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VISUAL EXPERIENCE, REVELATION, AND THE THREE RS

BILL BREWER

Introduction

Normal vision involves consciousness; and we often characterize the specific modification of consciousness involved in a particular case of visual experience by appeal to the way things look to the subject of that experience. My concern here is with the way in which such characterizations work. In my own case now, it looks to me as though there is a sheet of paper off to my left with many differently coloured lines on it forming a flattened loop with outwards radials that converge in a cross at the centre – it's a London tube map centred on Oxford Circus. How exactly does this description serve to convey the character of my current conscious condition; and what might this tell us about the nature of visual consciousness itself?¹

I begin in §1 with some important ideas about how we do and must specify the conscious character of vision. §2 aims to elucidate a further condition on the nature of visual experience, which I follow others in calling Revelation (e.g. Johnston, 1992; Byrne and Hilbert, 2007), by contrast with the Humility that Lewis argues governs our quite different mode of access to the imperceptible

¹ The argument that I develop here owes a great deal to John Campbell. It is especially influenced by his recent contributions to Campbell and Cassam (2014), extending earlier work in Campbell (1993) and Campbell (2002).

fundamental microscopic nature of the world around us (Lewis, 2009).² §§3&4 exploit Revelation in a series of objections to the first two of my three R's: what I call respectively the Resemblance and Representational accounts of visual experience. I sketch the principles of my third R, the Relational account that I myself favour, in §5 and conclude in §6.

§1 The Conscious Character of Vision

In 'The Refutation of Idealism', Moore famously writes as follows.

The moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see what, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous. (1922, p. 25)

The passage has prompted a great deal of commentary, concerning what Moore may mean by it, what truths it may convey, and what the implications may be of such truths. I begin my own discussion here with an assumption that is, I think, one plausible interpretation of Moore's idea, that one can only discern the conscious character of one's visual experience by attending to the worldly phenomena that one is apparently visually aware of.

Strawson makes similar claim in discussing Ayer's views on perception as follows.

² Although I adopt the name 'Revelation', the condition that I propose here is far less demanding than others intend by it. See n. 3 below.

Ayer says that we take a step beyond our sensible experience in making our perceptual judgements. I say rather that we take a step back (in general) from our perceptual judgements in framing accounts of our sensible experience; for we have (in general) to include reference to the former in framing a veridical description of the latter. (Strawson, 1979, pp. 45-6)

I began by claiming that we often characterize the specific modification of consciousness involved in a particular case of visual perception by appeal to the way things look to the subject of that perception. The suggestion here is that this appeal to the way things look is a matter of characterizing a way the world might be and derivatively specifying the conscious character of perception by remarking that that is the way the world looks to be around the perceiver in the particular case of perception in question. Moore and Strawson, as I read them, claim that this is not only natural and normal, but also essential. I agree with them about this and proceed from here on the assumption that they are right.

At the heart of this assumption is the idea of a world-looks order of explanation. Concepts that have their primary application to mind-independent objects in the world around us are secondarily applied in the characterization of our conscious visual experience of it; and this is essential if we are to give a faithful and accurate account of the conscious character of such experience. The canonical characterization of visual experience is thus of the form: it looks to me as though there are objects of such and such kinds with such and such properties arranged around me thus and so. In order to have a specific case to consider in what follows I take this to be a simplified instance of the general form: it looks to me as though there is something round and red before me.

My aim here is to explore how this crucial role for looks talk in the specification of the conscious character of visual experience may constrain the correct account of the nature of such experience itself. On the face of it there is precious little to go on in such an enterprise. The essential characterization of visual experience by the way things look to be in the mind-independent world appears to be consistent with what I will call Resemblance, Representational, and Relational accounts.

According to the Resemblance account, the conscious character of visual experience consists in the subject's acquaintance with mind-dependent phenomena; and it is correct to specify particular cases of such acquaintance by the way things thereby look to be in the mind-independent world because such mind-dependent phenomena are caused by and at least in certain basic respects resemble worldly things. According to the Representational account, the conscious character of visual experience consists in the subject's visually representing things as being thus and so in the mind-independent world around her, any particular case of which may thereby be specified as things looking to be precisely that way out there. According to the Relational account, the conscious character of the most basic visual experience consists in the subject's acquaintance with mind-independent worldly things themselves; and it is correct to specify particular cases of such acquaintance by the way things thereby look to be in the mind-independent world because these are some of the ways the mind-independent objects of her acquaintance are in the cases in question.

I hope to make progress beyond this comfortable consistency by introducing a further constraint. To a first approximation, this is the idea that at least in the most basic cases, a visual experience whose conscious character is specified by its looking to the subject as though there is an F before her is revelatory of what being F is. The argument that I offer tentatively here is that, in the presence of this additional constraint, the Relational account of visual experience is preferable to Resemblance and Representational accounts.

§2 Revelation and Humility

To a second approximation, Revelation is the thesis that visual experience whose conscious character is specified by its looking to the subject as though there is an F before her is a source of knowledge of what being F is, knowledge expressible in this context, and with appropriate attentional direction, by 'being F is being like that'.³ So an experience in which it looks to me as though there is something round and red before me is a source of knowledge of what being round and being red are: being round is being like that (attending to perceived shape); and being red is being like that (attending to perceived colour). Johnston (1992) and Chalmers (2006) are skeptical of Revelation. They argue, very roughly, that vision science has established that, insofar as the properties that worldly objects

³ See Johnston (1992) for a sceptical discussion of Revelation in connection with colour perception. I adopt the term 'Revelation' from him and elucidate my own use of it below. Byrne and Hilbert (2007) share Johnston's scepticism. Chalmers (2006) contains an extended and equally sceptical discussion the same idea far more generally, in terms of what he regards as a myth of 'Edenic' perception. See Campbell (2005) for articulation and defence of what he takes to be the fundamental insight that he calls 'Transparency' and contrasts with Byrne and Hilbert's reading of 'Revelation'. My own understanding of the basic idea is certainly closer to Campbell's.

look to have are those that such things normally have when they look to do so and that explain our experiences in which they look to do so, these are absolutely not the properties apparently revealed by those very visual experiences⁴. I reject their argument. For scientific explanations of visual processes do not compete in a single explanatory space with commonsense explanations of the nature of visual experience by the properties of mind-independent objects that such experiences reveal. So the correctness of the former have no eliminatory force against the latter. I make this objection in detail elsewhere (2011a, 2011b; see also Campbell, 1993, 2005; and Stroud, 2000).⁵ My project here is to explore the consequences of Revelation for our understanding of the nature of visual consciousness itself.

The second approximation of Revelation could still benefit from further clarification. I propose elucidation via its contrary, Humility: the thesis that we are irremediably ignorant of the intrinsic nature of mind-independent things.⁶

According to Lewis' Ramseyan argument for Humility (2009), the 'final theory' to which scientific research ideally tends ought to deliver a complete inventory of the fundamental intrinsic properties that play an active role in the actual workings of nature.⁷ Call the true and complete such final theory T. This contains

⁴ Johnston's concern is only with the colours; Chalmers' skepticism is quite general.

⁵ Campbell (2005) also responds to further arguments from Byrne and Hilbert (2007) against Revelation in the case of the colours.

⁶ See Langton (1998) and Lewis (2009) for canonical presentations on behalf of Kant and Ramsey respectively.

⁷ There are substantive and controversial issues concerning the correct precise characterization of intrinsic properties. For a helpful overview see Sosa (2001).

a good deal of our old, O-language, which is available and interpreted independently of T, and which suffices to express all possible observations. T also contains its own theoretical T-terms. These are implicitly defined by their role in the overall theory and name the fundamental properties in question. Furthermore, Lewis assumes that none of these causally basic intrinsic properties are named in O-language, “except as occupants of roles; in which case T will name them over again, and will say that the property named by so-and-so T-term is the occupant of such-and-such role” (p. 206).

Suppose that $T(t_1...t_n)$ is the simplest form of T, where $t_1, ...t_n$ are the T-terms, thereby implicitly defined in terms of the O-language that constitutes the remainder of this expression for T. The Ramsey sentence of T is $\exists x_1...\exists x_n T(x_1 x_n)$. This logically implies all and only the O-language sentences that are theorems of T. Call this Ramsey sentence R. Since O-language alone suffices to express all possible observations, every possible observable prediction of T is equally a prediction of R. Thus any evidence for T is equally evidence for R: evidence for T cannot go beyond evidence merely for R.

Now, it is extremely likely that, if there are any, then there will be more than one fundamental property in at least the most basic ontological categories: monadic properties, dyadic relations, and so on. That is to say, if there are any monadic fundamental properties, then there are very likely to be more than one. Similarly

It is unnecessary for my purposes in what follows to engage with these debates in detail. The provisional characterization of intrinsic properties as those that an object has of itself, independently of any other thing, those it would retain, or retain the lack of, if it were the only thing that existed, should suffice.

for dyadic relations, and so on. Suppose that $\langle a_1 \dots a_n \rangle$ is the n -tuple that actually realizes T ; and suppose that $\langle b_1 \dots b_n \rangle$ is any n -tuple which results from permuting some of the pairs $\langle a_i, a_j \rangle$ in which a_i and a_j are of the same ontological category. In other words, supposing that a_p and a_q are both monadic fundamental properties in the n -tuple $\langle a_1 \dots a_p \dots a_q \dots a_n \rangle$ that actually realizes T , let $\langle b_1 \dots b_n \rangle$ be the n -tuple $\langle a_1 \dots a_q \dots a_p \dots a_n \rangle$. Combinatorialism is the thesis that possibility is preserved under permutation or replacement of co-categorical items. So, on the assumption of combinatorialism, $\langle b_1 \dots b_n \rangle$ is a possible realization of T .

Quidditism is the thesis that possibilities which differ simply by the permutation or replacement of properties are genuinely distinct. So, on the additional assumption of quidditism, $\langle b_1 \dots b_n \rangle$ is a distinct possible realization of T from the actual realization $\langle a_1 \dots a_n \rangle$. Furthermore, since any evidence for T is evidence for R , and R is true in both the actual case, in which $\langle a_1 \dots a_n \rangle$ realizes T , and in the distinct possible case in which $\langle b_1 \dots b_n \rangle$ realizes T , then no possible evidence can tell us that $\langle a_1 \dots a_n \rangle$ is the actual realization of T , as opposed to $\langle b_1 \dots b_n \rangle$.⁸

Though our theory T has a unique actual realization, ... it has multiple possible realizations. ... no possible observation can tell us which one is actual, because whichever one is actual the Ramsey sentence will be true. There is indeed a true contingent proposition about which of the possible realizations is actual, but we can never gain evidence for this proposition, and so can never know it. ... Humility follows. (Lewis, 2009, p. 207)

The Humility Thesis (HT) that follows, according to Lewis, is the thesis that we are irremediably ignorant of the fundamental properties of the world: we cannot possibly know the intrinsic nature of physical reality itself. Provided only that a

⁸ Combinatorialism and quidditism are both substantive assumptions that may be questioned. I abstain from such questions here.

fundamental property is not a categorial singleton – that is to say that there are others of the same category⁹ – then we can never have any evidence that it – as opposed to any of these others – is the actual realizer of the theoretical role definitive of its name. We know that there is a property, so-named, that does just that; but we cannot possibly know which it is, what the intrinsic nature of the property so-named actually is. Since all intrinsic properties supervene upon these fundamental properties, we are in this sense irremediably ignorant of the intrinsic nature of mind-independent reality itself.

The proponent of Revelation is motivated by the intuition that perception of the macroscopic world around us is unlike theorizing about its imperceptible fundamental microscopic constitution in precisely this respect. The evidence provided by our conscious visual experience that there is something F before us is absolutely not neutral on what being F is in such a way as to warrant the introduction of any alternative possibility, F', in which it equally constitutes visual evidence of exactly the same standing that there is something F' there instead. The character of visual consciousness itself constitutes a source of precisely the knowledge that Humility denies, of what being F actually is.

Furthermore, Revelation explains the Moore-Strawson insight with which I began, that a faithful and accurate account of the conscious character of our visual experience makes essential use of concepts that have their primary application to mind-independent objects in the world around us of which this is

⁹ Later in the paper Lewis introduces additional assumptions that enable him to extend the argument to all fundamental properties; but it is unnecessary for my purposes to get involved with the additional complications.

our experience. For Revelation requires that visual experience in which it looks to the subject as though there is an F before her, which therefore constitutes her evidence that there is something F out there, is absolutely not neutral on what being F is. Its adequate characterization as the conscious condition that it is therefore makes essential use of that very concept, F, that has its primary application to mind-independent things in the world around her. This is precisely the requirement that I derive from Moore and Strawson above.

§3 Against Resemblance

The Resemblance account may appear at first sight well suited to respect Revelation in this sense; and this explains its persistence in one form or another in philosophical theories of visual perception. I begin the current section with an elucidation of the core idea and go on to argue that it is ultimately untenable.

The starting point is the suggestion that visual experience has a conscious character that indicates the presence of various worldly properties by causal covariation. A determinable range of worldly properties, the colours or shapes, say, reliably cause in us visual experiences with a determinable range of conscious characters. Specific determinates of the latter thereby indicate the presence of the corresponding determinates of the former, making our visual experiences into natural signs of those properties of mind-independent objects (Ayers, 1991, ch. 7). The conscious character of visual experience that indicates the presence of an F in this way may therefore be specified in terms of its looking to the subject as though there is an F before her.

As it stands, this picture is a paradigm of Humility. Visual experiences indicate the worldly properties that normally cause experiences with like conscious character, whatever those worldly properties may be. As yet, the experiences themselves display precisely the neutrality that drives Lewis' argument and do nothing to reveal what these normal causes actually are. The Resemblance account as I understand it has a crucial further feature. The conscious character of visual experience resembles the worldly phenomena that it indicates in at least certain basic respects. The core idea of the Resemblance account is that the addition of such resemblance to the indication relation makes visual experience whose conscious character is specified by its looking to the subject as though there is an F before her non-neutral on what being F is in such a way as to block the argument for Humility and constitute a source of knowledge of what being F is. So, as I say, the Resemblance account may appear well suited to respect Revelation.

The most natural reading of this idea that I take to be definitive of the Resemblance account as I understand it here construes resemblance as the sharing of basic properties at least between worldly objects and certain mind-dependent sensations that indicate the presence of those properties in experiences in which the subject is acquainted with the sensations in question. Specific such sensations thereby constitute the conscious character of experiences that are specified in terms of the worldly properties that they indicate as explained above. My experience in which it looks to me as though there is something round and red before me therefore involves my acquaintance

with a mind-dependent sensation that is likewise round and red. It is therefore absolutely not intrinsically neutral as between indicating something round and red, on the one hand, and indicating something square and green, say, on the other. It is 'made for' the former in such a way as to block the argument for Humility and to secure the Revelation in visual consciousness of what being round and being red are. For an instance of roundness and redness is right there before me, constituting the very conscious character of my experience of its looking to me as though there is something round and red out there in the world before me. My experience is therefore a source of knowledge that being round is being like that (attending to its shape) and that being red is being like that (attending to its colour).

My objection is that this crucial assertion of resemblance between mind-independent worldly objects and the mind-dependent sensations that we are acquainted with in visual experience does not really make sense. Roundness and redness are properties of mind-independent, space-occupying material objects. This is the whole point of the initial insight from Moore and Strawson that we can only specify the conscious character of visual experience by embedding concepts that have their primary application directly to mind-independent objects in the world around us within the scope of the way things look to the subject in those experiences. The Resemblance account is that an experience in which it looks to me as though there is something round and red before me consists in my acquaintance with a mind-dependent sensation that is itself round and red in precisely this sense that applies to mind-independent objects themselves.

Now the roundness and redness of mind-independent objects consists in a specific way in which they fill the space that they occupy – roundly – and a specific manner of colouration of their surfaces – redly. So it is entirely opaque to me how we are supposed to understand the idea that mind-independent sensations might be round and red in precisely this sense, how such things could possibly be round and red. Which space is it supposed to be in which mind-dependent sensations are roundly and redly extended? There is only one genuine space, namely this one, in which things may be round and red in the relevant sense; and its genuinely extended occupants are mind-independent objects and not mind-dependent sensations.¹⁰

There may perhaps be determinable dimensions along which mind-dependent sensations vary in their intrinsic nature; and we may metaphorically call a structure organized around such dimensions a space. We may further identify a given such dimension with the mind-independent determinable shape insofar as various sensations' position on it thereby indicate the shapes of worldly objects in vision. But this does not suffice for any true resemblance between such

¹⁰ It might be replied on behalf of the Resemblance account that this one physical space contains both mind-independent material objects and the mind-dependent sensations that are the direct objects of our visual experience and whose modes of spatial extension resemble some of those of material objects indirectly seen as proposed (see e.g. Jackson, 1977). I find the basic idea that there may be determinately extended yet mind-dependent occupants of physical space outside the subject impossible to comprehend. Furthermore, once we acknowledge that the direct objects of visual experience may be spatially extended entities in physical space, then I have argued elsewhere that phenomena of illusion and even hallucination do nothing to persuade us that these need by anything other than the mind-independent material objects themselves that we all know and love (Brewer, 2011a). This Relational account is taken up in §5 below.

sensations and the objects whose shapes they indicate. The literal sharing of properties constitutive of any genuine resemblance relation is inconsistent with the postulation of mind-dependent and mind-independent relata. To paraphrase Berkeley, a material object can be like nothing but a material object (1975, §8). Retreating to a pure indication account may avoid inconsistency but immediately invites Lewis' argument for Humility. Repeated insistence on resemblance in addition to indication expresses a genuine insight that conscious visual experience avoids Humility and satisfies Revelation; but this is simply unavailable on the present approach.

I conclude that the Resemblance account as articulated here fails to secure Revelation and so fails by the lights of the current investigation. The Relational account that I endorse in §5 below offers an alternative conception of something that might be described as resemblance, and may even be lying behind various historical appeals to resemblance in this area – notably Locke's discussion of primary qualities (1975, II.viii) – but this is a quite different view from the Resemblance account of the present section. The next proposal that I consider in §4 below is that the key to securing Revelation lies in representation rather than resemblance.

§4 Against Representation

The core idea of the Representational account is that the conscious character of a visual experience in which it looks to the subject as though there is an F before her is correctly so specified in virtue of its representational content: roughly,

that there is a suitably placed E out there.¹¹ This clearly accommodates the Moore-Strawson insight with which I began, that the conscious character of visual experience has to be specified in terms of the way the mind-independent world looks to be around the subject. In the case of my toy example here, it looks to me as though there is something round and red before me. According to the Representational account, this is matter of my having a visual experience whose conscious character is given by the representational content that there is something round and red there.

The Representational account also seems well placed to secure Revelation. For its characterization of visual consciousness in terms of the specific way the world around the subject is represented – as containing something round and red at p, say – is surely non-neutral in precisely the way required to block the argument for Humility concerning what it is for the world to be the way that such experience provides evidence that it is – namely as containing something round and red at p. I argue in the current section that this appearance of non-neutrality is not sufficient to secure Revelation, though. So the representational account must also be rejected.

According to the Representational account, my having a visual experience with the conscious character of its looking to me as though there is something round

¹¹ Representative proponents of the Representational account include Armstrong (1968, ch. 10), Dretske (1981, ch. 6), Searle (1983, ch. 2), Burge (1986, 2010), Peacocke (1989; 1992, ch. 3), McDowell (1986, 1994), Harman (1990), Tye (1992, 1995, 2000), Byrne (2001), Chalmers (2004), Pautz (2010), and Siegel (2010). There is of course significant controversy amongst these philosophers over the nature and range of representational contents involved in conscious vision.

and red before me is a matter of my being in a state that represents the presence of something round and red out there. Being in this state therefore places a determinate condition on the world if its content is to be correct, that it contains something round and red there. The question of Revelation concerns what being in this state offers me, though, in particular, whether it constitutes a source of knowledge of what being round and being red are; and this depends on how this determinate content is conveyed to me by the experience in question.

My argument against the Representational account takes the form of a dilemma.

Define a state with conceptual content to be a state with representational content such that the subject must actively deploy the concepts used in the canonical statement of its content in order to be in the state in question.¹²

According to the Representational account, visual experiences are representational states. Either these have conceptual content or they do not.

Suppose, first, that the Representational account proposes that visual experiences are states with conceptual content. Thus, I must actively deploy the concepts 'round' and 'red' in order to have a visual experience in which it looks to me as though there is something round and red before me. This proposal is surely set fair to secure Revelation. For the content of my experience is conveyed to me by my deployment of the concepts 'round' and 'red' used in its

¹² Various debates have been characterized as that between conceptualists and nonconceptualists concerning perceptual content. I intend my characterization in the text to be stipulative of what I mean by this here. For a sample of these debates, see Evans (1982, esp. ch. 6), Cussins (1990), Peacocke (1992, ch. 3; 2001), Crane (1992), McDowell (1994), Brewer (1999, ch. 5; 2005), Heck (2000), Kelly (2001), and Byrne (2005).

specification, which in turn requires my knowledge of what being round and being red are.¹³ So it follows from the fact that I have a visual experience whose conscious character is specified by its looking to me as though there is something round and red before me that I know what being round and being red are.

This is not sufficient for my experience to be a source of such knowledge as Revelation claims, though. We may acquire knowledge of what being round and being red are otherwise – by definition or description, perhaps, or by some other means. But Revelation claims that this knowledge may be provided by a visual experience whose conscious character is specified by its looking to the subject as though there is something round and red before her as its source. That is to say, a subject of such an experience who previously lacked this knowledge may thereby come to know what being round and being red are. This is the sense in which her experience is supposed to be non-neutral with respect to what the roundness and redness of mind-independent objects are. The subject of a representational state with conceptual content that there is something round and red before her necessarily deploys the concepts ‘round’ and ‘red’ in that very state. She therefore either previously knew what being round and being red are or is the subject of a distinct but concurrent state that is her source of such knowledge. It follows that her representational state in itself is not a source of the knowledge of what being round and being red are. According to the Representational account, though, Revelation is supposed to be secured by the

¹³ I assume throughout that active deployment of the concept ‘F’ depends upon the subject’s knowledge of what being F is in precisely the sense in which Revelation claims that this knowledge may have its source in visual experience.

representational content of conscious visual experience. The current conceptual version of the Representational account therefore fails.

These difficulties with the conceptualist Representational account may be illustrated by considering perceptual demonstrative representation. Suppose that a person with normal vision is facing a single prominent object with a specific shape and colour in decent lighting conditions. Consider, first, the case in which she has no prior knowledge of what being that shape/colour is. Even if she comes to her situation with suitable background knowledge of what shapes and colours are in general, attempting to deploy a determinate shape/colour concept as a mere formality, as it were, by simply rehearsing an (internal) statement that 'there is something that shape/colour out there' is insufficient for her genuinely to represent there being so in the sense in which this really does involve actively deploying the specific shape/colour concept in question. In addition she must actually have conscious sight of the instance before her and attend appropriately to its shape/colour. In which case, the true source of her knowledge of what being that shape/colour is is a concurrent conscious-attentional state distinct from any conceptual representation that may draw upon it in deploying the demonstrative concept in question. On the other hand, she may be in a position immediately to issue an (internal) assertion constituting a genuinely conceptual representation that there is something that shape/colour before her if she already has the relevant concept, and hence the knowledge of what being that shape/colour is, perhaps on the basis of previous visual encounter with various instances. In the nature of this second case, though, her representational state is not itself the source of her crucial knowledge of what being that shape/colour is,

but rather presupposes it. Her perceptual demonstrative reference anaphorically exploits her previous knowledge of the shape/colour in question. The Representational account therefore fails to capture the conscious character of visual experience in a way that truly secures Revelation.

Suppose, secondly, then, that the Representational account proposes that visual experiences are states whose content is not conceptual. That is to say, the proposal is that visual experiences are states with representational content such that a person may have such an experience without actively deploying the concepts used in the canonical statement of its content, which must therefore be conveyed to the subject in some other way. My objection to this proposal is that the only real alternative as an account of how nonconceptual content may be conveyed to the subject in visual experience takes us straight back to the problems of the Resemblance account considered and rejected in §3 above.

Consider a subject who has a visual experience with nonconceptual representational content that is correct if and only if there is something round and red before him. He need not deploy the concepts 'round' and 'red' in his experience; and suppose without loss of generality that he previously had no knowledge of what being round and being red are. According to the nonconceptualist Representational account currently under consideration, his visual experiential state constitutes a source of just such Revelatory knowledge. It is difficult to see how this is supposed to be accomplished, though. For being in a state with nonconceptual representational content is in general manifestly insufficient for knowledge of what it is for something to fall under the concepts

employed in specifying its content. Appeal to subpersonal representational states with quite complex contents is essential to the explanation of a great deal of what we say and do. For example, Peter McLeod and colleagues (McLeod and Dienes, 1996) have argued convincingly that a skilled fielder is able to catch a cricket ball lofted towards her by moving in such a way that $d^2(\tan\alpha)/dt^2 = 0$, where α is the angle of elevation of gaze from the fielder to the ball. Her success involves the subpersonal representation of the second derivative with respect to time of the tangent of the angle of her gaze; but there is absolutely no presumption that she knows what having a zero such second derivative is. Many successful fielders clearly have no such knowledge. Similarly, a subject may be in a subpersonal state with precisely the nonconceptual representational content of a visual experience in which it looks to him that there is something round and red before him and not thereby have any knowledge of what being round and red are. Being in a state with that content is therefore no source of such knowledge. Quite generally, whatever the nonconceptual content is supposed to be of a person's conscious visual experience, he may be in a subpersonal state with the very same content and not know what falling under the concepts employed in specifying its content actually is. That is to say, the nonconceptual representational contents of visual experience are in themselves no source of such knowledge. So once again the Representational account misidentifies the source of Revelation in conscious visual experience in its appeal to representational content.

The insistent Representationalist might attempt to block this objection by insisting that, unlike McLeod's evidently subpersonal ball-catching contents, the

representational contents of conscious visual experience may not equally be the contents of unconscious subpersonal states, in spite of the fact that neither contents make the relevant demands on the subject's active deployment of the concepts used in specifying them. So it does not follow from the fact that ball-catching contents are no source of knowledge for the subject of what having a zero second derivative with respect to time of the tangent of an angle is that the nonconceptual contents of visual experience are likewise no source of knowledge of what being round and being red are.

This reply is only as good as its explanation of the crucial difference between the two kinds of content, though. Quassim Cassam offers such an explanation on behalf of the nonconceptual Representational account in his recent discussion of 'Berkeley's Puzzle' (Campbell and Cassam, 2014, ch. 8, and Cassam's Epilogue). His proposal, drawing on the 'phenomenal intentionality research programme' (Kriegel, 2013), is that visual experiences have their contents in virtue of their phenomenology. Such contents are therefore essentially conscious and may not equally be the contents of unconscious subpersonal states that evidently fail to provide their subject with Revelatory knowledge of what being round and being red are, for example.

The structure of this response immediately gives cause for concern. What makes visual experiential content essentially conscious is supposed to be the fact that experiences have their content in virtue of their phenomenology. This leaves perfectly open, it seems to me, the possibility that subpersonal states may have precisely the same contents in virtue of something else: their non-conscious

intrinsic nature, or various relational or functional properties instead. So the initial objection goes through. Simply being in a state with the representational content in question fails to secure Revelation. Furthermore, Cassam's proposal is that it is the phenomenal nature of visual experience, in virtue of which it has its nonconceptual representational content, that is really responsible for Revelation; and this leaves entirely unanswered our fundamental question of how the conscious character of visual experience in which it looks to subject as though there is an F before her is a source of her knowledge of what being F is. The current suggestion is effectively that it is the phenomenology that does it. But that is the datum to be explained rather than any adequate explanation of it.

Cassam may reply that it is at least the beginning of an explanation because the phenomenology of the visual experience in question is what explains the fact that it has a representational content that is correct if and only if there is an F out there. Phenomenology provides an alternative to the conceptualist's appeal to the active deployment of the concept F in experience as the means by which the nonconceptual content of conscious visual experience may be conveyed to the subject. But now we are going round in a circle. Phenomenology is supposed to secure Revelation because it explains this content, although the content fails to secure Revelation since the subject may just as well be in a subpersonal state with that same content and yet have no knowledge of being F is. So this beginning of an explanation gets us precisely nowhere. The Resemblance account considered in §3 above at least attempts to give a substantive account of how the conscious character of visual experience itself constitutes a source of such knowledge, and perhaps Cassam's proposal is implicitly designed to draw

on some notion of resemblance between phenomenology and worldly E-ness here too. But the Resemblance account fails. So any such appeal at this crucial point in the Representational account is equally unsuccessful.

This completes my dilemma for the Representational account. It fails to secure Revelation if the representational contents of conscious visual experience are supposed to be conceptual and it fails if they are supposed not to be. What is required is an alternative to the Resemblance account as a substantive explanation of how the conscious character of visual experience itself secures Revelation directly. In §5 below I suggest that this is provided by the recognition that visual consciousness consists in the subject standing in a relation of acquaintance with mind-independent worldly objects.

§5 The Relational Account

The Relational account offers a direct explanation of Revelation on the basis of the conscious character of visual experience by taking the initial Moore/Strawson point absolutely literally. Their insight is that specification of the conscious character of visual experience makes essential use of concepts that have their primary application to mind-independent objects in the world around the perceiver along the following lines: it looks to the subject as though there are objects of such and such kinds with such and such properties arranged around her thus and so. In our simplified example, it looks to her as though there is something round and red before her. According to the Relational account, having an experience whose conscious character is specified in this way is normally a

matter of the subject actually standing in a relation of acquaintance with something round and red out there. That round red object itself, and in particular its roundness and redness, constitute its conscious character that is therefore correctly specified in terms of its looking to her as though there is something like that there. In this way the conscious character of visual experience is given by the nature of the mind-independent objects themselves with which the subject is acquainted in such experience. As Campbell puts it, “The qualitative character of the sensory experience is constituted by the qualitative characters of the objects ... in the scene observed” (Campbell and Cassam, 2014, p. 28).

So the Relational account has a direct explanation of Revelation. The datum is that visual experience in which it looks to the subject as though there is something round and red before her is a source of knowledge of what being round and being red are. According to the Relational account, having such experience is being acquainted with something round and red out there, a condition whose conscious character is given by its roundness and redness that is therefore revelatory of what roundness and redness are: being round is being like that_s (attending to its shape); and being red is being like that_c (attending to its colour).

Recall that Lewis’ argument for Humility depends on a neutrality in our evidence for the presence of an F as to what being F actually is that permits equally admissible permutations of worldly properties for the evidential states in question. Revelation insists, on the other hand, that conscious vision of an F before us not like this. For it constitutes a source of knowledge of what being F is.

According to the Relational account, visual experience in which it looks to the subject as though there is an F before her consists in her conscious acquaintance with a particular instance of F out there in the world: a condition whose conscious character is given by the F-ness of that very object amongst other things. This is precisely what it is for her experience to be non-neutrally F-related in such a way as to block the argument for Humility and secure Revelation. The Relational account provides an intelligible explanation of what the visual Revelation that blocks Lewis' argument for Humility actually is.

I suggested in §3 above that the Relational account may offer a picture of visual Revelation that explains the prevalence and appeal of talk of resemblance in this area even in spite of my rejection of the Resemblance account as presented there. That account depends on the incoherent idea of two quite distinct things sharing properties like roundness and redness: mind-independent objects and corresponding mind-dependent visual sensations. According to the Relational account, on the other hand, only mind-independent objects are ever round or red: these are modifications of the spatial extension of those things. But our visual experiences are cases of our acquaintance with such things, whose conscious character is therefore given precisely by their roundness and redness. In this sense, our experiences may be said to 'resemble' those things. We legitimately talk about them both in the same terms because the experiences are partially constituted by the mind-independent objects in such a way that the conscious character of the former are given by the relevant properties of the latter. Again, this in the correct sense in which visual experiences reveal the

nature of mind-independent objects, thereby constituting a source of our knowledge of what being round and being red actually are.

§6 Conclusion

The Resemblance and Representational accounts of the nature of conscious visual experience fail to secure Revelation. The Relational account succeeds in securing Revelation. So the Revelation supports the Relational account over the Resemblance and Representation: it distinctively favours one of the three Rs over the other two.

It would be natural at this point to ask why we should accept Revelation. I simply took this as an unargued pre-theoretic commitment from the start. That seems absolutely right to me; and we do need to start somewhere. Furthermore, it is certainly not be possible to give any adequate theoretical defence of Revelation here. I do believe that such a defence is possible, though, on the basis of the premise that it is conscious perception that provides our empirical thought with its subject matter and basic content. This is of course a traditional empiricist conviction, prominent in Locke (1975) and Hume (1978), for example, and equally to the fore in the logical atomist arguments of Russell (1985) and, in his own way, the early Wittgenstein (1974).¹⁴ I hope to return to this topic in its own right on another occasion.¹⁵

¹⁴ For illuminating discussion of the logical atomist arguments of Russell and Wittgenstein see Pears (1967).

¹⁵ Historical debts for formative discussions of these topics go back a long way, in particular, to Michael Ayers, John Campbell, Quassim Cassam, Imogen Dickie,

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