

Walter Hopp

Perception and Knowledge.

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This is a work of “California school” phenomenology, i.e., phenomenology informed by the “analytic” philosophy of mind and language, not to mention epistemology. Walter Hopp’s claims about perception and its relation to knowledge are fundamentally Husserlian. But this is not a book devoted to Husserl exegesis (there is some in Chapter 7) or to fretting over Husserl’s legacy within the history of philosophy. The main arguments instead concern the past decade’s debate over non-conceptual content. It will be acutely interesting to anyone concerned with Husserl’s legacy, because its aim is Husserlian intervention in that *au courant* debate, but potential readers should be aware: there is considerably more Hintikka than Heidegger in the bibliography here.

The thesis is that perception justifies knowledge insofar as it provides *fulfillment*, an idea Husserl articulated in the *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901). Hopp’s distinctive contribution lies in explaining *fulfillment* in terms of two kinds of non-conceptual content: intuitive contents and horizontal contents. The main targets of the book, therefore, are now-popular theories of experiential conceptualism, stronger and weaker versions of which are distinguished at the beginning of Chapter 2. Another main target are those contemporary theories that deny that perception has any content whatsoever – a notion discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 1 disambiguates content and presents two relatively familiar arguments for the necessity of distinguishing mental contents from intentional objects. The real action begins in Chapter 2, which refutes a host of *phenomenological arguments* for conceptualism: The Argument from Conditions of Satisfaction, championed by Searle (1983) and Noë (2004), that experiences must have propositional content (hence conceptual content) because they have conditions of satisfaction; The Argument from Perceiving-As, put forth by Hanson (1961) and Kuhn (1970), that the theory-ladenness of perceptions (minimally aspectuality) requires that experience be conceptually mediated; The Argument from Perception of Categorically Structured Objects, derived from C. I. Lewis (1929), that concepts are required in order to perceive a structured world, i.e., one populated by collections, quantities, complexes, parts, property-instances, properties, events, processes, kinds, relations, facts, or causes; The Argument from Perceptual Identification, articulated by Campbell (2002), that experiences must be conceptual because if they weren’t it wouldn’t be possible to identify (and re-identify) perceived objects in the perceptual background; and the Argument from Horizons, that the Husserlian theory itself requires conceptuality, insofar as empty (i.e., unfulfilled) contents must be conceptual. Hopp finds all wanting, in various ways.

Chapter 3 moves on to criticize a pair of more popular *epistemic arguments* for conceptualism, McDowell’s (1994) and Brewer’s (1999, 2005). McDowell is indicted for

neglecting the distinction between contents and objects, and adopting an overly strong understanding of the normativity of justification, i.e. one that situates epistemic normativity too close to the moral normativity of action. Particularly effective here is the distinction of four different senses of “conceptually organized” (84). That ambiguity is so pervasive, and equivocation upon it so pernicious, that more than a few have followed McDowell to the conclusion that the “space of reasons” is exhausted by the “space of concepts.” The criticism of Brewer is not (and is not advertised as being) nearly so strong. Hopp claims that Brewer’s version of the epistemological argument is committed to a notion of rational intelligibility such that “Experiences, if they justify beliefs, must have the sort of content that could serve as a premise in an argument for those beliefs” (94). This is supposed to commit Brewer to an overly strong version of internalism, and Hopp skewers the key premise on grounds that it is significantly less plausible than the negation of the conclusion implied by it. Perceptions must *somehow* justify beliefs, no matter what kind of content they may or may not have. Any claim running afoul of *that*, well then so much the worse for *it*. This form of argumentative “Moore shift,” i.e., rejecting the conclusion of the conceptualist as less plausible than the negation of his or her premise, is one of the book’s favorites.

Though the criticisms of McDowell and Brewer don’t cease, Chapter 4 shifts to mounting an argument against experiential conceptualism itself. Hopp first establishes what he calls the Detachability Thesis (DT): “C is a conceptual content only if it is a detachable content, that is, it is possible for C to serve as the content of a mental state M in which the relevant objects, properties, and/or states of affairs that C is about are not perceptually or intuitively present to the subject of M” (105). He then shows this principle to conflict with an assumption currently under attack by philosophers like Pollock and Cruz (1999), viz. the “Conceptualist” Principle (CP) that “the (egocentric or internal) epistemic status of a subject S’s belief B is determined by (i) B’s conceptual content and (ii) the conceptual contents of those mental states M’, M’’, *et al.*, if any, to which its content is inferentially related” (107). According to CP, any two beliefs with the same conceptual contents will have the same “epistemic status,” i.e., the same amount of justification. But according to DT, two beliefs with the same conceptual content may have very different epistemic statuses, namely when one is a perception and the other is not. So much the worse for CP, says Hopp, arguing that attempts to salvage it, e.g., in Kvanvig (2007) and Pryor (2000) are to no avail. A pair of even more direct arguments, one derived from Dretske (2000) and the other involving misperceived duck decoys (117), turn on misidentification and the intentionality of perceptual experiences themselves. The chapter concludes with five arguments, of which two derive from Heck (2000), against the sort of demonstrative theory proposed by Brewer (2005) that would attempt to retain both CP and DT.

Chapter 5 announces a defense of non-conceptual content from the other flank, i.e., against those who would deny perception *any* content whatsoever. Combining a distinction from Speaks (2005) and the content/object distinction from Chapter 2, Hopp distinguishes four possible interpretations of non-conceptual content. First an interrogation of Kelly (2001) and Cussins (2003), then an argument according to which relative non-conceptualism on the content interpretation would require attributing content to a subject even when that subject did not “possess” it (138), winnows these down and leaves only absolute nonconceptualism (on the content interpretation) viable. Following Reinach [1911] (1982) originally, but also Williford (2006), Dahlstrom (2006), and Yoshimi (2009) more recently, Hopp rejects the Argument from

Horizons (begun in Chapter 2) and concludes not merely that the contents necessary for perception cannot be conceptual, but also that there must be such contents.

Chapter 6 continues the argument against those who treat perception as being without content. The targets here are M.G.F. Martin (2009), Campbell (2002), and Brewer (2008), but also the doctrine Hopp labels (following Campbell) “the relational view.” Hopp admires the relational view’s rejection of “indirect realism,” which would have it that percepts are only ever signs or images, and admires its facility at explaining how we *directly* perceive individuals. His main argument is that the relational view runs afoul of hallucination. In this context Hopp distinguishes stronger and weaker forms of disjunctivism, arguing against what he calls “weird object disjunctivism” and “radical disjunctivism,” the latter defended by Martin (2009) and Fish (2009). He does so by arguing that they cannot explain why illusions are erroneous (154). The chapter concludes with a discussion of a more moderate disjunctivism, following A.D. Smith (2002, 2008), which Hopp defends by denying an “introspective access” thesis, i.e., the notion that “Necessarily, if two experiences are indistinguishable from one another by introspection alone, then they have the same phenomenological character” (172). Abandoning that thesis, Hopp can claim (on Husserl’s behalf) that hallucinations and veridical perceptions have a different “phenomenological character,” even though they might be indistinguishable from one another introspectively.

The most direct statement of Hopp’s view, and his most direct interpretation of Husserl, comes in Chapter 7. Hopp argues that the best explanation of how perception justifies belief is *fulfillment*. Following Willard (1995), Hopp distinguishes fulfillment from perception, going on to argue that the former is based on three conditions: (1) an intuitive condition that an object be “given,” paradigmatically in perception, (2) a conceptual condition, under which the object and its properties are thought, and (3) a synthesis condition that the object be given *as* it is thought. A series of examples are adduced to show that none of the three conditions can be reduced to others, and that all are required. Regarding the third condition in particular, Hopp argues that concepts must be grasped “authentically” (195), by which he means they must exercise a capacity to identify objects in a wide range of environments in a manner that is reliable and non-deferential. Of particular importance in this final chapter is the clear differentiation (unclear in Husserl himself) of *epistemic fulfillment* from *intuitive fulfillment*. The former is the stalking horse of the book. Hopp’s account involves some departure from a few passages in Husserl himself. But that is a prudent sacrifice for unraveling the truths of epistemic fulfillment itself, not to mention engaging the likes of Bernet (2003), Alston (1989, 1996), Burge (2003), Sellars (1997), Pryor (2000), Pollock (2001), Schellenberg (2008), Audi (2003), Plantinga (1993), Gupta (2006), and those merely in the work’s final fifteen pages.

This is a book of many virtues. I think first among them is the level of detail in its arguments, with such a great many figures currently working in the “analytic” philosophy of mind, only some of whom I have had space to mention. It is a rarity to see such a wide range so deeply criticized. Whatever your views on non-conceptual content or Husserl’s theory of perception, you will not find a more thoughtful engagement of the two. It is often claimed that Husserl himself is underappreciated, and that his work still has important, if unrealized, contributions to make. It is a great credit to Hopp that such a claim, so often empty, can here be seen partially fulfilled.

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