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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Perceptual justification and objectual attitudes

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Abstract
Some philosophers claim that perception immediately and prima facie justifies belief in virtue of its phenomenal character (Huemer, Skepticism and the veil of perception. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2001; Pryor, There is immediate justification. In: Steup M, Sosa E (eds) Contemporary debates in epistemology. Blackwell, London (2014), pp. 181–202, 2005). To explain this special justificatory power, some appeal to perception's presentational character: the idea that perceptual experience presents its objects as existing here-and-now (Chudnoff, Intuition. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013; Berghofer, Husserl Stud 34(2):145–170, 2018). As some philosophers have noted, if perception justifies in virtue of its presentational character alone, the kind of content perception has should not matter for perceptual justification; more precisely, it should not matter whether perceptual content is propositional or not (e.g., Smithies, The epistemic role of consciousness. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019; Kriegel, Australas J Philos, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2021.1978513). However, most philosophers tend to resist this conclusion, holding that perception must be propositional in order to justify, on the ground that all our model of justification are propositional (e.g., Gauker, Philos Perspect 26(1):19–50, 2012). This paper challenges this claim. The paper consists of a negative and a positive part. In the negative part, I discuss and reject the master argument for the propositionality of perception; the conclusion is that propositional content is neither sufficient nor necessary to explain perception's justificatory power. In the positive part, I take this conclusion seriously and outline an objectual model of perceptual justification. I define objectual attitudes as mental states whose content is not a full proposition, but a sub-propositional representational item, such as the representation of objects, properties, and kinds (Grzankowski and Montague, Non-propositional intentionality. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018), and show that it is plausible that some perceptions and some beliefs are attitudes of this kind. I then argue that objectual perceptual experiences have the right kind of phenomenal character and the right kind of structure to

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serve for immediate prima facie justification. I conclude by defending my objectual model from three objections.

Keywords Perception · Perceptual justification · Phenomenal justification · Objectual attitudes · Propositional Content · Belief

1 Introduction

Some philosophers claim that perception *immediately* and *prima facie* justifies belief in virtue of its phenomenal character (Huemer, 2001; Pryor, 2005). To explain this special justificatory power, some appeal to perception's *presentational* character: the idea that perceptual experience presents its objects as existing or here-and-now (Berghofer, 2018; Chudnoff, 2013). If perception justifies in virtue of its presentational character alone, the kind of content perception has should not matter for perceptual justification; more precisely, it should not matter whether perceptual content is propositional or not (Kriegel, 2021; Smithies, 2019). However, philosophers tend to resist this conclusion, holding that perception must be propositional in order to justify, on the ground that all our models of justification are propositional (Gauker, 2012). This paper aims to challenge this standard view.

The paper consists of a negative and a positive part. In the negative part, I discuss and reject what I call the Master Argument for Experiential Propositionalism. I reconstruct the argument roughly as follows. The content of perception is what justifies the content of belief; the content of belief is propositional; in order for perception to justify belief, the content of perception should be of the right kind to enter into logical and inferential relations with the content of belief; only propositions can enter into such relations with other propositions; thus, for perception to justify belief, the contents of perception must be propositional. The master argument can be attacked on several fronts: (i) it is false that only propositions can justify propositional beliefs; (ii) not all propositional states have the power to justify immediately and prima facie; (iii) some beliefs are non-propositional. The conclusion of the negative part of the paper is thus that the propositionality of perception is neither sufficient nor necessary to explain perception's justificatory power.

In the positive part of the paper, I take the above conclusion seriously and outline an objectual model of perceptual justification. I argue that objectual perceptual experiences have the right kind of phenomenal character and structure to serve for immediate prima facie justification. I conclude by defending my objectual model of justification from three main objections.

One clarification before starting our discussion. The paper offers an objectualists model of justification that leads to what has been called objectual knowledge, i.e., non-propositional knowledge that is not knowledge-how, but it departs from rival theories of objectual knowledge in two significant ways. The first is that rival accounts typically argue that objectual knowledge is knowledge of things, and is constituted by acquaintance states of some sort (see Farkas, 2019 for discussion). However, my objectual states are not acquaintance states, and their objects are not objects, properties, and kinds *simpliciter*, but *representations of* objects, properties, and kinds. If

acquaintance is used in the traditional sense, i.e., as a kind of direct awareness, then that seems to me to exclude any sort of mediation, representation included. For this simple reason, I believe the account here proposed to be incompatible with contemporary accounts of knowledge by acquaintance, at least as long as perceptual experience is concerned.

A second point of difference with contemporary accounts of objectual knowledge regards the role of belief. According to some philosophers, belief plays no role in knowledge of things: knowledge of things just is acquaintance with things (e.g., Atiq, 2021; Duncan, 2020). On the other hand, my account preserves the connection between a state's assertoric or phenomenal character, belief, and justification, following classic phenomenal conservatism, in the form of the principle that if it seems to S that they have a perceptual experience as of O, S thereby has at least prima facie justification for believing in O (see Sect. 4).[1]

It is not among the objectives of this paper to provide an evaluation of different accounts of objectual knowledge. The aim is far more modest: to fill in a gap in the logical space opened by the possibility of objectual attitudes and to defend the plausibility of objectual perceptual justification.

2 Perceptual objectualism

What is perceptual objectual content? The answer to this question presupposes an answer to the question of what objectual content, in general, is; and the answer to the question of what objectual content is depends on what one takes propositional content to be. This is because Objectualism, i.e., the thesis that at least some intentional mental states are relations between subjects and objects, broadly intended as ordinary objects, properties, and kinds (Ben-Yami, 1997; Forbes, 2000; Szabó, 2003; Crane, 2003; Thagard, 2006; Montague, 2007; Kriegel, 2015; Grzankowski, 2018a; Grzankowski & Montague, 2018; Mendelovici, 2018), is often defined in contrast to Propositionalism, i.e., the thesis that "all intentionality is propositional" (Grzankowski & Montague, 2018, p. 1).

There are two ways to understand Propositionalism, namely relationally and non-relationally. In relational terms, the thesis is that intentional mental states have their intentional character (their *aboutness* or *directedness*) in virtue of being related to abstract objects that are the primary bearers of truth values, i.e., propositions. In non-relational terms, the thesis is that the content of a mental state are its conditions of satisfaction, which are always conditions *that* such and such is the case (Searle, 1983).

Not all intentional attitude ascriptions, however, have a sentential structure. For instance, we may hear *a bark*, see *a dog*, believe in *God*, fear *spiders*, and think of *the*

[1] The epistemic dispensability of belief for knowledge of things occurs also in Duncan's (2020) representationalist version, in which knowledge of things is constituted by veridical representational "awareness" states. However, while it is clear how belief can be dispensable in acquaintance-based accounts of perceptual knowledge because direct contact with objects in the world has epistemic priority, it is not clear to me that belief is similarly dispensable in representationalist accounts. In fact, I believe that only an appeal to some doxastic component of perceptual experience (i.e., a belief, belief-component, or assertoric character) can fully explain the distinctive character of perceptual experience and its special epistemic role in our mental economy, as well as the relation between the two (Martin, 2002, p. 387ff.). I discuss this in Sect. 3.

number seven. Attitude ascriptions of this sort usually go by the (somewhat misleading; see below) name of *objectual* attitudes. According to Forbes, an objectual attitude ascription is like a propositional attitude ascription, except that instead of imputing a relation between a subject and a proposition about an object, "it imputes a relation between a subject and the object itself" (2000, p. 141). According to Mendelovici, objectualism is the thesis that at least some mental states have objectual content, which are states with objectual contents, such as objects, properties, and kinds (2018, p. 214). Here I define objectualism as the thesis that at least some mental states have objectual content, i.e., the sub-propositional representations of objects, properties, and kinds.

Like Propositionalism, Objectualism can be understood in relational or non-relational terms. In relational terms, it is the view that some mental states are relations between subjects and objects, broadly intended as ordinary objects, properties, and kinds (Forbes, 2000; Grzankowski, 2016, 2018; Montague, 2007; Szabó, 2003). In non-relational terms, it is the view that some mental states have a kind of content that is not truth-evaluable (Crane, 2009; Grzankowski, 2018b; Kriegel, 2019).

The view that I defend in this paper is that perceptual attitudes may sometimes have objectual content. I call this view *Perceptual Objectualism* (henceforth, PO). The focus of the paper is epistemological: I defend PO from the accusation of being epistemologically untenable. Based on the definitions provided so far, PO can be understood as the thesis that some perceptual attitudes are relations between subjects and objects; or that the content of some perceptual attitudes is non-truth-evaluable. Because of the difficulties in understanding what the relata of attitudes are, if they are not propositions (see Grzankowski, 2018 for and Buchanan & Grzankowski, 2022 for discussion), I will assume here the second, non-relational reading of PO.

Earlier I wrote that the term 'Objectualism' was somewhat misleading. This is because it invites an understanding of PO as a relational view of perception. PO, however, does not claim this. PO is a non-relational view of perception according to which some perceptual attitudes may have non-truth evaluable content. It does not say that perception is essentially a direct relation to worldly objects. There might be no existing worldly objects one is related to, when representing an 'object' in the objectualist sense. This point clearly raises some issues concerning the representational status of perceptual objectual content. This section will deal with these, but not before offering some motivations for PO.

In its modern form, PO has only recently appeared in the literature about objectualism and is still largely underdeveloped.[2] Like Objectualism in general, PO receives some intuitive strength from the fact that perceptual verbs can take sentential as well as nominal complements: we say that a subject S sees *a dog*, hears *a bark*, or touches *fur*. We can strengthen this initial linguistic evidence by means of the following argument. Genuine objectual attitudes cannot have their nominal clause being paraphrased into sentential form *salva veritate* (against, e.g., Quine, 1956). Thus, *Mary loves that Jane is smart* and *Mary loves Jane's being smart* are not equivalent translations of *Mary loves Jane*, because Mary can love *that Jane is smart* or *Jane's being smart* without

[2] Something along the lines of PO, in the form here discussed, can be found in Crane (2013), Montague (2007), Kriegel (2019), and Duncan (2020), although the thesis that perception can be directed at objectual contents has important precursors, as we are going to see, in Brentano and Husserl.

thereby loving *Jane* (see Montague, 2007). Similarly, we can argue that seeing a dog does not seem reducible to seeing any *fact* about it (*ibid*.).[3]

It can be objected that "it does not seem possible to perceive objects without at least some of their properties, or to perceive properties without perceiving at least some instantiations of these properties" (Church, 2013, p. 11). The objection makes a reasonable point: singling out something requires perceiving at least one of its properties in virtue of which the object stands out against the background (see Siegel, 2006). To perceive the dog in the yard, I must perceive at least one property F that differentiates it from the background, such as its brownness. Against this objection, one might notice that one does not have to see *that* an object has this or that property in order to see *the object that* has those properties (Dretske, 1979). Moreover, seeing an object that is F is different and does not imply seeing *that the object is F* or *the object's having F* (Textor, 2021b). Perceiving the dog *in virtue of* perceiving its brownness is a different act from perceiving the state of affairs of the dog's being brown or that the dog is brown. Later in the paper, I will argue that it is likely that objectual acts of perception precede propositional acts of perception, in a sense of priority to be defined. But for now, it is sufficient that we accept that there is a difference to be observed here, and that seeing a brown dog is not the same as perceiving that the dog is brown, or the dog's brownness.

We can now finally turn to the issues concerning the representational status of PO. I will discuss here two. The first issue is that the representational content of perception is often explained in propositional terms, i.e., as the conditions of truth, accuracy, or satisfaction of the experience, and these are always conditions *that* such-and-such is the case (Searle, 1983). Thus, someone who maintains that there is a kind of representational content that is not truth-evaluable must explain in what sense this content is nonetheless representational. The second issue concerns the evaluability conditions of objectual content. Representation not only allows us to compare introspectively indistinguishable experiences with different veridical statuses, but also the degree to which veridical experiences accurately represent what they represent. How can this feature be accommodated within the objectualist framework?

To solve the first issue, the objectualist must reject any straightforward connection between perception's representational status and propositionality. There are two strategies that the objectualist can put in place.

The first strategy is to argue that perception's representational character should be understood on the model of states of the mind such as desires and hopes. In this sense, perceptual experience is representational in that it is about things in the subject's

[3] These remarks might remind the reader of Dretske's distinction between fact- and object-seeing (Drestske, 1979). However, there are important differences between my account in this paper and Husserl's and Dretske's proposals. The first lies in the fact that both Husserl's and Dretske's simple seeing are thoroughly non-epistemic. Husserl writes that simple seeing cannot be part of a judgment because judging is a complex of naming and predicating; vice versa, no judgment can include a perception, because judgment is essentially non-intuitive (Husserl, 2001; cf. Mulligan, 1995, pp. 171–172). Dretske claims that simple seeing O is compatible with having no beliefs about O (1979, p. 100). Both stances are incompatible with the thesis that I shall defend in this paper, namely that seeing O is compatible *only* with having no *prior* beliefs about O; seeing O comes with (posterior) *beliefs in* O. This will become clearer later in the text. A second important difference is that Dretske's simple seeing is *de re*, while my objectual seeing, qua a representational state, is not (see also Mulligan, 1995 for a naïve realistic interpretation of Husserl's simple seeing).

environment, and this explains perception's phenomenal character (this is what Martin calls the semantic conception of representation; Martin, 2002, p. 387). This seems to be, for instance Grzankowski's sense of objectual content (who, we should notice, never lists perception as a potential objectual attitude). He suggests that objectual content is content that is not evaluable for truth or any equivalent thereof like accuracy, veridicality, or satisfaction.

> Consider a few examples: Harry is thinking of the number seven, Bill loves Sally, and Mary fears Fido. When is Harry's thought *satisfied* or *accurate*? The question seems misplaced. Similarly for Bill and Mary, there is no admissible question of the form 'when is Bill's love satisfied/accurate?', 'when is Mary's fear satisfied/accurate?'. Even if we broaden our notions of evaluability to include *realization* conditions, *veridicality* conditions, or so on, the question is still misplaced. (Grzankowski, 2018a, p. 141)

Other objectualists put forward a different strategy. This involves distinguishing between truth-evaluability and its (alleged) non-propositional alternatives, such as accuracy or veridicality. Crane, for instance, has argued that the claim that perception has content and the propositionality of perception can be disjoined; he chooses pictures to illustrate this point, because pictures can be 'about' things without being true or false but *accurate* or *inaccurate*:

> Accuracy is not truth, since accuracy admits of degrees and truth does not. (The same can be said of correctness.) A picture, for example, can be more or less accurate, but a picture is not true or false. So there is no straightforward deductive inference from the claim that experiences can be accurate and inaccurate to the conclusion that they can be true or false, that they have propositional contents. (2009, p. 458)

These two different approaches to objectual content deliver two different answers to our second issue concerning the evaluability conditions of objectual content.

It is obvious that the objectualist should in any case interpret accuracy or veridicality conditions quite liberally. For instance, Textor (2021a) suggests construing veridicality conditions for perceptual experience on the model of the conditions of the correct application of singular and general terms. To develop this idea further, imagine modelling the content of perception not on a whole proposition but on a single term, similar to, e.g., exclaiming "Dog![4]" when seeing a dog. There are conditions (i.e., ways the world is) in which yelling "Dog!" is correct and conditions in which is not; that is, respectively, when there really is or there is not a dog in the environment around the subject. Analogously, there are conditions (i.e., ways the world is) in which undergoing a dog-experience is correct, that is, when there really is a dog in the environment, and vice versa.

This strategy can be useful to deal with the first understanding of objectual content, the one that does not admit of evaluability conditions of any kind, but can still admit of something like 'application' conditions. However, this is not enough, for even when

[4] The exclamation mark is a typographic expedient I use to denote the assertoric character of perception. On the notion of assertoric force, see the next sections.

there is a dog in the environment, and so my representing "dog!" is correct, other things can still go wrong. For instance, I might misperceive the colour of the dog's fur, or represent the dog as being closer than it really is. The real challenge for the proponent of PO is to accommodate this fact.

The second understanding of objectual content can be of help. When some objectualists claim that objectual content is evaluable, they claim that there is a way of evaluating objectual attitudes that does not make use of propositions as models for the contents of perception. As we have seen, Crane's alternative model makes use of pictures, as an example of representation that is evaluable but not truth evaluable. Duncan (2020) seems to agree with Crane that there are some representations that are evaluable without being truth evaluable. He uses the notion of veridicality to express this fact:

> Awareness states, such as perceptual and introspective states, are not true or false. My awareness of the color of your shirt, for example, is neither true nor false. But awareness states are *veridical* or *non-veridical*. One's perceptual or introspective representation of property Q is veridical if and only if Q is instantiated as it's represented; one's perceptual or introspective representation of an object O is veridical if and only if O exists and is present as it's represented. Otherwise it's non-veridical. (p. 3564)[5]

However, not everyone agrees. According to Papineau, pictures are just very dense representations, with extremely rich and complex truth conditions, but not substantially different from propositions (Papineau, 2021, p. 36). For instance, the content of a given perceptual episode might be a long conjunction of several propositions, or a Russellian proposition that contains every object and property in one's sensory field at that time.

The quarrel boils down to the difficult question of whether there really are different types of representations that are evaluable, or there are not. Settling this debate is beyond the scope of this paper; however, let me say a few words to show why I think Papineau is not right. Consider the following two different ways in which the accuracy of a picture can be evaluated. In the first case, start from a physical picture, like a photograph or a painting, and make an infinite number of imperfect copies of it, such that each is slightly less accurate than the one it follows. In theory, it should be possible to place all these physical replicas on a continuous scale from the most to the least accurate. The difference between two contiguous images would then resemble that between two contiguous colours on the light spectrum; in other words, the scale is analogue. Take now a digital picture made of pixels and create a new series of imperfect replicas. Assign to each pixel a value of 1 when it matches the corresponding original pixel and 0 when it does not. In this second way, the various replicas can also be placed on a scale of degrees of accuracy, but the difference between contiguous pictures, no matter how small the pixel unit is, will always be a discrete unity. This second scale is digital.

[5] Notice that Duncan must understand veridicality as equivalent to Crane's idea of accuracy—or else, the second clause of veridicality (that Q/O is instantiated/present "as it's represented") would generate a truth-evaluable context; that is, it must be possible that an awareness state represents things *more or less veridically* without representing them in a *truth* evaluable manner.

If there really is a difference between two properties, one discrete and one analog, call them accuracy_a and accuracy_d if you like, then Papineau's point does not hold. There are representations that are richer and denser than propositional representations and are not reducible to the latter type. This non-propositional type of representation is evaluable but not truth-evaluable, and it can accommodate the need to evaluate some objectual attitudes, including perception. For this reason, this is the sense of objectual content I will assume for the rest of the paper.

We can now move to the core of this paper, which is the defense of PO from the accusation of being epistemically untenable.

3 The master argument for Experiential Propositionalism

I call Experiential Propositionalism (EP) the thesis that the content of perceptual experience is always propositional, i.e., truth-evaluable. EP usually goes hand-in-hand with *Intentionalism* or *Representationalism* about perception, namely, the thesis that perceptual states are intentional (they are about or directed to something) because representational. Indeed, the standard version of Intentionalism is the thesis that perception is a propositional attitude "such as believing or intending […] when one has a perceptual experience, one bears the perception relation to a certain proposition p" (Byrne, 2005, p. 245). But EP can also be defended on non-representationalist grounds, for instance as a necessary constraint to explain the justificatory power of perception (McDowell, 1994). This is the master argument for Experiential Propositionalism.

The idea that perception can provide *immediate* justification for one's beliefs, that is, a kind of justification that does not come from justification to believe other propositions (Pryor, 2005, p. 204), is, in its modern version, recent yet of intuitive strength. Your visual experience as of a brown dog seems to give you good reasons to believe that there is a brown dog, whether you actually hold the belief or not.[6] In addition, perception is often regarded as a "justificational 'regress stopper'" (Smithies, 2019, p. 95), as it does not invite further questions about its justification.

Not everyone agrees that perception has the power to justify belief. Davidson (1986), for instance, claimed that only belief can justify belief; but many commentators argue that his view was motivated by his belief that perception is non-intentional (see e.g., Huemer, 2001, p. 72). Most philosophers today take perception to be more than mere 'raw feels', and its contentfulness as a necessary condition for perceptual justification. This raises the question of what kind of content perception must have to justify a belief that p. The Master Argument states that such content must be propositional.

The Master Argument is most famously deployed by McDowell (1994; but see also Brewer, 1999; Pryor, 2000; Siegel, 2010) in support of the 'sameness of content' thesis, i.e., the thesis that the content of perception must be of the same kind as the content of belief (i.e., according to McDowell, both propositional and conceptual). This simple model is quite attractive because it allows the content of perception to

[6] Following Firth (1978), it is customary to distinguish two senses in which experiences can epistemically justify belief: propositional and doxastic justification. A belief is propositionally justified when subjects have justification to hold the belief, whether or not the subject actually holds it; a belief is doxastically justified when a subject holds a belief in a justified way.

be taken up by belief directly; in McDowell's words, the content of experience is "the sort of thing one can also […] judge" (*ibid*., p. 36). This 'direct-taking' strategy straightforwardly accounts for the justificatory role of perception, in that "what the subject says counts as giving a reason for her belief because the way the object looks is the way she believes it to be" (*ibid*., p.165).

Here is the outline of the argument[7]:

(P1) If perception immediately justifies belief, the relation between a perceptual episode and the belief that it underwrites must be more than causal; it must be rational.
(P2) The relation between these states can be rational only if logical relations (such as implication or probabilification; McDowell, 1994, p. 7) can hold between their respective content.
(P3) Logical relations can hold only between propositional contents, for only propositions can be affirmed, negated, disjoined, and conjoined (Huemer, 2001, p. 74).
(C) If perception immediately justifies belief, the content of perception must be propositional.

(P1) expresses the rationality constraint. The idea is that perception should provide more than mere, as John McDowell famously put it, "exculpations" for one's beliefs; it is not only *because* but *for the reason that* I see a brown dog that I form the belief that there is a brown dog before me. (P2) establishes a structural requirement on rationality: the content of perception must be of the kind that can enter into logical relations with the content of belief. The content of belief is propositional. (P3) claims that only propositions have the right structure to relate to other propositions.[8] This establishes the conclusion that if perception immediately justifies belief, the content of perception must be propositional.

In the remainder of this section, I will reject P2 of the Master Argument, by showing that the relation of justification between perception and belief can be rational even if logical relations (such as implication or probabilification) do not hold between their respective contents. This will be achieved by defending the following three claims: (i) not all propositional states have the power to justify immediately and *prima facie*; (ii) it is false that only propositional states can justify propositional beliefs; (iii) some beliefs are non-propositional.

Let us start with claim (i). Propositionality is clearly not a sufficient condition for immediate and *prima facie* justification. States like desires and imaginations have propositional content as well, but my desire that there are 1 million euros in my bank account does not justify my belief with the same content, no matter how hard I may desire it. Why do some propositional attitudes, like belief and perception, justify and some others, like desires and imaginations, do not?

A popular explanation of this fact appeals to what has been called the *assertoric force* of a mental state. The idea is that some states do not merely *tell* subjects that

[7] Similar reconstructions can be found in Gauker (2012), Echeverri (2013), and Almäng (2014).

[8] "Only things with sentential structure can be premises of inference" (Brandom, 1997, p. 128). These propositions can also be unstructured, as in Stalnaker's account (1984); but this view has had historically less fortune in the philosophy of perception compared to the view of propositions as structured entities.

things are so-and-so, but rather *assert* it. By this, one means that some states are committed to the truth of what is represented (Martin, 2002). Beliefs and perceptions are states of this kind; subjects ought to believe perception as they ought to believe belief—because both are states that purport to represent the world truthfully (see Pryor, 2000; Huemer, 2001; Martin, 2002; Matthen, 2005; Siegel, 2010).

We should notice that the notion of assertoric force need not be construed in phenomenal terms. Beliefs have assertoric force too, but they may or may not be occurrent, and it is unclear whether they are phenomenal when occurrent. Assertoric force can be understood in functional terms, for instance as the disposition to take p for granted when used as a starting point for reasoning (Echeverri, 2013, p. 33). On the other hand, it does seem plausible to use the notion of assertoric force to explain perception's distinctive phenomenal character, but this calls for an explanation of the difference between assertoric states of different kinds, like perception and belief.[9] I shall formulate a suggestion about this later in the paper in terms of presentational force, but for now, let us just take a neutral stance regarding the phenomenal nature of perception's assertoric force.

Propositionality is obviously not sufficient for justification in general and for perceptual justification in particular; but is it necessary? If it was, the objectualist would be in quite a pickle. She could still maintain that objectual perceptual attitudes are real but lack any justificatory power. However, this would make the view unpalatable to those who believe that immediate perceptual justification is at least plausible, and these are many.

Luckily, some intuitive arguments can be made against this case. Consider pain: my feeling pain is good evidence, if any, to form my belief that I am in pain; yet it is questionable that pains have propositional content.[10] A similar case involves evaluative beliefs. As Atiq argues (2021, p. 15), the case of 'moral dumbfoundedness', i.e., the inability of ordinary agents to formulate propositions as justification for their evaluative beliefs, could be explained by the fact that part of the evidence one has for holding evaluative beliefs are not propositions about one's experience. Thus, we need additional evidence to believe that in order to justify a state with propositional content, the content of the grounding state must necessarily be propositional as well.

This additional evidence typically comes from considerations about the nature of reasons. If a perceptual episode is to justify a belief that *p*, then it must provide *reasons* to support *p*; and it is hard to see, the objection goes, how can something be a reason for *p* if it does not provide inferential support to*p* (Glüer, 2009, p. 323, fn. 48). Following

[9] This objection can also be also formulated in phenomenological terms: What is so special about perceptual phenomenology that it can immediately justify beliefs, when no other kinds of phenomenology can? (Siegel & Silins, 2015; see Kriegel, 2021 for discussion).

[10] The propositionalist has three possible replies. (i) They can commit to a thesis for which all mental states, including pain, have propositional content; but they must give an independent argument for it (see Echeverri, 2013 for this objection). (ii) They can bite the bullet and argue that, if there are non-propositional mental states, these cannot play any justificatory role; this move narrows the scope of the propositionalist thesis and, most problematically, leaves out states that can plausibly justify, such as pain (ibid.). (iii) They can argue that it is the fact of my being in pain that justifies my belief of being in pain. (iii) Is in my opinion the strongest reply, but it does not work either. It seems wrong to say that what we perceive are facts; we judge that something is a fact; but what is the fact we judge or 'take in' when undergoing an illusion or when hallucinating? (Crane, 2006, p. 464).

a long Sellarsian tradition, a proposition is located in the space of reasons, and thereby it is justified, if it can enter into inferential relations with other propositions (Brewer, 2005). Williamson (2000, p. 195) uses his famous knife example to clarify this point. Suppose that in a court trial, someone brings a bloody knife as a piece of evidence. The presentation of the bloody knife, Williamson argues, would be too unspecific to be a reason to convict the defendant, making it necessary to formulate *propositions* about it.

One way to reply to the objection that all reason is propositional is the following. Pryor (2005, p. 215) points out that there are two senses of the verb 'justify':

> On the first construal, "justifying" a belief in P is a matter of proving or showing the belief to be just (or reasonable or credible). This is something that *a person* does, by giving some argument in support of that belief. […] By extension, we can also talk about *things* justifying beliefs; in this extended sense, a thing counts as justifying a belief if it is something *you are in a position to use* to prove or show your belief to be just. Such things would be "reasons" in the dialectical sense […]. To be explicit, let's call these things *justification-showers*.
>
> There is also a second way to construe the verb "justify," which sees it as akin to the verbs "beautify" and "electrify." When a combination of light and color beautifies a room, it is not *proving* that the room is beautiful; rather, it is *making* the room beautiful. Similarly, on this understanding, justifying a belief is a matter of *making* a belief just or reasonable, rather than a matter of *showing* the belief to be just. That is how I understand the notion of a justification-maker (2005, p. 194).

In this passage, Pryor distinguishes between dialectical and non-dialectical reasons. A dialectical reason is something a subject can *give* or *use* to show a belief to be just; it is something that can be used as premises in an argument. Headaches and pains cannot be reasons in this sense. By contrast, a justification-maker is something that *makes* rather than *proves* a belief just or reasonable, even though you cannot use it as premises in an argument. Headaches and pains can be reasons in this sense.

Following Pryor's suggestion, one way to argue that objectual perceptual experiences can be justifiers despite their non-propositionality is to think of them as justification-makers rather than justification-showers. A justification-shower is a proposition that is evident to me and that I can 'show' or give to my opponent as a premise to my propositional argument. A justification-maker is a state that makes my reasoning to certain proposition p epistemically appropriate, while not properly speaking entering any propositional argument to the conclusion that p. A non-propositional perceptual experience can make it reasonable for you to believe that *p*, even though you cannot use this reason as a premise in a propositional argument.

Naturally, one might be in a certain state and nonetheless *have* no reasons for their belief, even though *there are* reasons, because the state is personal-level inaccessible to her.[11] Compare, for instance the epistemic status of a subject who has an objectual perceptual experience as of a dog and a subject who does not have such personal-level

[11] I than an anonymous reviewer for pushing me on this point. See also Pryor (2005, pp. 194–195).

experience, for instance because she is blindsighted.[12] It is hard to deny that the first subject is in a better epistemic position with respect to the judgment that there is a dog before her. This different epistemic status can be explained by the fact that the first subject not only undergoes a conscious state that is a possible justification-maker, but the state is also epistemically available to her. The subject thus has reasons for her belief that p, even though she cannot use that reason in a propositional argument to the conclusion that *p*.

Moreover, the subject seems to be in such an epistemic position *in virtue of* undergoing that very experience, and *independently* of her giving propositional reasons.[13] It is *in virtue of* undergoing a visual experience of a dog before her that the subject believes that there is a dog before her. In other words, there seems to be a connection between the perceptual experience and the belief that is not merely causal but rational. And this is so even though the contents of the two states do not seem to be in logical relation to one another because of their structural differences, and thus *independently* of the subject forming propositional states *about* her experience. My state of pain cannot be a premise in my argument to the conclusion that I am in pain because it does not have the proper (propositional) structure to be the premise of a propositional argument to that conclusion, thus violating P2 of the Master Argument. Nonetheless, it seems perfectly reasonable to 'point' at my state of pain as a reason to hold the belief that I am in pain. Similarly, my perceptual experience as of a dog can justify the belief that there is a dog before me, even though it does not have the proper (propositional) structure to be the premise of a propositional argument to that conclusion.

In this section, I have collected various objections against the master argument for EP, in order to show that the propositionality of perception is neither sufficient nor necessary condition for perceptual justification. I claimed that this would be achieved through the following three claims: (i) not all propositional states have the power to justify immediately and *prima facie*; (ii) it is false that only propositional states can justify propositional beliefs; (iii) some beliefs are non-propositional. We have dealt with claims (i) and (ii), so it is now time to deal with the last claim. This will pave the way to a full objectualist model of justification based on the idea that the distinctive character of perception, together with the requirement that perception is contentful, are necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for immediate prima facie perceptual justification.

4 Objectual justification

Let us take stock. If the propositionality of perception is neither sufficient nor necessary for perceptual justification, then something else must. In the previous section, I hinted at the idea that the assertoric character of perception, together with the requirement that perception is contentful, are necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for immediate prima facie perceptual justification.

[12] On the epistemic role of conscious perception vis-à-vis blindsight, see Smithies (2019, p. 76ff.).

[13] I am indebted to Mark Textor for this point.

This suggestion is in line with recent attempts to explain the justificatory role of experience based on its phenomenal character that goes under the name of *Phenomenal Conservatism*:

> *Propositional Phenomenal Conservatism*: If it seems to S that p, then S thereby has at least *prima facie* justification for believing that p (Huemer, 2001, p. 99; see also Pryor, 2005 and Matthen, 2005).

Notice that, even though Phenomenal Conservatism is standardly formulated in propositional terms, it need not be. An important implication of the idea that perception justifies in virtue of its phenomenal character is that perception can justify independently of the kind of content it has (see Kriegel, 2021). Thus, one might think of the view I am proposing as a modification of Phenomenal Conservatism with a non-propositional twist:

> *Objectual Phenomenal Conservatism*: If it seems to S that they have a perceptual experience as of O, S thereby has at least prima facie justification for believing in O

where belief-in, such as believing in God or in Martians, is the objectual analogue of belief-that.[14]

But despite phenomenal conservatism being increasingly popular, there are several well-known problems with seemings, i.e., experiences with a distinctive phenomenal character such that a seeming that p makes it seem to you as if *p*. One is that the principle is too general; the character of seeming can be problematically extended to non-perceptual experiences that are appropriate to call seeming but that nonetheless do not present the special kind of phenomenal character that allows experience to justify beliefs without needing justification itself (Smithies, 2019, pp. 387–389). A second concern is that the view implies that experiences are justifiers because they are seemings, but it does not explain why seemings themselves are justifiers (Berghofer, 2020, p. 3).

To answer these problems, some philosophers such as Chudnoff (2013) and Berghofer (2020) have suggested restricting phenomenal conservatism to perceptual justification only, and thus focusing solely on the special character of perceptual experience. The result is the internalist principle for which perceptual experiences are justifiers in that they have "a distinctive, justification-conferring phenomenology, and if a perceptual experience E has such a justification-conferring phenomenology with respect to proposition p, E, by virtue of its phenomenology, provides immediate *prima facie* justification for believing that p" (Berghofer, 2020, p. 4). This distinctive, justification-conferring phenomenal character is then usually spelt out, following some Husserlian suggestions, in terms of the experience's presentive or presentational character: the idea that perceptual experience presents its objects as *bodily present*, *here-and-now*, *in propria persona*.[15]

[14] I will soon expose at length the characteristics of this model. But to give some initial plausibility to the claim, consider that objectual beliefs are not a novelty in the philosophical debate. Szabó (2003) is a classical place to start to find arguments against the reductive propositionalist analysis of belief-in statements.

[15] Cf. Husserl (2001, p. 137): "In perception the object seemed to achieve full-bodied presence, to be there *in propria persona*." (orig. emph.). See also Berghofer (2018).

I subscribe to this principle, and I will not provide further arguments for its truth than the ones already found in the previous section. This is not only to keep the length of this paper reasonable, but also because the point of this paper is not to defend a form of phenomenal conservatism. Rather, it is to show that if what explains perception's special epistemic power is the kind of representational force it has, then any restriction to the kind of content perception can have is ultimately unmotivated. In the case of perception, the current proposal is that there is some "distinctive, justification-conferring phenomenology" of perceptual states (whether propositional or non-propositional) that explains this special epistemic power.

This is the task ahead. In order to explain the special epistemic status of perception, I must show that objectual perceptual experiences manifest the "distinctive, justification-conferring phenomenology" that explains how propositional perceptual experiences can confer direct, *prima facie* defensible, justification. This can be achieved by accommodating two other facts within the structure of perceptual objectual attitudes. The first is the similarity between perception and belief, i.e., the fact that both have assertoric force; the second is the dissimilarity between perception and belief, i.e., the fact that perception seems to assert its content in a presentational way, a way that explains why perception is an immediate justifier.

One initial worry is that the assertoric character of perception commits one to Experiential Propositionalism. After all, the notion of assertoric force is one borrowed from the philosophy of language, where asserting "is the act of claiming that something is the case—for instance, *that oranges are citruses*, or *that there is a traffic congestion on Brooklyn Bridge* (at some time)" (Pagin & Neri, 2021; orig. emph.). One asserts propositions, not *objects*.

This conclusion can be challenged. There might be states that assert—in the sense of being committal to—a content that is not sentential. This view was notoriously defended by Brentano (1883, 2009), who held that "a single feature which is the object of a presentation can be affirmed or denied too" (2009, p. 207ff.).[16] For instance, when we state that A exists, we are not combining the individual A with the predicate of existence; we simply affirm A. Conversely, when we deny that A exists, the object denied is A, not a combination of A and the property of existence: "The affirmation of A constitutes the true and complete sense of this proposition, and that A alone is the object of the judgment" (*ibid*.). In his 1883, Brentano offers the following linguistic argument (see again Textor, 2021a). Consider impersonal sentences like "it is raining"; what is the complex of subject and predicate that is being judged? His answer is that no property is predicated: the subject simply acknowledges the rain.

Thus, according to Brentano, we can have committal mental acts (i.e., acts with assertoric force) towards objects. In an unorthodox sense, he refers to acts of this kind as judgments; all committal mental acts in which a content[17] is acknowledged are judgments (Stumpf, 1919, p. 36; trans. by Textor, 2021a, b). Perception too falls into this category, precisely for its committal character, as the act of "simple acknowledgment"

[16] See Textor (2007, 2021a) for discussion. See also Owen (2003) for a discussion about a similar view in Hume.

[17] To be more precise, Brentano talks of "presentation" (*Vorstellung*), "the fundamental way of being conscious of an object" (Crane, 2006, p. 45). The term has various translations, such as 'representation', 'idea', 'presentation', or 'content'.

of a presentation. An etymological note will illuminate this thesis. The German word for acknowledging (*anerkennen*) has a sense that expresses ontological commitment[18]: to acknowledge something is to accept it as existing. In other words, perception is a kind of judgment because it expresses ontological commitment toward what it presents. Meinong, one of Brentano's pupils, expresses this idea strikingly: "Something is only allowed to count as perceived if its existence is immediately recognized [*erkannt*], that is, recognized without reference to other cognitions [*Erkenntnisse*] that serves in some sense as premises" (1899, p. 212; trans. by Textor, 2021a, b).

If we accept Brentano's proposal that objectual content can be asserted, we can explain how objectual perceptual acts manifest assertoric force while avoiding propositionality. But why should we do so? There are two main motivations for doing so: first, to best capture the phenomenology of typical objectual perceptual experiences, which would otherwise be left unexplained; and second, to best understand the behaviour of subjects that are plausibly incapable of propositional attitudes.

Let us start with the first reason. Either objectual perceptual states have the same type of phenomenal character that propositional objectual perceptual states have, or they do not. If they do not, we should explain how is it that objectual perceptual states are a kind of perceptual state, and yet they do not manifest the phenomenal character typical of states of this mental kind. This does not only seem thoroughly unmotivated, but it also does not fit with our first-hand experience, in which we do not distinguish between assertive and non-assertive perceptual states. If, on the other hand, we accept that all perceptual episodes have the same type-phenomenology, then we must conclude that objectual perceptual states also have presentational phenomenology, and thus assertoric force. And this implies that assertoric force should be disjoined from propositionality.

There is a second argument in support of the idea that assertoric force and propositionality should be disjoined. Suppose, as it seems reasonable to, that animals are not capable of propositional attitudes in the way we are. Nonetheless, their behaviour in nature and interaction with their surroundings show important similarities with human behaviour. Banally, if something travels in their direction, they dodge; or if they see some tool that might be useful to their purpose, they grab it (for animals that have these abilities). As Textor writes:

> […] animals and young infants can manoeuvre their environment by sight, touch and hearing. How could they do this if perceiving required judging existential propositions? Mere awareness of environmental features is not enough for this achievement. One must take them to be real to take them into account when planning one's actions. (2021, p. 13)

If animals and young infants have something like a presentational phenomenology in perception, this phenomenology must be disjoined from the propositionality constraint. A purely propositional account of perceptual attitudes would thus leave a whole domain of psychology unexplained.

Let us return to the main picture. In having a perceptual experience as of an object O, the subject takes O as something that she should accept in her ontology; as a result,

[18] A sense that is customary also among other philosophers such as Frege and Quine.

she forms some sort of belief. What kind of belief? Unsurprisingly, she will be able to form some *propositional* beliefs based on her experience; I will be more exhaustive on this topic in the next section. I now want to propose that she will be able to form some *objectual* beliefs too, and, in particular, the belief that expresses her ontological commitment regarding O. Following some recent literature, I will call this the belief *in* O.

What is a non-propositional belief in that expresses ontological commitment? And why is it not simply a belief that O exists? To begin with, Szabo offers the following counterexample to the thesis that belief-in statements are hidden existential statements. Think of Hamlet's famous motto "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy". This means that Horatio believes that there are things that he does not believe in. If believing that there are Os was the same as believing in Os, then Horatio should believe in things he does not believe in. But while Horatio believes that things Horatio does not believe in is true, Horatio believes in things Horatio does not believe in seems false (Szabó, 2003, p. 591).

We need not look too far for a second argument to the non-equivalence of nominal and sentential existential beliefs. I have mentioned the fact that it is plausible to take nonhuman animals and infants to manifest a kind of ontologically committal behaviour towards objects of perception not unlike the one discussed here. At the same time, it is also plausible to believe that they lack the conceptual capacities needed for predication and to entertain propositional attitudes. If perceiving required propositional existential judgments, they would not be able to perceive, at least not in these terms. This treatment can be extended to belief and justification. The objectual model can serve a liberal attitude towards animal and infant justification: an act of "simple acknowledgment" of a presentation can immediately give rise to an act of 'simple belief' *in* that presentation, *before* one can come to know any facts about that presentation, or before they develop the right kind of abilities, or in the complete absence thereof. To those who are attracted to this possibility, the objectual model of justification here presented can be attractive.

Finally, Textor (2021a, b) reconstructs the following argument as belonging to Brentano: the concept of existence cannot be acquired *prior* to inner and outer experience and so it cannot be a predicative component of experience itself (2009, II, pp. 50–51). To further support this point, Textor asks us to imagine that there is a first-order concept of existence that applies to everything, and that subjects predicated this concept in *all* their perceptual judgments (such as 'that colour exists' or 'that shape exists'):

> What would be the point of making this judgement? In special circumstances the judgement that that exists has a point. You took the little green man in your field of vision to be a figment of your imagination. Then you recognise that this little green man (really) exists. But normally there is no background assumption that something is a figment of the perceiver's imagination. Since the judgement that this colour exists has no point, yet there is a judgement (belief) connected to the perception of the colour, we should take the judgement involved to be non-propositional. (Textor, 2007, p.76)

We do not go around judging that the things we perceive exist; there is no reason for doing so. Nonetheless, our interactions with the environment are assertive in character.

This suggests that our primitive attitude towards our environment is one of acceptance (in the sense defined above): we just *accept* things around us, pending very good reasons to the contrary. Let us conclude this section by summarizing the structure of the objectual model of justification proposed here. A subject is perceptually presented with a content. Following a Brentanian suggestion, the best way to characterize this experience is as an act of "simple acknowledgment". In having a perceptual experience as of O, the subject takes O as something that she should accept in her ontology; as a result, she might form a belief in O. This belief thus expresses her ontological commitment regarding O. In the following section, I will discuss some problems for this thesis.

5 Objections

In this last section, I will defend the objectual model of justification from two main objections: (i) the problem of reasoning from objectual to propositional content; (ii) classic objections against doxastic accounts of perception.

Let us start with the first objection. It can be objected that human reasoning is by and large propositional and thus that we can accept objectual attitudes only if they can somehow fit within a propositional network of reasons, but it is unclear that they can. This echoes the objection we discussed in section III in defense of EP, i.e., the problem of how non-propositional contents can be input to our reasoning. We answered by expanding our notion of reason through an appeal to Pryor's distinction between justification-showers and -makers. But the present objection has a slightly different target: it does not only ask how to reason from one type of content to another, but also how some content can be translated into a content of different type, i.e., from non-conceptual to conceptual (*conceptualization*) and from objectual to propositional (*propositionalization*). I call this *the problem of translation*.

I would like to address this problem by dividing it into two sub-problems. The first is the relation between objectual perceptual experiences and which *objectual* beliefs they justify. The second is the relation between objectual perceptual experiences and which *propositional* beliefs they justify. I will start with the first issue.

Because objectual perceptual experiences as of O (OP) and objectual beliefs in O (OB) have plausibly the same content, namely O, anything that is the content of OP can directly be taken up as the content of OB. In other words, the objectual model of justification makes McDowell's direct-taking strategy available to the non-propositionalist: the content of the experience is the sort of thing one can also judge (even though now 'judge' takes a new meaning that does not imply propositionalism). In this way, the objectual model avoids the problem of translation in the case of the move from OP to OB; for example, if OP has the objectual content ⟨dog⟩, OB will have the content ⟨dog⟩.[19]

Not only so. If objectual perceptual experiences can also represent O as being some way (as I have suggested in Sect. 2), and if O is presented by OP as being F, OB

[19] Recall that because I write the forces of each state in their attitude component, the content of each attitude is simply ⟨O⟩ and does not specify the force nor the kind of attitude. For the opposite view, i.e., that one can read psychological kinds off representational contents, see Montague (2022).

can too represent O as being F; for instance, if the content of OP is ⟨brown dog⟩, the content of the OB that it grounds can also be ⟨brown dog⟩. This might not seem much, but if I am right that objectual attitudes are psychologically and logically more basic than propositional attitudes, then we should expect that they also have as less justificatory and informational power than propositional attitudes. The point is that this justificatory power is not zero.

I move now to the second case. This case is harder than the first, because it requires that the content of OP is translated to a propositional and conceptual format in order to be suitable to be taken up by propositional beliefs (PB). We already know that this is possible: we can and do reason from non-propositional to propositional content in several ways. Duncan (2020), for instance, discusses both so to say classical (such as logical reasoning) and less classical conceptions of reasoning (such as association, instrumental reasoning, and problem-solving). He uses the work of Shin (1994) on diagrams and Camp (2007, 2018) on maps to argue that objectual content features in reasoning "not just as inputs, but as the very things that we deliberate with and draw conclusions on the basis of" (2020, p. 3584).

How this happens is a difficult question, to which I do not have a definitive answer. However, we do not have to suppose that it would require processes and skills different from those normally involved in propositional and conceptual thinking and judging.[20] Precisely *which* information is translated depends on many factors, for instance on which concepts the subject possesses. Notice that this is one way in which this case differs from the first. For the move from OP to OB does not require that the subject possess the concepts corresponding to the canonical description of the content of OP. It suffices that the subject is capable of *demonstrative concepts* such as "that"—by which anything that is represented in OP can come to be represented by OB.[21]

It can still be objected that this last move is too simplistic in that it does not fully address the problem of conceptualization, which some critics of experiential non-propositionalism take quite seriously (see e.g., Gauker, 2012, 2018). But this problem can be addressed too if we are willing to accept a looser conception of conceptualism. I will be brief because the problem, if genuine, affects all non-conceptualist views of

[20] As I understand him, Evans proposes something along these lines in his explanation of how a subject can consciously access their sub-personal informational states. This passage, according to Evans, requires conceptualization. But we should not let this fact "obscure" the general picture: "a subject can gain knowledge of his internal informational states in a very simple way: by re-using precisely those skills of conceptualization that he uses to make judgements about the world" (1982, p. 227). I think we should accept the spirit of Evans's remark independently of his reliabilist view; in other words, we do not need to postulate special conceptual skills to explain the passage from non-conceptual, non-propositional, to conceptual and propositional content.

[21] It is difficult to say what demonstrative concepts are, not only because the literature about demonstrative concepts is controversial, but also because there is no agreement as to what concepts are. McDowell (1994) famously invokes demonstrative concepts to reply to the non-conceptualist argument that one's conceptual capacities are by far overcome by one's discriminatory capacities, and thus must be concept-independent (Evans, 1992). Against McDowell, Kelly (2001) maintains that demonstrative concepts are not genuine concepts as they do not allow the re-identification over time of the same perceptual item; I later quote Speaks (2005), who suggests that this may not be an essential feature of conceptual capacities (see also Camp, 2009). See also Levine (2010) for discussion about the misuse of demonstrative concepts in the case of experiential conceptualism (which I discuss in the next footnote), phenomenal concepts and concept acquisition.

perception, and so it goes beyond the scope of this paper. According to the kind of undemanding conceptualism I have in mind, to say that a creature has a demonstrative concept of F is just to say that it can have thoughts about F; for instance, "when I am in direct perceptual contact with a color property, I can have thoughts about that property, notwithstanding whatever happens when I am presented with the property for re-identification at a later time" (Speaks, 2005, p. 381).[22] This 'cheap' conceptualism is far less demanding than the classic conceptualism endorsed by most conceptualists and targeted by most nonconceptualists, and for this reason, I believe it has the potential to solve some of the issues surrounding conceptualism—by shifting the focus from the conditions of concept possession to a creature's thought abilities (Speaks, 2005, p. 388).[23]

At any rate, cheap conceptualism can give a simple answer to the problem of conceptualization within my objectualist model. In fact, given the direct-taking structure of my objectualist model, the content of a perceptual objectual experience would be automatically conceptualized (through a demonstrative concept) in the passage from the perceptual to the belief state. Alternatively, we can think of the content of the objectual belief as being at least conceptualiz-*able*, because suitable to be immediately taken up by the correspondent objectual belief (see McDowell, 2009, p. 264).

There is one final issue to be addressed that concerns the problem of translation, and this is the possible translation from the nominal existential belief in O into the belief that O exists. In the previous section, I argued that nominal existential beliefs are different and non-reducible to sentential existential beliefs. However, it seems plausible that a subject could move from one state to the other, if they are capable of so doing; but this, someone might object, might threaten the independence of one from the other.

It is hard to deny that there is some sort of connection between belief-in and belief that something exists. Some distinguish between two types of belief-in, evaluative and non-evaluative. Thus, to believe in God is sometimes a belief that he exists, but to believe in science is to believe it to have certain properties, for instance to be valuable (Mulligan, 2003, pp. 28–29). But we have seen that Horatio cannot believe in things he does not believe in, and so it cannot be true that all non-evaluative beliefs-in are hidden existential statements.

I want to suggest that the ontologically committed belief in O can be translated into the belief that O exists because the two beliefs *express* the same content, while they

[22] Levine (2010) suggests a theory of mental demonstratives (the mental equivalent of linguistic demonstratives) as directly referential semantic mechanisms, whose semantic values are the objects in the world they refer to or some features of them. Against McDowell's experiential conceptualism, he maintains that if mental demonstratives are so, then they could not be concepts themselves nor ways of conceptualizing, but simply mental 'pointers' directed at some part of an already existing perceptual representation singled out in attention. I am sympathetic to the proposal because if mental demonstrative are not concepts but primitive mental functions that allow the subject to have thoughts about what they perceive, they can be freely ascribed to non-propositional thinking creatures. But while they might not be concepts themselves, I do not see why they could not be thought of ways of conceptualizing, if they serve "to incorporate the content of the perceptual representation into the thought of which it is a constituent" (Levine, 2010, p. 190–191) and if, following Speaks, to say that a creature has a demonstrative concept of F is just to say that it can have thoughts about F.

[23] On loosening up our criteria of concept ascription, see Camp (2009).

obviously do not *have* the same content (one is a sub-propositional item, the other is a full proposition). What does it mean for two mental states to express the same content? This is not too mysterious. Consider that philosophers usually distinguish two representational parts of intentional mental states: the content and the attitude. How does the existentially committed belief in O express ontological commitment in O? The answer is by being the kind of state it is; that is, in virtue of its very nature. How does the belief that O exists express ontological commitment in O? The answer is by representing the property of existence within its content.[24] Different representational strategies, same result. In Sect. 3, I have already discussed at large why it is important to keep these states independent; but it is worth repeating the same point in terms of representational powers. The two states at hand are not reducible to each other because they require different representational powers. Representing existential commitment in an objectual way does not require the subject to have any propositional nor sophisticated conceptual capacities, but only to be able to have mental states of a certain nature. By contrast, propositional and sophisticated conceptual capacities are necessary for representing existential commitment in a propositional way.

The second and final problem concerns the objectual model of justification as a doxastic model of perception. According to our Brentano-inspired model, perception and belief are doxastic states, i.e., states that commit one to the truth of their representation, but differ regarding the sense of their commitment. When something is presented to one in perception, it is immediately 'acknowledged', i.e., presented as existent here-and-now. By contrast, something presented in judgment is merely presented as true. How does the present account fare against classic objections against doxastic accounts of perception?[25]

One of these classic objections involves realized non-veridical perceptual experiences. In these scenarios, the subject realizes she is undergoing a falsidic experience, and consequently stops believing what the senses present to her; the subject is still undergoing a perceptual experience, but plausibly deprived of its doxastic character. An even more challenging case is presented by Pelser (2010). A veteran desert traveller sees an oasis in the desert and, given the unlikelihood of the existence of an oasis in that location takes it as a mirage; in fact, there really is an oasis. Pelser's case is even more challenging because it seemingly presents a veridical perception deprived of any doxastic character.

I think all cases of this sort should be given the same reply. The belief that one's experience is falsidic is compatible with the experience itself retaining its presentational and doxastic character. An accurate analysis of the experience would reveal that its doxastic character is still present in the form of a feeling that one would not be surprised *if things turned out to be that way*—that, for instance, "it would not be surprising if one line did turn out to be longer than the other after all" (Craig, 1976, p. 17).[26] The realization does not eliminate but only, so to say, 'silences' or 'overwrites' the

[24] Kriegel (2023) has recently developed a similar strategy.

[25] For a discussion of such cases see, e.g., Armstrong (1968), Craig (1976), Smith (2001), and Byrne (2021).

[26] This strategy is already discussed by Brentano: "Similarly, an acceptance of an object given in sensation, which is disapproved of by a higher judgement, could persist. Indeed, it is not at all clear, how the lower activity should be changed in its intrinsic character because of the occurrence of the higher activity; if the

disposition to believe the content of the perception. This phenomenological analysis suggests that perception, even when disbelieved, retains its assertoric and presentational force. Furthermore, notice that in order for realised illusions and hallucinations to constitute a real counterexample to doxastic theories of perception, "we [would] need the further assumption that if one believes that the lines are equal, one does not also believe that they are unequal. And since people sometimes have contradictory beliefs, the assumption isn't obvious" (Byrne, 2021).

As a final note, let me stress once again that the doxastic account I am here defending does not exactly equate perception with belief. On the contrary, it tries to specify how perception is like belief, in the sense that it possesses assertoric force, and yet unlike it, in that it is (a) presentational and (b) seems to be epistemically more fundamental. We can put this point by saying that it is a *sui generis* doxastic attitude. Thus, the fact that perception does not in some cases behave "exactly" (e.g., in its being impenetrable or recalcitrant) like belief does not constitute an issue for my account, as it does for some of the classical doxastic accounts.

6 Conclusions

This paper aimed to defend the thesis that perception may sometimes take objectual content and still retain its justificatory power. To ensure this, I argued that the objectual perceptual attitude should be understood as a sui generis kind of doxastic state, both like and unlike belief. I have used Brentano's theory of judgment to elucidate the similarities and dissimilarities between perception and belief, and pictured perception as a kind of "simple acknowledgment" of a content. Finally, I have outlined a fully objectual model of justification that proceeds from objectual perceptual attitudes to objectual belief and suggested how it can interact with propositional justification.

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Declarations

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Footnote 26 continued
lower activity had a relation of acceptance to the outer object before, it will have it later" (Brentano 1903, p. 26. Trans. by Textor in Textor, 2007).

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