience was not missed despite the fact that the subject may also be unable to verify this fact at a later time. This means that nothing is missed in experience despite the fact that most of it fails to form a memory.

The FGA, then, is an attempt to point out that, because there is too much information in experience for conceptual capacities to handle, at least some information must be missed. Consider this analogy, a man with two hands cannot catch 1000 tennis balls that are tossed at him at the same time. He necessarily misses some of the balls because the tools required to catch them all, 1000 hands, are not available to him. This "catch" or "miss" analogy is an important part of the first step in my argument.

Recall that the FGA proposes two sub-sets within the set of everything that is sensibly discriminated, the set of the missed perceptual experiences and the set of perceptual experiences that I have just labeled "caught." The FGA, in order to be established, must be able to show that the missed set is populated *and* that some of the members of this set must be nonconceptual. I think that it is possible to bring some degree of uncertainty to both of these claims. I will be attempting to rule out only one.

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<sup>24</sup> McDowell, 57.

The FGA requires both of these criteria to be true:

F1: The set of missed perceptual experiences must not be empty.

F2: Some of the members of the set of missed perceptual experiences must be nonconceptual.

In order to argue that at least one of these two criteria cannot be met, I will start by looking at what experience includes and what it excludes. I take it to be universally accepted that there are degrees of perception. Pelling and Chuard have given similar accounts of how experience is divided into categories based on extent of awareness. Below, I compile both views into one figure that not only shows how experience is divided, but also shows how these authors think that it relates to the sub-personal (Fig.1).<sup>25</sup>

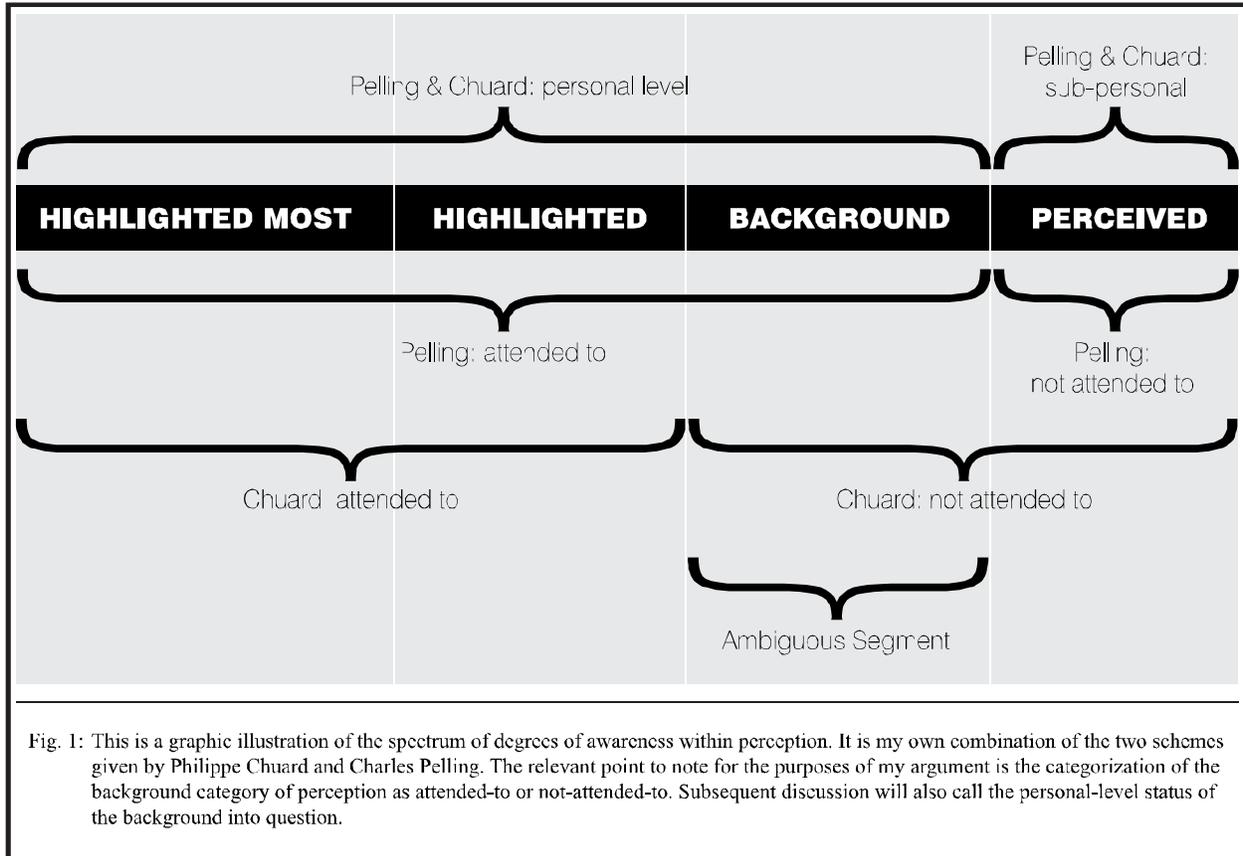
The distinctions being made are between what a subject experiences in the highest degree (being highlighted most, noticed, attended to, and being at the personal- or conscious-level) from what the subject experiences in the lowest degree (not being highlighted at all, noticed, or attended to). Both Chuard and Pelling call this lowest degree of experience “background,” and, despite accounting for it in different ways (Chuard: not attended to *at all*, Pelling: highlighted least but still attended to), both philosophers agree that this segment of the spectrum is located within the personal level.

I claim, in contrast with this view, that the background is not unambiguously situated within the personal-level. Instead, it is only *possibly* at the personal level. If so, then it is unclear whether its contents are experienced or if they are merely perceived (as sub-personal). Because it is unclear just where the boundary between the personal-level and sub-personal-level lies, since it is unclear where the background is located on the spectrum, and because any merely perceived item falls below the personal-level threshold, items within the background *possibly* do not

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<sup>25</sup> Pelling, 225-230. See also, Chuard, “The Riches of Experience,” (Draft) (Canberra: Australian National University), 14, available < [http://philrsss.anu.edu.au/people-defaults/philippe/the\\_riches\\_of\\_experience.pdf](http://philrsss.anu.edu.au/people-defaults/philippe/the_riches_of_experience.pdf)> (6 May 2009).

qualify as being in the “missed” set because they were never part of experience in the narrow sense.



Why do I claim that the status of the background is ambiguous? I have two arguments for this, the first of which will be given briefly in this paragraph, the second of which will be given in section III. From Pelling’s view, the claim that the background is attended to in some sense is possibly correct. It seems obvious that it is possible to be minimally aware of the entire periphery of experience. Alternatively, it is possible that some portion of the periphery is not attended to at all. Chuard thinks that this does not automatically relegate such items to the sub-personal or to the nonconceptual. Clearly, there is also a sub-personal “area” (for lack of a better term) for perceptual elements to exist within. Pelling claims that his alternative account is coherent and is better than Chuard’s. Whether or not this is true, however, Pelling has not rendered Chuard’s

account impossible. He states, “It does seem possible, then, to give a coherent account of the foreground/background distinction... Indeed, I think that the sort of account that I have just sketched actually provides a *better* explanation.”<sup>26</sup> This leaves us with three broadly possible accounts of where on the spectrum the background might be located. Yet, if this is where the discussion rests, with multiple possibilities, then this means that the status is ambiguous. Future investigations may cause theorists to form a consensus on the matter. And, should this occur, then the argument in this paper would become significantly less relevant. But, given the state of the discussion to date, I see no reason not to proceed.

F1 stipulates that the FGA depends on the non-emptiness of a set within experience. If this set must reside within the ambiguous background region, it follows that its contents are equally as ambiguous. This claim, to be supported below, therefore threatens F1. This is because F1 cannot be known to be true if the set of missed perceptual experiences is only possibly populated. In step-wise form this argument’s structure goes as follows:

1. The FGA stands or falls on the truth of both F1 and F2.
2. For F1 to be true, the set it refers to must be unambiguously non-empty.
3. The set F1 refers to cannot be shown to be unambiguously non-empty.  
Therefore,
4. F1 cannot be established.  
Therefore,
5. The FGA cannot be established.

Premise 3 can be supported more strongly. I will provide the second argument in support of that premise now.

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<sup>26</sup> Pelling, 230. Emphasis in original.

### III

M. G. F. Martin provides a scenario that will be useful in showing exactly why the background segment of the perceptual spectrum is ambiguous, whether it exists at the personal level or at the sub-personal level.<sup>27</sup> Martin suggests a believable situation in which a man, Archie, looks in a drawer for his cuff link. The cuff link is present in the drawer, but for some reason, he fails to notice it. He goes on to search in other places, eventually gives up the search, and leaves the house to go to dinner. A little while later, Archie remembers seeing the cuff link in the drawer. For some reason he did not notice the item at the time he was viewing the contents of the drawer, but later, his mind is able to present him with information about what he saw, information which he had not noticed at the time of the original experience. Martin thinks that this kind of scenario teaches us that, elements of experience need not “impinge” on beliefs. But, if this is the case, then by what means does Archie receive his information about the cuff link? The answer is memory. Yet, is it reasonable to think that Archie remembers something he never noticed?

Martin notes correctly that memories do not inform us directly about the state of the world, instead, “they inherit whatever authority they have from being the traces of past perceptions of how things were.”<sup>28</sup> This shows that, as with (typical) synchronic scenarios, justification can be had in diachronic scenarios through the mediation of the function of memory. However, Archie’s situation indicates to me that memory may also come from a perception that was not highlighted, attended to, or even noticed at the time the memory was formed.

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<sup>27</sup> Martin, 749-750.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 751-752.

There are two basic explanations for how the cuff link scenario might work. First, as Martin suggests, it is possible for a person to remember what was never conceptualized. Archie saw the cuff link, but failed to conceptualize it, and as a result, he also failed to ascribe the correct amount of importance to what was seen. Later he reviewed his memory, conceptualized it, and was then able to make use of the visual conception by recognizing the object as the one for which he was searching. Second, it is possible for a person to remember only because of conceptualization. Or, to put it another way, remembering requires conceptualization.

Pelling offers a sub-personal explanation that, presumably, includes sub-personal conceptualization. He thinks that, possibly, Archie could recall what he never experienced by means of a sub-personal process. This provides a conceptualist-friendly alternative to Martin's interpretation of the cuff link scenario and removes it as a threat. However, there is a problem with Pelling's response.

The experience of remembering having seen what was never attended to is not the same as the experience of seeing an object for the first time. The memory is of *having seen* the *cuff link*. One does not recall the scene in the form of a sub-personal perception; when one reviews one's memories, they are of an experience, that is, an experience of the object at the personal level. And, one does not recall merely having seen a set of bare, unprocessed pixels that is only now interpreted as the object that was being searched for. Memories do not deliver past experiences in this way. Thus, there are two issues that I am trying to call out, one of timing, *when* the conceptualization takes place, and one of conceptualization, when the *conceptualization* takes place.

The cuff link example shows us that elements of a perceptual episode that were in the background can later be remembered *as if they were*, after all, attended to sufficiently to have

produced conceptualization. To use Martin's terminology, the memory presents itself as of an experience that has already impinged upon beliefs. Thus, the memory includes an impression of a conceptualization not at the time of remembering, but at the time of the remembered perception, that is, in the past. Thus, there are two points being made:

Point 1: Archie's recollection of the cuff link is a present memorial experience.

Point 2: The recollection is in the form of a conceptualized content.

The implication of these two points, in turn, strains the previously accepted boundaries of experience. Both Chuard and Pelling have suggested that experience includes the background (that which is not noticed, or highlighted but is still within experience in the narrow sense). Memories of things that were not originally noticed or highlighted (the lowest level or even sub-personal) that nonetheless present themselves *as if they were* noticed (at the highest level!) lead us to think that we can alter the degree of attention being paid to elements of a perception even after it is stored in memory! I take this to be a surprising discovery. This power is so great, in fact, that we can even resurrect some elements of experience that would have been otherwise categorized as completely missed (as with Archie's cuff link) in the sense that they were never experienced at all. This provides us with a segment of the spectrum that seems to be a member of the sub-personal from one perspective (the lowest of the low),<sup>29</sup> and a member of noticed items from another perspective (the highest of the high). This segment therefore has an ambiguous nature. To recap, the argument goes as follows:

- A. To be part of the personal level, an element of perception must be experienced (by definition).
- B. Sometimes, an element of perception that originally seems to be at the sub-personal level because it seems not to be experienced, when it is remembered at a later time, is

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<sup>29</sup> Martin thinks the missed cuff link was an experienced but nonconceptual element of perception. Pelling thinks that the cuff link was not experienced at the personal level at all but was retained only through a sub-personal process.

- remembered as if it had been experienced at the personal level (as in the cuff link scenario).
- C. If the element is a member of one part of the spectrum in one sense and a member of another part of the spectrum in another sense, then it is ambiguously located (by definition of “ambiguous”).
  - D. Because it contains ambiguous members, the background segment of the perceptual spectrum, ambiguously, is part of the personal level, or part of the sub-personal level, or it is somehow part of both.

Going back to the requirements of the FGA, specifically F1, recall that the set of missed perceptual experiences is, first and foremost, a set of *experiences*. Thus, by definition, they cannot exist within the sub-personal system. Additionally, given premise A above, they must also be located within the background segment of the spectrum or else they would not have been missed. These two requirements, therefore, become the horns of a dilemma when we recall that the background’s location (whether it is within the personal or sub-personal levels) is ambiguous. Thus, if the status of the background segment is unknown or is essentially ambiguous in its nature, then it must also be unknown/essentially ambiguous whether or not the set of missed perceptual experiences is or can be populated.

To return to the analogy of the man catching the tennis balls, we can add a few more details that will help make sense of the argument above. First we can add a low fence behind the man. Furthermore, the rules of the game now stipulate that the man has not missed a ball if it goes over the fence (representing the sub-personally perceived elements). So, when the 1000 tennis balls are thrown at the man all at once, we see three possible outcomes for each ball. The ball could be caught outright (representing experienced elements of perception). The ball could go over the fence (representing sub-personal elements). Or, the ball could be missed, but not go over the fence (representing those elements of perception that the FGA requires as stipulated in F1).

Unfortunately, we may not know whether a ball that the man appears to have missed has gone over the fence or not. The only thing we know is that he sometimes appears to miss a ball that he later is able to produce in one of his hands. Thus, the status of the set of apparently-missed balls is uncertain. If a score keeper had a column in his notebook for balls that were missed (but that did not go over the fence), this column could contain only question marks.

Returning to the non-analogical, we may add these ideas to the step-wise argument:

- E. The set of missed perceptual experiences must be located in the background segment of the spectrum, which in turn, must not be located at the sub-personal level.
- F. If elements of the background are located sub-personally, then they would not qualify as members of the set of missed perceptual *experiences*. (see A)  
Therefore,
- G. The set of missed perceptual experiences cannot be shown to be unambiguously non-empty.

But, the “set of missed perceptual experiences” is just “the set F1 refers to,” which was part of premise 3. Therefore, premise 3 above has found its second line of support and the conclusion that it had been used to support is confirmed. So much for F1.

If F1 (“The set of missed perceptual experiences must not be empty”) cannot be established, then neither can FGA. I think that a very similar attack on F2 might have served the same purpose, but, because both F1 and F2 are required for the FGA to work, it is sufficient to unseat just one of them; it is sufficient that I have argued only against F1.

#### **IV**

The FGA is only one out of five potential defeaters that challenge conceptualism. Yet, it is the dominant argument. To date, it has only been countered by recourse to demonstrative concepts. The consensus is that the RIDC is a relevant condition that demonstrative concepts must meet if

they are to be used by conceptualists to overcome the FGA. However, the majority of philosophers who have written on this issue think that demonstrative concepts cannot meet this condition. If philosophy were a democracy, conceptualism would be done for. Yet, in some sense, philosophy is at least partially democratic. Thus, if conceptualism is to be saved in the sense that philosophers will continue to pay it some respect, then it seems that a new kind of response will have to be created.

Has just such a response been given here? I think so. This is because the present argument, while mounting a sufficient response to the FGA, has not had to entangle itself with the RIDC. This is a very useful feature for the argument to have because it can be seen as a fully independent rebuttal to the FGA. As such, it may serve as a truly additional reason to reject the FGA. If philosophers of perception eventually come to unanimously think that the RIDC is a valid condition and that demonstrative concepts do not meet it, then at least one alternative reason to doubt the FGA will remain. This would put conceptualism in an interesting place, but, perhaps because of Chuard's work, the consensus will shift the other way. In that case, the present argument would serve merely as an additional reason to retain conceptualism.

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