



King's Research Portal

DOI:
[10.1111/phib.12123](https://doi.org/10.1111/phib.12123)

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Brewer, B. (2018). Perceptual Experience and Empirical Reason. *Analytic Philosophy*, 59(1), 1-18. Article 1.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/phib.12123>

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE AND EMPIRICAL REASON

BILL BREWER

Introduction

What is the role of conscious experience in the epistemology of perceptual knowledge? In particular, suppose that I see an object before me and thereby come to know that it is red or round: how exactly are we to understand the contribution that my seeing that thing makes to my epistemic standing in relation to its colour or shape?

I assume without argument, following Williamson (2002, esp. ch. 1), that seeing that *o* is *F* is a way of knowing that *o* is *F*. I also take for granted our intuitive conviction that in certain basic cases of seeing that *o* is *F*, the fact that the subject sees *o* itself is integral to their epistemic status as cases of knowing that *o* is *F*.¹ My question is how this is to be understood: how should we characterize what is going on in seeing that *o* is *F*, in such cases, in order to illuminate the contribution of seeing *o* to their status as cases of knowing that *o* is *F*. This will not involve any commitment to the idea that seeing *o* in such cases constitutes or contributes to their satisfaction of an entirely general necessary condition on

¹ There are of course cases in which a person sees that *o* is *F* without seeing *o* at all: for example, when a person sees that her neighbour is home by seeing his car in the drive, or sees that her best friend is not at a party that she is attending. But I take those cases in which seeing *o* is integral to seeing that *o* is *F* as basic throughout what follows.

knowing that o is F (see Williamson, 2002, ch. 1, and Roessler, 2009).

Nevertheless, there is genuine explanation and intelligibility to be had; and that is what I aim to offer here.

My basic proposal is that seeing o involves conscious acquaintance with o itself, the concrete worldly source of the truth that o is F, in a way that may make it evident to the subject that o is an instance of 'x is F' as she understands this, and hence evident that o is F. Seeing that o is F is thus a way of its being evident that o is F and is therefore a way of knowing that o is F.

In §1 I set out the main lines of the account that I favour of the metaphysics of visual experience, of our seeing the particularly worldly objects around us. §2 presents the core of the associated account of seeing, and hence knowing, that such things are the various ways that we can come to know that they are on the basis of this perception. This account is elaborated in §3 in a way that explains the role of conscious visual experience in perceptual knowledge, making theoretically intelligible the status of seeing that o is F as a way of knowing that o is F. §4 considers various relevant forms of error and epistemic failing. Finally, in §5, I consider the role of reasons in the epistemology of perception as proposed.

§1 Seeing o

On the Object View, (OV), that I favour, perceptual experience is most fundamentally to be understood as a relation of acquaintance, in a sense modality, from a spatiotemporal point of view, and in specific circumstances,

with particular concrete worldly objects. Acquaintance is an unanalysable conscious relation that we are enabled to stand in with such things by the normal functioning of our brains and perceptual systems. Thus, seeing *o* is a matter of standing in a conscious relation of visual acquaintance with *o* itself, from a given point of view and in certain specific circumstances of perception.²

Now the objects that we see look various ways to us. The core of the (OV) account of looks is that an object of acquaintance *o* thinly looks *F* iff *o* has, from the point of view and in the circumstances of perception in question, appropriate visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of *F*. These are similarities by the lights of the various processes enabling and subserving visual acquaintance: similarities in such things as the way in which light is reflected and transmitted from the objects in question and the way in which stimuli are handled by the visual system, given its evolutionary history and our shared training during development. Paradigm exemplars, in turn, are the instances of *F* whose association with 'F' partially constitutes our understanding of that term.³ Now, some, but not all, of these thin looks will be salient to us in any particular case, for example, as we switch between the duck and rabbit looks of the duck-rabbit diagram. I say that an object, *o*, thickly looks *F* iff *o* thinly looks *F* and the subject registers its visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of *F*.

The paradigm case of registration as I understand it involves the active

² See Brewer (2011) for a full motivation, elaboration, and defence of (OV).

³ These may include pictures or images of *F*s in certain cases. I acknowledge without defence here my commitment to an account of concept possession in terms of our understanding of general terms that gives a central role to our consciousness of certain paradigm exemplars that ground and prompt our natural inclinations in classifying novel instances accordingly on the basis of what strike us as relevant similarities and differences with such paradigms.

deployment of the concept of an F; but (OV) also recognizes a variety of significantly less demanding modes of registration, including those involved in systematic behavioural responses, such as simple sorting, and those involved in the noticing of various organizational, orientational, or other gestalt phenomena.

Illusory experiences, in which o looks F although it is not F, are cases of acquaintance with an object from a point of view or in circumstances in which it has visually relevant similarities with paradigm Fs although it is not itself an instance of F. These similarities may but need not in turn be registered.

Hallucinations, on the other hand, are cases of experiences without looks-grounding objects of acquaintance, whose correct theoretical characterization is rather that they are not distinguishable by introspection alone from cases of acquaintance with a given qualitative scene from a specific point of view. Some experiences pre-theoretically classified as illusions may involve a conjunction of successful acquaintance with some degree of hallucination in this sense caused by the relevant worldly objects. Furthermore, since acquaintance depends on the satisfaction of significant and highly complex physiological enabling conditions, there will also be abnormal experiences that are correctly to be characterized in terms of partial failures in acquaintance: cases of degraded acquaintance. These cases of total and partial failure of acquaintance are essentially derivative of the success that grounds veridical and illusory, thin and thick, looks.

In a slogan, according to (OV), the ways that things look to a person in perception are in the first instance the looks of the very mind-independent things that she is

consciously acquainted with from the point of view and in the circumstances in question.⁴

§2 Seeing that o is F

In this section I offer the positive explanation that I propose on behalf of (OV) as to how perceptual experience conceived as acquaintance with mind-independent physical objects may constitute a source of empirical knowledge. This is intended to make intelligible the status of seeing that o is F as a way of knowing that o is F in those cases that I regard as basic where the subject sees o itself.

Suppose that o is F, for an appropriate F that can be known on the basis of vision. Thus, given what 'F' means, o itself makes application of F correct: o is what makes 'o is F' true and in this sense constitutes a reason to apply the concept.⁵ Instantiation given predicate meaning in this way makes a concrete worldly object, o, a basic source of truth. Now, according to (OV), seeing o is a matter of conscious visual acquaintance with that worldly source of truth itself. So seeing o may make application of F in judgement evidently correct for a subject who grasps the concept F and is viewing o from a point of view and in circumstances that enable her registration of the appropriate visually relevant similarities

⁴ See Martin (2010) for an alternative development of the slogan on which looks are intrinsic properties of perceivable worldly objects rather than anything dependent on the perceiver's point of view and circumstances.

⁵ The notion of a reason is notoriously slippery in this area. I claim only that it applies in an acceptable sense as indicated. Those who are sceptical may take this for the moment as a stipulation as to my understanding of the notion as I use it here. See § 5 below for further elaboration and clarification of the place of reasons in the (OV) account of perceptual knowledge and for a distinction between two important varieties.

between *o* and the paradigm exemplars of *F* that are involved in her understanding of that very concept.⁶ In this way, she sees that *o* is *F*; and seeing that *o* is *F* is a way of its being evident to her that *o* is *F* and is therefore a way of knowing that *o* is *F*. Seeing *o* acquaints her with a reason to judge that *o* is *F*, in the sense outlined above; understanding and registration constitute her recognition of *o* as such. On the Object View that I endorse, this is the fundamental contribution of perceptual experience to empirical knowledge: experience acquaints us with the source of specific empirical truth as such.

In developing this central idea to begin with, I focus on the most basic case of perception from a relatively canonical point of view and in relatively standard circumstances. Perceptual-epistemic errors and failings of various kinds are deviations from this basic case that are in my view to be handled separately and derivatively, as I indicate briefly below (§4).

So suppose that *S* sees *o*, which is *F*, head on in normal circumstances and good lighting. *S* is acquainted with *o* itself, which, given what ‘*F*’ means, is a reason in the sense set out above to apply that very concept: *o* is the source of the truth that *o* is *F*. In this case, *o* thinly looks *F*: from that point of view and in those circumstances, *o* has appropriate visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of *F*. That is to say, predication of ‘*F*’ is also appropriate to the way things look. Suppose further that *o* thickly looks *F*. That is to say, *S* registers

⁶ See Johnston (2006) for a somewhat different development of a similar core claim. As he puts it, “What is distinctive about non-hallucinatory and non-illusory sensory experience is that it presents the truthmakers for the propositions that we immediately judge true on the basis of sensory experience” (pp. 278-9).

these similarities, whether or not she actually applies the concept F to o in judgement. If she does, then this application is evidently warranted by o: o's being F is perceptually evident to her. If she does not, for whatever reason, then at least she appreciates that o looks F. In a slogan, then, in such a situation, acquaintance in perception provides the evident ground for concept application in judgement. Applying F to o in this light is seeing that o is F, and intelligibly amounts to empirical knowledge that o is F.

§3 Elaboration

To elaborate this account I clarify both what perceptual acquaintance itself contributes to the acquisition of empirical knowledge and what more must be conjoined with it for this to succeed. Then I go on (in §4) to consider how to accommodate various kinds of mistaken perceptual judgement or epistemic failing.

First, when S is presented in perception with a mind-independent object, o, that is F, from a relatively canonical point of view and in relatively standard circumstances, then the fundamental nature of her experience is conscious visual acquaintance with that very object, o, which, given what 'F' means, constitutes a reason to apply the concept F in judgement aimed at truth, as I am using the notion of a reason here. That object of acquaintance, o, is the concrete worldly source of the truth that o is F; and her experience is a matter of being visually conscious of that very thing, o, from a given point of view and in certain circumstances where it has appropriate visually relevant similarities with

paradigm exemplars of F. In noticing, recognizing, or registering, its visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of F, in the absence of countervailing evidence, application of F therefore strikes her as correct in the light of those paradigms' involvement in her acquisition and understanding of that concept. Given her grasp of the concept in question, acquaintance with o makes its application to that very object evidently correct. The source of the truth of her judgement of F-ness is o itself, along with the paradigms that give this concept its content; and this reason for judging that o is F is precisely what enters into the fundamental nature of the subject's perceptual experience. For her experience just is conscious visual acquaintance, from a given point of view and in certain circumstances, with that very thing. Furthermore, in registering its visually relevant similarities with the paradigm exemplars that enter into her own understanding of that concept, she recognizes the status of the object of her acquaintance as a reason to judge that o is F. Hence the fundamental contribution of perceptual experience itself to the acquisition of empirical knowledge is the presentation to the subject of the reasons for the correct application of her empirical concepts: the particular mind-independent physical objects themselves to which those concepts correctly apply.

Second, it is clear that perceptual knowledge that o is F depends upon far more than mere visual acquaintance with o. For S has to register o's visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of F conceptually; and she may be acquainted with o and yet it fail thickly to look F in this way for a variety of

reasons.⁷ Furthermore, she must actually make the judgement that o is F rather than merely noting o's thick look, as it were, and withholding judgement for some reason. Hence perceptual acquaintance is significantly more basic than any empirical knowledge itself; and, indeed, S may be acquainted with o without even actively entertaining any content concerning o at all. Acquaintance itself is therefore not a matter of being somehow guaranteed certain factual information about its mind-independent physical objects, or indeed of getting something right about those things at all. Rather, it provides a fundamental ground for getting anything right, or wrong, about the concrete worldly constituents thereby presented in perception. Thick, conceptually registered, looks are the product of such acquaintance, from a given point of view and in certain circumstances, along with recognition or categorization of its objects as of various kinds. As I put it above, the ways that things look to a person in perception are in the first instance the looks of the very mind-independent things that she is consciously acquainted with from the point of view and in the circumstances in question: the ways things look are the ways perceptually presented things look. And perceptual knowledge additionally involves actually endorsing thick looks in judgement. Thus acquaintance has to be combined with conceptual registration and endorsement for the acquisition of knowledge.

Still, conscious visual acquaintance provides a medium for the registration of relevant similarity making o's instantiation of predicate 'x is F' evident to the subject in such core cases. Her visual experience is constituted by her acquaintance with the concrete worldly source itself of the truth that o is F, given

⁷ See below for more detailed discussion of these possibilities.

what 'F' means. She is acquainted with o from a point of view and in circumstances in which its being F is visually accessible to her: o thinly looks F. She registers its visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of F as these partially constitute her understanding of that very concept, and, on the assumption that she actually judges that o is F, rather than merely noting o's thick look and withholding judgement for some reason, she thereby sees that o is indeed F. This is therefore intelligibly a way of knowing that o is F.

So, in seeing that o is F, visual acquaintance with o from a point of view and in circumstances in which it thinly looks F is supplemented by conceptual registration of appropriate similarities with paradigm exemplars of F and endorsement of the resultant thick look, that o is F, in judgement. I should say a little more about these supplements and the relation between them.

First, what is conceptual registration as this figures in the thick looks essential to perceptual knowledge according to (OV)? Unfortunately, I can offer no explicit definition or reductive analysis of the activity: it figures as a primitive in the presentation of (OV). Nevertheless, a useful illustration may be given by considering familiar cases of 'seeing as' such as Wittgenstein's Duck Rabbit (1958, II.ii). My fundamental perceptual condition in such a case is one of conscious visual acquaintance with the relevant diagram itself. Relative to my point of view and circumstances of perception, it has visually relevant similarities with paradigms of both a duck and a rabbit. It therefore thinly looks both duck-like and rabbit-like regardless of whether I notice either resemblance: perhaps I am preoccupied with other things. Suppose that I register it as duck-

like: I notice its visually relevant similarities with the paradigms involved my grasp of that concept. It thickly looks duck-like and I see it as duck-like. This is a phenomenological fact of conceptual classificatory engagement with the very diagram presented to me in perception, which continues thinly to look both duck-like and rabbit-like. Similarly, when I shift aspects and see it as rabbit-like, there is an alteration in this phenomenology of the categorization of what is presented.

Although manifestly phenomenological in this way, conceptual registration is nevertheless a genuine supplement to visual acquaintance. For any predicate 'x is F' that applies to o, a subject, S, may be acquainted with o and not register its visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of F, either because he has no conception of what an F is, and so has himself no relevant paradigms associated with that predicate, or because he pays no attention to o's similarities with any paradigm exemplars that he does associate with it – he is simply paying attention to other things.

Similarly, and this brings me to the second topic of endorsement and its relation with registration, it would be a mistake to construe conceptual registration itself as a matter of making any specific judgement, or judgements, about the objects presented in perception. S may see o and register its visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of F and yet still fail to judge that o is F because he has reason to take the situation to be misleading in some way. Nevertheless, the paradigm case of conceptual registration, absent any such reason for withholding assent involves actual subsumption of o under F in judgement. This

is the basic case of seeing, and thereby knowing, that *o* is *F*. In cases where there are grounds for caution or suspicion, conceptual registration may instead result in the judgement that *o* looks *F*.

In the 'good' cases in which *o* is indeed *F* that we have been exclusively concerned so far, conceptual registration constitutes the subject's recognition of the status of the object of his acquaintance, *o*, as a reason to apply the concept *F* in judgement; and, in the absence of any reason to withhold assent, this in turn intelligibly constitutes his seeing, hence knowing, that *o* is *F*.

It may be objected at this point that the account on offer here can only be of limited philosophical value. For the notion of conceptual registration that carries so much weight presupposes precisely the knowledge that it is supposed to explain. Seeing that *o* is *F* depends upon the subject's conceptual registration of appropriate visually relevant similarities between *o*, as the object of conscious acquaintance, and paradigm exemplars of *F* involved in his grasp of that concept. This in turn depends upon his prior knowledge of various objects in his environment that they are *F*. For how else does he come to associate appropriate paradigms with the predicate 'x is *F*' in a way that contributes to his understanding? So registering *o*'s visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of *F* presupposes knowledge of *F*s and is therefore of limited epistemic-explanatory value in understanding perceptual knowledge that *o* is *F*.

A preliminary issue to raise against this line of objection concerns the reductive ambitions being required of any attempt to make perceptual knowledge

intelligible. The objection effectively stipulates that a satisfactory explanation of some kind of knowledge K must be given without presupposing any knowledge of the same kind. Now if the dialectical agenda is set by a sceptic about K-knowledge, then perhaps a requirement along these lines may be defensible. But it is far from obvious to me at least that the demand is legitimate in general. For the project here is to make intelligible the status as knowledge of cases of S's seeing that o is F that all parties to the current discussion at least agree are indeed cases of knowing that o is F. We are not wrestling directly with any radical sceptic.⁸ In any case, the effectiveness of the objection against my (OV) account, even given some such requirement of adequacy, clearly depends upon the appropriate kind K. For S's perceptual knowledge that o is F is knowledge of many different kinds: knowledge on the part of S, perceptual knowledge, knowledge about o, knowledge of F-ness, and so on. In response to this general form of objection I content myself with a series of short comments in relation to some of these more specific challenges.

To begin with, I reject out of hand any requirement that we make S's perceptual knowledge that o is F intelligible without presupposing any knowledge whatsoever on S's part, or indeed any knowledge that anything is F. For, as I admit above, empirical concept possession is an epistemic skill. Possession of

⁸ See Brewer (1999, esp. chs, 4, 6, & 7) for more on the distinction between elucidation of the epistemic status of perceptual knowledge, on the one hand, and direct engagement with the sceptic about perceptual knowledge, on the other. This is framed in that discussion by my preference for a first-order as against a second-order account of (R), the thesis that "perceptual experiences provide reasons for empirical beliefs" (p. 18). See also my discussion of Van Cleve's response to the Cartesian Circle in §5 below. A helpful parallel may also be provided by Dummett's (1978) distinction between an explanatory and a suasive justification of deduction.

concepts like F involves knowledge of what being F is, acquired in general by learning of certain paradigm exemplars that they are indeed cases of F. So the very idea that S is in a cognitive position to know on the basis of perceptual experience that o is F already presupposes that he is a knower and has some knowledge of Fs. This is absolutely not to give up on the idea of any illuminating explanation of the contribution of his seeing o to any particular case of his seeing, and hence knowing, that o is F. For the account offered by (OV) presupposes, neither that S has any prior knowledge about o, nor that he has any prior perceptual knowledge that anything is F. I take these two points in turn.

First, although the proposed account of perceptual knowledge that o is F does presuppose knowledge that a, b, and c are F for various other objects in the world serving as S's paradigm exemplars of F, it does not presuppose knowledge that o is F, or indeed any other knowledge about o at all. As I argued above, neither acquaintance with o, nor registration of its appropriate visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of F presuppose any such knowledge.

Furthermore, as will become apparent in discussion of my second point immediately below, it actually follows from the fact that a, b, and c are paradigm exemplars involved in S's grasp of the concept F, that his knowledge that a is F, that b is F, and that c is F is not purely perceptual in the sense whose intelligibility is in question.

Second, the key distinction here is between perceptual and testimonial knowledge. I grant that S's registration of o's visually relevant similarities with the paradigm exemplars of F that play a role in his understanding of that concept

involves an epistemic association of such paradigms with the predicate 'x is F' in a way that does presuppose, at least in the most basic cases in which the concept possession in question is basic and non-descriptive, some knowledge that certain objects in the world around him are indeed F and perhaps also that others are not F. But I claim that this knowledge is in the first instance testimonial in kind. Crudely, S sees various objects around him and is informed in some way by others that they are F or that they are not F. A great deal more needs to be said about the transition; but I claim that this enables him to go on and know for himself, as it were, on the basis of perception alone, that certain of the objects that he sees in the world around him are also instances of the predicate 'x is F', just as I explain above. In this way he acquires the capacity for perceptual knowledge that o is F on the basis an epistemic-predicational skill that does not presuppose perceptual knowledge that anything is F.

Thus, (OV) offers an illuminating theoretical elaboration of the commonsense explanation in answer to the question how one knows on any given occasion that o is F: that one can see o and knows an F when one sees one. For it illustrates in a way that is easily generalizable how this particular piece of knowledge about a particular mind-independent physical object comes to be out of more basic acquaintance with that very thing along with conceptual registration of its visually relevant similarities with the paradigm exemplars of F that are involved in possession of that very concept. Neither of these components presupposes perceptual knowledge about that particular object or any other F, although the latter predication does depend upon testimonial knowledge concerning various other objects in the world around the subject and also presented in perception to

the effect that they are F or that they are not F. Of course this doesn't solve all possible epistemological questions concerning perception; but it does give a genuine explication of a particular piece of perceptual knowledge on the basis of conscious and cognitive capacities that do not presuppose it.

§ 4 Error

I said earlier that mistaken perceptual judgement and other epistemic failings of various kinds have to be handled separately and derivatively. These of course raise a number of epistemological issues and I cannot possibly address all or even any of them fully here. I confine myself to brief comments outlining the (OV) treatment that I would propose of three kinds of case.

First, as I characterized the category above, an illusion is an experience in which a physical object, o, looks F, although o is not actually F.⁹ According to (OV), this comes about when a person is visually acquainted with that very object, o, from a point of view and in circumstances in which it has visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of F although it is not itself an instance of that kind. Let us suppose that o is G instead, where G is an alternative determinate, incompatible with F, of a shared determinable. If the subject registers o's visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of F conceptually, then, although

⁹ As will become clear below, this characterization is not necessary for an experience plausibly described as illusory. There are complex cases in which complementary illusory factors 'cancel out' and an object looks F and is F, yet the experience is still illusory. See Johnston (2006). There are also cases that suggest that the characterization is not sufficient either. For example, a perfect wax model may look like the Prime Minister, but it is not clear that this constitutes a visual illusion.

she is in fact acquainted with an object that constitutes a reason to apply the concept G, she understandably mistakes this for a reason to apply the concept F instead. If she actually does apply F in judgement, then this will of course not be a case of knowledge, since her resultant belief is false. She may take herself to be presented with a reason for that false judgement. In fact she is not. For o is no reason to apply F at all: 'o is F' is simply false; and o is instead a reason to apply G. Still, given the misleading point of view and/or circumstances involved, her error is perfectly understandable.

Second, in hallucination, according to (OV), the subject is in a condition that cannot be distinguished by introspection alone from one of being perceptually presented with mind-independent physical objects of such and such kinds arranged thus and so before her. She may thereby take herself to be acquainted with reasons to make all sorts of judgements about the world around her. Again, though, none of these will be cases of knowledge, even if some of them turn out accidentally to be true. For she is not in fact acquainted with any such reasons at all.

Third, there may also be cases in which a person is visually acquainted with a mind-independent physical object, o, that is F, and in which o thickly looks F. Furthermore, she may endorse this thick look in judgement but still fail to acquire knowledge, as a result of the presence in her immediate environment of suitable 'ringers' for Fs: objects that are not Fs but that she might in the circumstances sufficiently easily have likewise taken to be Fs as to undermine the epistemic standing of her actual true belief. I am not myself convinced that

the mere presence ringers always undermines the status of her simple perceptual demonstrative judgement that o is F as knowledge. But in any such cases in which it does, she is in an otherwise ideal position to acquire knowledge and has reason in experience of the kind that I am interested in truly to judge that o is F; but the world simply conspires against our full endorsement of the epistemic credentials of her judgement. I cannot see how the account that I propose is less well placed than any other to accommodate this fact. Certainly, as I acknowledge from the start, no necessary and sufficient conditions can be given for knowing (by perception) that o is F that deliver philosophers' intuitively correct verdicts in every such case.

I cannot possibly resolve all the various familiar epistemological problems that come up in connection with each of these three kinds of obstacle to knowledge. I do hope to have said enough, though, at least to demonstrate that the present development of (OV) has a natural way to accommodate and characterize some of them, and is no less well equipped than any other available alternative to deal adequately with others.

All of this does raise the following pressing question though.¹⁰ What are the respective epistemological contributions of (a) the direct object of perception itself and (b) the point of view and circumstances from which its visually relevant similarities with various paradigms come to light. How does (OV) apportion its epistemic-explanatory resources, as it were, between the object of perception itself, on the one hand, and the perceiver's point of view upon it, on

¹⁰ A question urged on me in discussion with Anil Gupta.

the other? I answer as follows. (a) It is a necessary condition upon a perceiver's having reason in experience of the kind that I am elucidating here to apply the concept F in judgement that she should be consciously acquainted with what is in fact a reason for such application, namely, a direct object of perception, o, that is in fact F.¹¹ That object o itself is a reason in the relevant sense to make the concept application in question in judgement. (b) It is a further necessary condition on that very reason coming to light in her experience that she be acquainted with o from a point of view and in circumstances that enable her registration of the appropriate visually relevant similarities that it has from that point of view and in those circumstances with the paradigms that are involved in her grasp of the concept F. Satisfaction of the former but not the latter results in a case of acquaintance with what is in fact a reason to apply the concept F in judgement that may nevertheless not be evident to the subject. Satisfaction of the latter but not the former, in an illusory experience of an object that is actually G and not F, say, from a point of view and in circumstances relative to which it has visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of F, results in a case in which perception is misleading in a way that may issue in understandable error in judgement.

These two necessary conditions are not jointly sufficient, though. For there may be cases of compensating compound illusion of the kind remarked by Mark

¹¹ It is of course possible to come to know that o is F on the basis of perception without actually seeing o at all, as I point out in n. 1 above; and this may still be non-inferential knowledge. But, as I stipulate there, my focus throughout is on the most basic cases in which I know that o is F by seeing o. My question is then how to understand the contribution of seeing o to their status as cases of knowing that o is F.

Johnston (2006). In such cases a perceiver is acquainted with a direct object, *o*, that is in fact *F* from a point of view and in circumstances relative to which it has visually relevant similarities with paradigm exemplars of *F* due to the mutually compensating presence of two or more misleading factors normally individually responsible for illusion. For example, she may be looking at two twins of the same height. One is wearing horizontal strips making him look shorter than he is; but they are in an Ames room in which the gradual reduction of height towards one corner induces the illusion of people being increasingly taller than they are as they approach. If the striped twin is closer to the compressed corner than his brother by just the right amount, then they look the same height. Still this is a complex illusion in which two compensating illusory effects are offset. In such cases I would say that the subject does not have reason in experience of the kind that I am attempting to elucidate here to apply the concept *F* in judgement, even though she is acquainted with the twins who are in fact the same height from a point of view and in circumstances in which they look the same height, and she may register this in judgement. I do not know how to add to the two necessary conditions (a) and (b) given above in order to achieve sufficiency in the face of such possibilities, which are in any case clearly (doubly) abnormal. I am certainly not attempting an analysis, though; and I doubt very much that any such thing could be provided. The point is rather simply to illustrate the role and necessity of both (a) and (b) to the (OV) account of reason in experience outlined above. As we saw earlier with the potentially undermining effect of easily accessible ringers, and is evident here again with Johnston's veridical illusions, these two important necessary conditions fall short of sufficiency on their own for the subject's perceptual knowledge that *o* is *F*.

§ 5 Reasons

The instantiation by particular concrete worldly objects of the general concepts by which we categorize them constitutes a basic source of truth.¹² In this sense, such objects are themselves reasons to apply some such concepts and to withhold others, as I have been using this notion throughout so far. Call these objectual reasons. In seeing that o is F, in the primary cases that I am concerned with here, S is visually conscious of a particular such objectual reason to apply F, in circumstances in which she recognizes its status as such in a judgement that therefore intelligibly constitutes knowledge: seeing that o is F is a way of knowing that o is F.

There is a quite different but equally important and perhaps more standard notion of an empirical reason, on which such reasons are the facts that may serve as explanantia in rationalizing explanations of why a person believes what she does about the world around her: facts normatively favouring her believing what she does and so making this something that she ought, at least to some extent, to

¹² Perhaps, if 'objects' are taken very broadly, to encompass all the actual 'ways things are', then this formula may be quite general: all cases of truth being cases of the concrete ways things are instantiating certain of the 'ways for things to be', along the lines suggested by Travis (2013, in which his Introduction gives an excellent overview of the key idea). I do not wish to commit myself, either to any such broad interpretation of 'objects', which I intend instead to be construed far more narrowly according to the commonsense notion of a physical object, as outlined in my (2011, esp. ch. 1 & ff.), or to the general thesis that all truth should be understood according to a model of instantiation.

do. Call these factual reasons.¹³ In this sense, it seems to me, the fact that S sees that o is F may be amongst the factual reasons for her belief that o is F.

Now the point of contrasting these two notions of a reason comes out in considering a thesis that Cunningham calls 'Reasons Priority': "it is because perceptual experience provides one with reasons that it provides one with knowledge" (2017, p. 3*). Crudely, it seems to me that Reasons Priority is correct for the objectual reasons constituted by the objects of perceptual acquaintance themselves, when a person sees that o is F, say, by registering o's visually relevant similarities with the paradigm exemplars of F involved in her grasp of that concept. O is an objectual reason to apply the concept F, and seeing that o is F is a way of knowing that o is F because perceptual experience provides S with that very reason, by acquaintance, recognizable as such in her registration of its visually relevant similarities with those exemplars. In contrast, I claim, Reasons Priority is false concerning factual reasons. Certainly the factual reason cited above, that S sees that o is F, is not a fact provided by perception that thereby constitutes the subject's reason to believe that o is F when she sees that o is F. Indeed, there is no fact epistemically prior to the fact that o is F that is in some sense provided by perception to serve as explanans in a rationalizing explanation of S's belief that o is F in such a way as to confer upon it its status as (perceptual) knowledge. Nevertheless, the fact that she sees that o is F is what

¹³ My discussion here benefits greatly from reading Cunningham's forthcoming (2017) critical discussion of my (OV) epistemology of perception (2011), and related Truth Maker Views, as he calls them: see also Kalderon (2011) and Johnston (2006, 2011). It would form the core of my response to his objection. See Scanlon (1998), Dancy (2000), and Alvarez (2010), for this notion of a reason in the practical sphere. Cunningham directly adopts this notion.

makes her epistemic position as a knower intelligible to us as theorists through its involvement of S's seeing o and registering its visually relevant similarities with the paradigm exemplars involved in her grasp of F, as elucidated above. Furthermore, this factual reason that we may cite as theorists, that she sees that o is F, can also be known by the subject herself, but only on the basis of second order reflection on her perceptual situation in doing so.

Such reflection and self-knowledge raises interesting and important issues that I cannot adequately address here. For the record, I am sympathetic to an account along the following lines. Suppose that S sees that o is F. She thereby knows that o is F. She may knowledgeably infer that o looks F from this piece of knowledge by an ascent routine that takes as input the contents of perceptual judgements that she is inclined to make about the worldly objects that she sees ignoring any extraneous information and introduces into these an appropriate 'looks' operator: moving in this case from 'o is F' to 'o looks F'. Putting these two pieces of knowledge together she may derive the conclusion that she sees that o is F: o looks F, and o is F, so I see that o is F. Indeed, she may continue in similar vein to derive further knowledge, now as theorist of her own situation, as it were, of why this is a way of knowing that o is F. First, a similar ascent routine enables her to derive the knowledge that she believes that o is F when she sees that o is F: moving in this case from what she thereby knows, that o is F, to 'I believe that o is F'. Second, she may conclude that she sees o from the fact that o looks F. So, having previously seen that a is F, that b is F and that c is G, for some incompatible determinate, G, of the same determinable as F, say, she may conclude that she can tell an F when she sees one. For she learns by induction

from those previous cases that her beliefs about the objects that she sees normally match the facts in respect of their Fness. Thus she can now give the (OV) account of her own epistemic standing as knowing that o is F: she sees that o is F, which is a way of knowing that o is F since it involves seeing o and exercising her capacity to tell an F when she sees one.¹⁴

Seeing that o is F is a way of knowing that o is F. This is intelligible to us as theorists because seeing that o is F involves conscious acquaintance with o itself, a concrete worldly reason to apply the concept F, from a point of view and in circumstances that allow the subject's registration of the visually relevant similarities between o and the paradigm exemplars of F involved in her grasp of that concept, and hence her recognition of its status as a reason to apply F. But the status of seeing that o is F as a way of knowing that o is F is not dependent upon the subject's prior knowledge of this explanation of its epistemic status as such. She does not infer her knowledge that o is F from prior knowledge that she sees that o is F, or prior knowledge that she sees o and that she can tell an F when she sees one: she has no such prior knowledge. She simply has to instantiate the condition of seeing that o is F, involving these components as it does, in order thereby to know that o is F. Nevertheless, she can, on the basis of first order knowledge about the world acquired in this way, reflectively ascend to appreciate the fact that she sees that o is F and the standing of her seeing that o is F as a way of knowing that o is F along just these lines that I have set out on behalf of (OV).

¹⁴ For more on this ascent routine approach to the relevant forms of self-knowledge, see Evans (1982, esp. ch. 7), Gordon (1986), Moran (2001), and Byrne (2005, 2011, 2012). For criticism of the approach, see Cassam, (2014).

The position here is structurally similar to the solution that Van Cleve (1979) offers on Descartes' behalf in response to the Cartesian Circle objection with respect to the epistemic status of clear and distinct perception. Van Cleve contrasts the following two claims.¹⁵

(V1) For all p, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that p, then I know that p.

(V2) I know that (for all p, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that p, then p).

Circularity threatens Descartes' epistemology because he appears to be committed to the following two theses.

(D1) I can know that everything clearly and distinctly perceived is true only if I first know that God exists and is no deceiver.

(D2) I can know that God exists and is no deceiver only if I first know that everything clearly and distinctly perceived is true.

Van Cleve admits that (D1) is an explicit Cartesian commitment; and this is correct in my opinion. He breaks the circularity by denying (D2) on Descartes' behalf. The key insight is that the truth of (V1) does not depend upon prior possession of the knowledge attributed by (V2). For the Meditator acquires first

¹⁵ I modify Van Cleve's formulations by replacing his notion of being certain that p with that of knowing that p for clarity and simplicity in what follows.

order knowledge simply by falling under (V1): by doing some clearly and distinctly perceiving that p. This is a way of knowing that p without any need for second order knowledge that everything clearly and distinctly perceived is true. The status of clear and distinct perception as a source of knowledge depends upon the truth embedded in (V2), that everything clearly and distinctly perceived is true; but it does not depend upon the Meditator's prior knowledge of that truth. Nevertheless, the Meditator may attain this knowledge, making (V2) true, but only by the acquisition of and reflection upon further first order knowledge attained simply by clear and distinct perception, namely, in Descartes' case, knowledge of the existence of God.

Similarly, on behalf of (OV), I contrast the following two claims, where seeing that o is F is restricted to the basic cases that I have been considering throughout in which I do so by seeing o itself from a point of view and in circumstances in which I register its visually relevant similarities with the paradigm exemplars of F involved in my grasp of that concept.

(B1) For all o and all F, if I see that o is F, then I know that o is F.

(B2) I know that (for all o and all F, if I see that o is F, then o is F, I see o, and I can tell an F when I see one).

Like Van Cleve's Descartes, I claim that the truth of (B1) does not depend upon prior possession of the knowledge attributed by (B2). For the Perceiver acquires first order perceptual knowledge simply by falling under (B1): by doing some

seeing that *o* is *F*. This is a way of knowing that *o* is *F* without any need for second order knowledge that one is seeing that *o* is *F* and that *o* therefore is *F*, or that one sees *o* and can tell an *F* when one sees one. The status of seeing that *o* is *F* as a source of knowledge depends upon the truth embedded in (B2), that 'seeing that' is factive and that seeing that *o* is *F* involves seeing *o* and telling an *F* when one sees one; but it does not depend upon the Perceiver's prior knowledge of these truths. Nevertheless, the Perceiver may attain such knowledge, making (B2) true, but only by reflection on his situation in seeing that *o* is *F* and the acquisition of prior first order knowledge, through perception, or indeed in the first instance through testimony, that *a* is *F*, *b* is *F*, and *c* is (non-*F*) *G*, for example.

The key similarity here for present purposes is that both positions rest the status of a way of knowing as such upon facts that may be unknown to those acquiring knowledge in that way. There is also a key difference, though. For Van Cleve's Descartes, clear and distinct perception gets to be a way of knowing simply because God guarantees the truth of what is known in (V2), namely that for all *p*, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that *p*, then *p*, where this involves no awareness of any reason for belief on the Meditator's part in the act of acquiring first order knowledge through clear and distinct perception.¹⁶ According to (OV), on the other hand, seeing that *o* is *F* gets to be a way of knowing again in virtue of the de facto truth of what is known in (B2), namely that for all *o* and all *F*, if I see that *o* is *F*, then *o* is *F*, I see *o*, and I can tell an *F* when I see one; but this itself

¹⁶ This reliabilist externalism about first order knowledge through clear and distinct perception seems to me to be the respect in which Van Cleve's Cartesian epistemology is least faithful to the historical Descartes of the Meditations (1986).

entails that the act of acquiring first order knowledge of this kind through perception involves acquaintance with an objectual reason to apply F and recognition of its status as such in registration of the visually relevant similarities between that object of acquaintance and the paradigm exemplars of F involved in one's grasp of that concept. Put in terms that may be derived from Cunningham's (2017) discussion, although both positions reject factual Reasons Priority, (OV) accepts an objectual Reasons Priority that Van Cleve's Descartes rejects.

(OV) denies that the fundamental epistemic role of perceptual experience is to be articulated by reference to any factual reasons or warranting inference. The core phenomenon is rather that of rationally subsuming a particular object under a general concept given conscious experiential acquaintance with the former and grasp in understanding of the latter. Perceptual presentation of particular mind-independent physical objects in this way provides conscious acquaintance with those very things that constitute objectual reasons for the application of certain empirical concepts in judgement. In registering the visually relevant similarities that a perceptually presented object *o* has with the paradigm exemplars involved in our grasp of the empirical concept F, we recognize *o*'s status as a reason to apply that very concept in judgement. In this way, perceptual experience provides us with recognizable objectual reasons for specific basic beliefs about the objects in the world around us. Endorsing the thick looks of mind-independent physical objects in judgement in this way – that is to say, seeing that various things are thus and so – provides us with factual reasons for further worldly beliefs, and indeed further beliefs about our own epistemic standing in

seeing that o is F. But the whole enterprise of empirical knowledge is grounded upon the evidently rational subsumption of perceived particulars under the general concepts available in understanding that constitutes this basic perceptual knowledge.¹⁷

References

- Alvarez, M. 2010. Kinds of Reason: An Essay in the Philosophy of Action. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brewer, B. 1999. Perception and Reason. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2011. Perception and its Objects. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Byrne, A. 2005. 'Introspection'. Philosophical Topics, **33**, 79-104.
- 2011. 'Transparency, Belief, Intention'. Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume, **85**, 201-221.
- 2012. 'Knowing What I See'. In D. Smithies and D. Stoljar (eds.), Introspection and Consciousness. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cassam, Q. 2014. Self-Knowledge for Humans. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cunningham, J. 2017. 'Are Perceptual Reasons the Objects of Perception?'.
Forthcoming in J. Gersel, R. T. Jensen, M. S. Thanning, and S. Overgaard

¹⁷ This paper draws on and develops ideas first presented in my (2011, esp. ch. 6), and derives acknowledgements from there as well as those for many subsequent discussions. In particular, I would like to thank the following for their helpful comments and suggestions. Michael Ayers, John Campbell, Quassim Cassam, Joe Cunningham, Imogen Dickie, Julien Dutant, Naomi Eilan, Craig French, Anil Gupta, Clayton Littlejohn, Mike Martin, Ian Phillips, Johannes Roessler, Paul Snowdon, Matt Soteriou, and Charles Travis.

- (eds.), In the Light of Experience – Essays on Reasons and Perception.
Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dancy, J. 2000. Practical Reality. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Descartes, R. 1986. Meditations on First Philosophy, trans. J. Cottingham.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dummett, M. A. E. 1978. 'The Justification of Deduction'. In his Truth and Other Enigmas. London: Duckworth.
- Evans, G. 1982. The Varieties of Reference. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gordon, R. 1986. 'Folk Psychology as Simulation'. Mind and Language, **1**, 158-171.
- Johnston, M. 2006. 'Better than Mere Knowledge? The Function of Sensory Awareness'. In T. Szabo Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds.), Perceptual Experience. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2011. 'On a Neglected Epistemic Virtue'. Philosophical Issues, **21**, 165-218.
- Kalderon, M. 2011. 'Before the Law'. Philosophical Issues, **21**, 219-243.
- Martin, M. G. F. 2010. 'What's in a Look?'. In B. Nanay (ed.), Perceiving the World.
Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Moran, R. 2001. Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge.
Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Roessler, J. 2009. 'Perceptual Experience and Perceptual Knowledge'. Mind, **118**, 1013-1041.
- Scanlon, T. 1998. What We Owe to Each Other. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Travis, C. 2013. Perception: Essays After Frege. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van Cleve, J. 1979. 'Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle'. Philosophical Review, **88**, 55-91.

Williamson, T. 2000. Knowledge and its Limits. Oxford: Oxford University Press.