

Contents of Experience

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Abstract In this paper I aim to situate the Naiyayika theory of perception in contemporary philosophy of mind. Following the ancients, I suggest we reconsider the taxonomy and the assumed interactions between kinds of perceptual content. This reclassification will lead us to reconsider some aspects of the Cartesian conception of mind that continue to influence the work of contemporary theorists. I focus attention on different accounts of sensory perception favoured by ancient Indian Naiyayika philosophers and Descartes as a starting point for reconsidering contemporary accounts of perceptual content. I show that Descartes' account of sensory perception provides the impetus for a causal-explanatory account of conceptual content in terms of its non-conceptual counterpart. Though contemporary philosophers claim to have cast off their Cartesian heritage, my discussion reveals that some of its tenets continue to influence the work of contemporary philosophers. I offer reasons for rejecting yet another Cartesian influence and recommend that we follow the Nyaya taxonomy of perceptual states.

Keywords Nyaya Epistemology · Perception · Concepts · Nonconceptual content

Introduction

The human mind as conceived by the Nyaya philosophers in the ancient Indian philosophical framework is very different from its Cartesian conception, which informs and shapes the framework accepted by contemporary philosophers of mind. In this paper, I aim to situate the Naiyayika theory of perception in contemporary philosophy of mind. Following the ancients, I suggest we reconsider the taxonomy and the assumed interactions between kinds of perceptual content. This reclassification will lead us to reconsider some aspects of the Cartesian conception of mind

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that continue to influence the work of contemporary theorists. In this paper, I focus attention on different accounts of sensory perception favored by ancient Indian Naiyayika philosophers and Descartes as a starting point for reconsidering contemporary accounts of perceptual content.

In the first section, I explicate the Naiyayika distinction between kinds of perceptual awareness, viz., indeterminate and determinate awarenesses. In some ways, this distinction parallels the prevalent distinction between non-conceptual and conceptual content of perceptual states. In the second section, I show that Descartes' account of sensory perception provides the impetus for a causal-explanatory account of conceptual content in terms of its non-conceptual counterpart. Though contemporary philosophers claim to have cast off their Cartesian heritage, my discussion reveals that some of its tenets continue to influence the work of contemporary philosophers. Contemporary philosophers attempt to offer causal-explanatory accounts of concepts in terms of non-conceptual perceptual content.¹ In the last section of the paper, I offer reasons for rejecting yet another Cartesian influence and recommend that we follow the Nyaya taxonomy of perceptual states. My reasons draw on a principled basis for the failure of any attempt to offer a non-circular account of conceptual content in terms of non-conceptual content.

Naiyayika Account of Sensory Perceptions

The earlier and later Naiyayikas accept that there are two kinds of perceptual states: indeterminate awareness (*nirvikalpakam*, literally translated as 'awareness which is devoid of concepts') and determinate awareness (*savikalpakam*). I will use the Nyaya notion of indeterminate awareness to clarify and elucidate a viable notion of non-conceptual content.²

The Naiyayikas define indeterminate awareness (*nirvikalpaka pratyaksa*) as a bare, nonverbalizable perception. The adjective 'nonverbal' (*avyapadesyam*) appears in the original Nyayasutra definition of perception. According to the earlier Naiyayikas the adjective applies to all perceptions; to wit, it does not mean *unmentionable* or *undenotable* by words, rather it means that a perception does not include a word as its cause or object. However, later commentators hold that the adjective 'nonverbal' indicates only a state of indeterminate awareness. According to the later Naiyayikas indeterminate awareness is a cognitive state untouched by *conceptual qualification* and predicative construction. In contrast, determinate perception involves perceiving a proposition that something is the case, and it may be verbalized as a judgment. It involves awareness of a particular as qualified by a concept.

Some recent Nyaya enthusiasts, like Arindam Chakrabarti claim that perceptual content is always determinate (Chakrabarti 2000). For Chakrabarti, the very notion

¹ See, for example, Peacocke (1992b).

² See recent articles by Peacocke (1998, 2001a).

of indeterminate perception is incoherent.³ I begin by answering his main arguments and in the process clarify the essential features of the Nyaya notion of indeterminate awareness. Chakrabarti offers the following argument as an internal reason to reject the notion of indeterminate awareness. The earlier Naiyayikas subscribe to two conflicting theses:

1. Perception is an *immediate* awareness not caused by any other cognitive state or awareness as its instrumental cause.
2. Determinate awareness is caused by an antecedent awareness of the qualifier.

To satisfy point two, we require antecedent awareness of the qualifier. The Naiyayikas suggest that the qualifier for determinate perceptions is provided by an antecedent awareness of a universal, which is given in indeterminate awareness. But then determinate awareness does not meet the condition (point one above) to qualify as a perceptual state. For this reason, Chakrabarti insists that the Naiyayikas must reject indeterminate perceptions; otherwise many determinate (*savikalpaka*) perceptions will be disqualified as perceptions insofar as they are instrumentally caused by another awareness.⁴

Stephen Phillips appeals to Gangesa to show that the Naiyayikas can silence such qualms. In an indeterminate awareness, a qualifier is given as itself, neither completely joined to, nor divorced from, the particular object it qualifies in that instance; nor even as further qualified by another universal or property.⁵ This insight of the Naiyayikas may be elaborated by using the notion of ‘non-particular individuals’ introduced by Chakrabarti in his earlier work.⁶ The Naiyayikas explain this by drawing attention to a person’s first time perception of ‘a cow’, it is not given as qualifying the particular cow cognized on a perceptual occasion, but nor is it completely separate from it. The indeterminate perception of a non-particular individual results in a dispositional grasp of ‘cowhood’ since a non-particular individual is immediately cognized or recognized *as an instance*. On a particular occasion of determinate perception, the antecedent indeterminate

³ A similar position is defend by several recent theorists in philosophy of mind and perception including Frank Jackson (2003). See his ‘Representationalism and the Content of Experiences’, Representation in Mind: new approaches to mental representation, eds, H. Clapin, P. Slezack and P. Staines Wesport: Praeger forthcoming

⁴ Chakrabarti (2000), A. p.6.

⁵ It may be noted that this suggests that an indeterminate awareness is an instrumental cause of some but not all determinate perceptions, i.e., only those in which the qualifier is fed not from memory but an indeterminate awareness. See, Phillips (2001). Phillips appeals to Gangesa’s definition of perception and clarifies that it is stricter than Chakrabarti’s rendering of it. For Phillips, properly translated the definition reads, ‘cognition that does not have a cognition as its chief instrumental cause [karana or trigger]’ (Phillips, S. p. 107.) It is not important for us to worry about the details of the debate or to decide who is right in this debate for our purposes here, but my views on this matter will become clear in the course of the discussion.

⁶ See his paper entitled ‘Non-Particular Individuals’, in *The Philosophy of P.F. Strawson* (Eds. P.K. Sen and R.R. Verma, Indian Council of Philosophical Research: New Delhi., 1995). Arindam Chakrabarti uses the term ‘individuals’ to encompass both particulars and universal instances. The use of term ‘individuals’ and ‘non-particular individuals’ follows Chakrabarti (1995). Chakrabarti’s use of direct perception signifies indeterminate awareness. Though he does not use the latter expression, he does make a distinction between direct perception and qualificatory perception. The latter term signifies determinate awareness.

awareness of the qualifier cannot be the instrumental cause, for there is no direct awareness of ‘cowhood’ *as a qualifier*. According to Naiyayikas, the instrumental cause of the determinate awareness, like every other perception, is the sensory connection with the object; and the instrument is the appropriate sense organ in operation. It is crucial to note that the Naiyayikas do not recognize the indeterminate awareness as *a sufficient cause of* determinate perceptions, the indeterminate awareness, by itself, is insufficient to bring about a determinate awareness. The indeterminate awareness of ‘a cow’ is a causal preliminary only in the sense that it is a necessary condition to account for the uniformity of all determinate cognitions which include ‘cowhood’ *as a qualifier* as a part of its content.

However, Chakrabarti has another argument against classifying indeterminate awareness as a perceptual state. He writes that all awareness is intentional, according to Nyaya. There are only three kinds of intentional roles that our awarenesses assign to their objects: the role of a qualifier (roughly, the predicate), the role of that which is qualified (the subject), and the role of the connecting relation or tie. The allegedly non-predicative raw perception, while claiming to be an awareness, cannot assign any one of these roles to its objects. ... But these are the only kinds of object of which we know. Hence it does not have an object. Hence it is not an awareness because there cannot be objectless awareness. To insist now that there is a fourth kind of objecthood called the objecthood appropriate to indeterminate awareness is to beg the question in the most pathetic fashion (Chakrabarti 2001).

The lack of apperceptive evidence accounts for the inability to assign an intentional role to the object of indeterminate awareness. This, however, does not mean that an indeterminate awareness lacks intentionality. Indeterminate awareness is posited as the best explanation for the availability of the qualifier, since the cognizing subject is not directly aware of the object of indeterminate awareness. Consider again the indeterminate perception of a cow. On a perceptual occasion, the interaction between the senses and the perceived object results in a sensory impression that is instantaneously cognized as a non-particular individual.⁷ We can say that the cognitive grasp is *of* a non-particular individual on account of the subject’s acquisition of a dispositional ability to recognize *another one of those non-particulars*. On account of the initial perceptual experience the subject acquires the ability to recognize cows. The recognitional capacities acquired by the subject to respond to ‘more of the same kind’ (other cows) can account for the intentionality of the perceptual state. The acquisition of such recognitional capacities may manifest in the subject’s behavior towards individual cows presented on the very same or other possible perceptual occasions. The subject need not be *consciously aware* of acquiring such recognitional capacities: it is sufficient that she possesses the relevant behavioral dispositions. There is no apperceptive evidence for an indeterminate awareness of a qualifier, and as a result the cognizing subject may lack the word or concept that characterizes the universal. Thus she is no position to assign an intentional role to the object of indeterminate awareness. Nonetheless, indeterminate awareness of a qualifier is posited as the best explanation for the recognitional

⁷ For the purposes of this discussion, I follow the Naiyayikas, who regard the mind as distinct from the self or conscious agency. The mind, or ‘inner sense’ as they call it, is an instrument employed by conscious agent (self) for cognizing external and internal sensory stimulations

capacities that are manifested in the behavior of a cognizing subject when confronted with other instances of the same universal. Since there is no requirement that the subject of an indeterminate awareness is consciously aware of acquiring such recognitional capacities, such awarenesses can be enjoyed by humans and other animals. Having smelt cows before, a hungry lion on smelling another cow in his vicinity may have a mental flash, ‘Aha, the same smell again’.⁸ Although, the lion is in no position to assign an intentional role (a name or a concept) to the object of his awareness; there can be no doubt that his awareness is intentional. The intentional role of the object of awareness is underdetermined. We cannot say whether the lion is thinking of the same particular, or the same universal, or the same relation. This is just another instance of the well-known Quinean thesis: underdetermination of theory by behavioral evidence. The indeterminacy extends to human cognition insofar as we are restricted to behavioral evidence. Indeterminate awareness in this sense captures what is common between human and animal perception. I have shown that an indeterminate awareness ‘of a qualifier’ counts as an intentional awareness by appeal to the recognitional abilities acquired by the subject on account of the perceptual episode.⁹ However, since the evidence is restricted to behavioral data, we cannot assign an intentional role to the object of awareness. Thus, Chakrabarti is wrong to insist that a given awareness cannot be claimed to be intentional unless the awareness assigns one of three accepted intentional roles.

The above discussion vindicates the coherence of the Naiyayika concept of an indeterminate perception. Now I move on to some pertinent claims about its nature and relation to determinate perceptual judgments. An indeterminate awareness may be thought of as a mental cognition, where the mind grasps a simple property, although such awareness does not amount to conscious awareness. Matilal explains the Nyaya account of mental cognition in the following way (Matilal 1986). The mind, he says, sometimes in cooperation with a sense faculty, sometimes acting by itself, grasps an object to generate the effect called a ‘mental event’. A mental event sometimes leads to a chain reaction resulting in a bodily action (what we ordinarily call ‘reflexes’) without requiring any interference from conscious agency. For example, the awareness of an object, e.g., a jewel, together with another awareness that it is desirable, may lead to attraction which in turn leads to an action to attain the desired object. In addition, the Naiyayikas regard mental events as causes and effects in functional terms. For them, mental events are individuated by reference to direct

⁸ I concede that we cannot make sense of indeterminate awareness of bare particulars, because we cannot cash out what it is for such a cognitive state to qualify as an intentional state. The argument for this claim is discussed in my paper: ‘Perceptual Cognition: a Nyaya-Kantian approach,’ *Philosophy East and West* 51 (2001), pp. 197–209

⁹ Someone may object that we can use the same strategy to establish what it would mean to regard an indeterminate awareness of a particular as an intentional awareness. I think this depends on what we mean by a ‘particular’. My argument in ‘Perceptual Cognition’ was intended to target the Buddhist notion of real particulars (*svalaksana*). The Naiyayika notion of particular is that of a substance qualified by universals and relations. I think my argument can be extended to show that we cannot explain what it is to be intentionally aware of substances in indeterminate cognition. I think we may be able to account for intentional awareness of particulars conceived of as bundles of qualities (including relations and universals). But this depends on prior cognition of qualities, the rest is construction. My suspicion is that such construction must be mediated by determinate awareness of propositional forms

(i.e., unmediated by any conscious processing) links between sensory inputs and behavioral outputs.

According to the Naiyayikas, there are two important ways in which determinate awareness differs from its indeterminate predecessor. First, determinate awareness is awareness of a complex object that has propositional structure in contrast to an indeterminate awareness of a simple, real property. The object of a determinate awareness is a proposition: a particular qualified by an abstract concept. We talk loosely when we say that a real property, say 'potness' given in indeterminate awareness *corresponds to* the qualifier in determinate awareness, 'there is a pot'. Strictly speaking, there is no correspondence for the nature and the intrinsic properties of the objects, viz., properties and propositions, apprehended through indeterminate and determinate awarenesses respectively are widely different. The indeterminate awareness of a *universal-as-such* is distinct from the determinate awareness of a *universal-as-a-qualifier*. The Naiyayika account of a proposition is Fregean in spirit, and like Frege, Naiyayikas hold propositions contain concepts rather than properties.¹⁰ Since, according to the Naiyayikas, the contents of determinate awareness are inner objects that become objects of inner perception or reflective awareness. And this brings us to the second way in which determinate awareness differs from indeterminate awareness. The indeterminate cognitive state is never revealed to us, that is, never apprehended by our inner perception or reflective awareness. This, in turn, explains why the content of an indeterminate awareness is 'non verbal' for unless we have conscious access to the state there is no possibility of any verbal behavior with regard to it.

Gangesa, an advocate of the *Navya-Nyaya* school, even allows that the same cognitive state is partly qualificatory and partly non-qualificatory (Gangesa 1888). Thus the same visual perception of a pot is qualificatory from the point of view of the individual pot (which is perceived) because potness or pot universal appears as qualifying the particular pot; and it is non-qualificatory from the point of view of potness as a property because nothing qualifies potness. This means that we have conscious access to part of the cognitive state whereas the non-qualificative part remains forever hidden from the inner eye. The Naiyayikas go no further to suggest how the indeterminate awareness of a universal can account for acquisition of the corresponding concept or qualifier which constitutes the propositional objects of determinate awareness. However, the account of concept acquisition better not appeal to the content of the indeterminate awareness, as by its nature the objects of such awareness are not amenable to inner perception or reflective awareness. Moreover, indeterminate awareness is only a necessary condition for determinate awareness, it is not sufficient cause of the latter. Thus it is rather unlikely that we can offer a causal-explanatory account of concepts and determinate perceptual judgments *solely* in terms of the content of indeterminate awareness.

Although it is possible that the determinate and indeterminate awarenesses share the same causal source, namely a given sense-object contact, they result in distinct cognitive states, or at least distinct parts thereof. This seems to suggest that the

¹⁰ Many influential Indian philosophers have argued for this, including Kisor Kumar Chakrabarti. See his, 'Some Comparisons Between Frege's Logic and Navya-Nyaya Logic', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Jun., 1976, pp. 554–563

cognitions follow different causal trajectories after the initial sense-object contact. It is interesting to note that some recent neuroscientific studies of visual systems by Melvyn A Goodale and others support such an extension of the Nyaya thesis. These studies show that the mechanisms and parts of the brain responsible for direct visual control of action (dorsal stream) are functionally and neurally separate from those mediating perceptual representations of that object (ventral stream in the cortex) (Goodale and Humphrey 1998). The action, or sensory-motor system computes accurate metrical information in the required egocentric coordinates for action, but these computations are fleeting and for the most part limited to the selected object in the scene with respect to the observer. These fleeting computations do not feed into the representational system nor do they play any role in constructing the representation. The representation system delivers a rich and detailed representation of the world mediated by a separate causal stream of visual projections in the primate cortex. Several empirical studies have claimed that human brain differs from that of lower animals in having a well-developed cortex, which explains why most animals lack the rich representations required for conceptual organization though they display sophisticated behaviors. This insight is shared by the Naiyayika account of indeterminate awareness places minimal demands on the cognitive apparatus possessed by subjects of experience and thus can be invoked to reveal the shared content of human and animal perceptions. In addition, the Naiyayikas offer us a neat framework for distinguishing conceptual and non-conceptual contents of experiences in terms of determinate and indeterminate awarenesses respectively.

The Cartesian Account of Sensory Perceptions

In this section, I focus on Descartes' account of sensory perception, which sets the stage for causal-explanatory account of conceptual content in terms of non-conceptual content. In the famous passage in the Second Meditation, Descartes classifies doubting, willing, affirming, imagining, and *sensing* as kinds of thinking. In the *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes spells out his reasoning for this assimilation:

By the term 'thought', I understand everything which we are aware of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness of it. Hence, *thinking* is to be identified here not merely with understanding, willing and imagining, but also with sensory awareness.¹¹

Here, I think, Descartes intends to identify one of the essential features of thought: immediate awareness. Since this feature is shared by sensations, there is reason to categorize them as thoughts. Ideas are constituents of thoughts and may occur *alone* as in sensation and imagination (e.g. when I sense a man or imagine an angel), or as *accompanied* by a further mode of thought which consists in taking an attitude towards the object of thought (e.g., in the case of judgments and volitions). In his response to Hobbes, Descartes clarifies that 'when I want something, or am

¹¹ Descartes (1967), *Principles of Philosophy*, in CSM I p. 195

afraid of something, I simultaneously perceive (am immediately aware of) that I want or am afraid; and, this is why I count volition and fear among my ideas'.¹² This suggests that the mark of an idea is its representational content. The following passage in the Third Meditation supports this intuition:

Some of my thoughts are as it were the images of things, and it is only in these cases the term 'idea' is strictly appropriate – for example when I think of a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God. ... there can be no ideas which are not as it were ideas of things.¹³

The important sense in which ideas are like images is that they represent things in thought. What makes an image an *image of* something is its intentional character, e.g., a photograph is 'of someone' who is the causal source. The use of the term 'image' however is misleading in this context because it suggests that ideas are mental pictures, which resemble the objects they represent. The passage in the *Sixth Set of Replies* focuses attention on the causal aspect of representation and warns us not to expect resemblance between ideas and the things that they represent:

When I see a stick, ...rays of light are reflected off the stick and set up certain movements in the optic nerve and, via the optic nerve, in the brainThis movement in the brain, which is common to us and the brutes, is the first grade of sensory response. This leads to the second grade, which extends to the mere perception of the color and light reflected from the stick; it arises from the fact that the mind is so intimately conjoined with the body that it is affected by the movements which occur in it. Nothing more than this should be referred to the sensory faculty, if we wish to distinguish it carefully from the intellect. But suppose that, as a result of being affected by this sensation of color, I judge that a stick, located outside me is colored; ... although such reasoning is commonly assigned to the senses (which is why I have referred to it here as the third grade of sensory response), it is clear that it depends solely on the intellect.¹⁴

The first grade of sensory response picks out the sense in which sensations are purely physiological occurrences. Both animals and humans are capable of 'seeing' in this sense. This causal-mechanical model of perception is sufficient to explain animal cognition and behavior in its *entirety*, and also accounts for a *part* of human cognition and behavior. The second grade of sensory response is a result of the close conjunction of mind and body and is thus characteristic of human perception. Descartes says that human perceptions of color, sound, heat, etc., are 'different states of the mind, or thoughts, which are the *immediate result* of these movements [the purely physiological movements transmitted to the brain via the nerves]'. The second grade of sensory response identifies sensations simply as thoughts or *ideas* in the mind.¹⁵ Henceforth, I dub sensations identified in the second grade, as sensory ideas. Sensory ideas are produced in the mind as a result of physiological

¹² Descartes (1997), 'Third Set of Replies', in CSM II, p. 127

¹³ Descartes (1997), CSM II, p. 30

¹⁴ Descartes (1997), 'Sixth Set of Replies', in CSM II, p. 295

¹⁵ Descartes (1997), CSM I, p. 284; emphasis added

movements in the body, which excite the nerve endings to transmit the stimuli to the brain. There is a natural inclination to assume that sensory ideas *resemble* the character of the object they represent. However, this opinion, Descartes explains, is mistaken. It can also be proved that the nature of our mind is such that the mere occurrence of certain motions in the body can stimulate it to have all manner of thoughts which have no *likeness* to the movements in question. ... we know that the nature of the soul is such that different local motions are quite sufficient to produce *all* the sensations in the soul.¹⁶

Consider the case of a sound perception in which there is a sensation whose qualitative character is perceived as belonging to the external object, e.g., when we say the lawnmower is really noisy. But sounds are in fact vibrations in the air and the perceived quality is a feature of sensory ideas caused by the interactions of those vibrations and our ear.¹⁷ The intervening process fails to preserve resemblance between the character of the qualities of the perceived object and the qualitative character of sensory ideas in the mind. This is the reason why Descartes introduces the third grade of sensory response. His aim is to issue a warning about a conceptual blunder when we make judgments about the nature of external world on the basis of sensory ideas.

One may ask, do we have any reason for saying that sensory ideas have representational content? Descartes suggests that sensory ideas, like all other ideas, have representational content in virtue of having some cause. Discussing the Causal Adequacy Principle, in the *Third Meditation*, he states that ideas considered formally (intrinsically) are merely modes of our thought, but the very same ideas considered objectively (representatively) 'are like pictures, or images which can easily fall short of the perfection of things from *which they are taken*' (emphasis added).¹⁸ The objective reality (what may be called its representational content) of an idea is derived from its cause. Ideas in the mind are effects of some causes, which contain at least as much formal reality as the objective reality contained in the ideas. In the *Sixth Meditation*, he elaborates this point in the case of sensory ideas:

When the nerves are pulled in the foot, they pull in and turn on inner parts of the brain to which they are attached and produce a certain motion in them; and *nature* has laid it down that this motion should produce in the mind a sensation of pain, as occurring in the foot ...every time this part [which immediately affects the mind] of the brain is in a given state it sends the same signals to the mind, even though other parts of the body may be in a different condition at the time.¹⁹

The regular correlation between sensory ideas and their causes is as a matter of 'natural law'. It is important to note that the term 'nature' here does not signify essential natures, rather Descartes says, "'nature" is simply a label which depends on my thought; it is quite extraneous to the things to which it is applied'.²⁰ The passage highlights the respect in which sensory ideas differ from other ideas. Though sensory ideas are immediately caused by and represent physiological movements; the mind is

¹⁶ Descartes, in CSM I, pp. 284–285; emphases added

¹⁷ Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, in CSM I §195

¹⁸ Descartes, *Third Meditation* in CSM II, p. 28.

¹⁹ Descartes, *Sixth Meditation* in CSM II, p. 60.

²⁰ Descartes, *Sixth Meditation* in CSM II, p. 59.

not aware of the physiological movements. Sensory ideas do not tell us about the qualities of their causes (i.e., external bodies and the internal movements induced by them) rather sensory ideas tell us of the benefit or harm that they do to the mind-body composite. Different physiological movements may result in the same sensory idea. Thus, the qualitative character of a sensory idea does not necessarily track the variance in its cause (or its representational content).

The preceding discussion may lead to doubt the causal connection between external or internal objects and sensory ideas in the mind. Since sensory ideas do not *resemble* their causes, we have no intuitive explanation for why a particular sensory idea is produced in the brain by certain physiological movements. Furthermore, unlike the case of mathematical truths, we cannot establish the regular correlation between sensory ideas and their causes by a priori reflection. Descartes addresses these doubts about causal explanation, he explains:

It is true that God could have made the nature of mind such that this particular motion in the brain indicated something else to the mind; it might, for example, have made the mind aware of the actual motion occurring in the brain, or in the foot... But there is nothing else which would have been so conducive to the continued well being of the body. ... The deception of the senses is natural, because a given motion in the brain *must always* produce the same sensation in the mind ... dryness of the throat may sometimes arise, not as it normally does, from the fact that a drink is necessary to the health of the body, but from some quite opposite cause, as happens in the case of a man with dropsy. Yet it is much better that it should mislead on this occasion than that it should always mislead when the body is in good health. This consideration is of greatest help to me not only for noticing all the errors to which my nature is liable, but also for enabling me to correct or avoid them. ... I can almost always make the use of more than one sense to investigate the same thing; and in addition, I can use both my memory ... and my intellect.²¹

The regular correlation between particular sensory ideas and physiological occurrences is in accordance with natural law, or as Descartes puts it, the goodness of God, for it is designed to fulfill a certain purpose: to ensure the continued well-being of the body. The natural law that governs the mind-body interaction cannot be known a priori. However, our experience reveals that sensory ideas are regularly associated with their physiological causes. We may sometimes be misled by sensations, but we have the resources to guard against such errors provided we are clear that the qualitative character of a sensory idea is different from its representational (causal) content. This opens the door for an empirical discovery of the natural law that governs the mind-body interaction. Thus, there is no reason to doubt that sensory ideas have representational content that is determined by the intrinsic nature of their causes.

In light of this discussion we may revisit the relation between the grades of sensory perception. For Descartes, human sensation is Janus-faced. Sensory

²¹ Descartes (1997), *Sixth Meditation* in CSM II, p. 60–61.

perceptions (identified in the first grade) are merely physiological movements in the appropriate sense organ caused by sensory contact with external objects, which (in turn) stimulates other physiological movements some of which are expressed as unconscious behavioral reflexes. Sensory perceptions in this sense, are shared by animals and humans, and can be thought of as the non-conceptual content of experiences. But non-conceptual content captures only a *part* of the sensory content of human perceptions. Sensory perceptions (identified in the second grade of sensory response) are ideas in the mind that are *caused* by physiological movements in the body and brain. Sensory ideas insofar as they have representational content and are constituents of thoughts, can be conceived of as observational concepts. This sets the stage for a causal-explanatory account of observational concepts in terms of non-conceptual content of experiences.

Before we close the section it is important to point out that Descartes did not ever attempt such an account, nor can we say that he intended it, for there are other features of the Cartesian model of mind that strictly rule out any such maneuvers, e.g. the real distinction between mind and body. Contemporary philosophers reject the features which shield Descartes from the false expectation that it is possible to offer a noncircular account of at least some observational concepts in terms of non-conceptual content of perceptual experiences. The point of this section is to bring to surface the implicit Cartesian influences that are embedded in the foundations of the established framework in philosophy of mind and encourage the contemporary philosophers to rethink their commitment to these hidden influences.

Peacocke's Account of Varieties of Perceptual Content

Christopher Peacocke's attempt to offer a causal-explanatory account of observational concepts in terms of non-conceptual contents is yet another example in which contemporary framework in philosophy of mind continues to be influenced by hidden Cartesian strands. In *A Study of Concepts*, Peacocke distinguishes two kinds of non-conceptual content: Scenarios and Protopropositions (Peacocke 1992b). Scenario is a way of locating perceptually salient spatial features in the vicinity of a perceiver. A scenario is essentially a spatial type. For a given perceptual experience, we assign a positioned scenario, i.e., a scenario together with an assignment of real directions and places to labeled axes and origin and an assigned time. Scenarios provide an egocentric mode of identification of places, directions and other features of space in a subject's vicinity on the basis of which we can state the content of a subject's perceptual experiences without an appeal to the first-person concept. In terms of scenario content we can explain the link between perceptual information and action, which in turn can be used to assign content to the subject's present-tense spatial judgments about her perceptual experiences. Thus, Peacocke claims that scenario contents can be used in giving a noncircular account of perceptual demonstratives and the first-person concept. It may seem that scenario content requires conceptual apparatus to identify point-types or points used for filling out the space around the origin or the perceiver and thus may not be conceptually innocent after all. However, it is only the theorist

who uses the conceptual apparatus to specify the non-conceptual scenario content of a given perceptual experience; the perceiver herself need not have any grasp of the conceptual machinery used for identifying non-conceptual content. It is sufficient that the perceiver's grasp of the perceptual content is manifested in the actions and behavioral dispositions acquired by her on account of the perceptual experience. However, there is a deeper worry.

Peacocke admits that spatial content involves more than just sensitivity to higher-order properties of stimulation patterns. He says,

I doubt that we could ever justify the attribution of genuine spatial content to an organism states, of a kind going beyond such sensitivity, unless the subject were on occasion to employ states with these contents in identifying places over time. ... Identification of places over time requires that states with scenario content contribute to the construction of a cognitive map of the world around the subject ...It is, in turn, highly questionable whether we can make sense of the subject engaging in such construction unless he employs at least a rudimentary form of first-person thought (Peacocke 1992a).

He claims that we can justify attribution of genuine non-conceptual content only if the subject *employs* such content in reasoning. This requirement is too strong, for to *employ* such content in reasoning the subject should be conscious of the content of experiences. Being conscious of the content of experiences is a matter of being in a second-order state that represents 'that *one* is representing that there is there is such-and-such an object in one's vicinity'. This, in turn, requires some rudimentary conceptual apparatus including the first-person concept. In this sense scenario content is not autonomous: it enters the content of experiences only of those creatures that are capable of some conceptual thought. Thus scenario contents may appear to be conceptually innocent on the surface but they rest on a background of conceptual abilities. This should make us suspicious about the non-conceptual nature of such content, and it certainly defeats Peacocke's rationale for introducing such content in the first place. He claims, the most fundamental reason for recruiting non-conceptual content lies in the need to describe correctly the overlap between human perception and that of other non-linguistic animals. He insists, 'the property of (say) representing a flat brown surface at a certain distance from one can be common to the perceptions of humans and lower animals ... it is literally the same representational property that the two experiences possess' (Peacocke 2001b). It is obvious that we cannot attribute the background conceptual abilities to lower animals, since there is empirical evidence that many lower animals lack the concept of the self.²² Thus, Peacocke would be forced to admit that it does not make sense to assign *genuine* non-conceptual spatial content to such creatures.

In any case, Peacocke thinks that a simple account in terms of positioned scenarios will not suffice for basic observational concepts. So, he introduces

²² Many empirical studies on primates and other animals show that except the great apes who are very closely related to humans, most animals including monkeys lack the concept of self. Gallup (1970) did a comparative study on monkeys and apes. The apes succeeded in passing the mirror test after three weeks or so but the monkeys did not succeed at all. See Gallup (1970).

protopositions that are more discriminating than scenarios. Protopositions are conceived of as structured sets containing individuals, properties, and relations rather than concepts thereof. Protopositional contents assist in isolating abstract and holistic features of the perceptual scene, which play an important role in memory and recognition and assist in the formation of mental maps. In explicating the nature of protopositions to show how they may assist in the formation of mental maps, etc., he appeals to properties and relations of human visual experiences, e.g., symmetry, equidistance, same shape as, and so on. The introduction of sophisticated properties like symmetry in protopositions invites the suspicion that such contents are not non-conceptual. After all, he requires more than a veridical perception of symmetry; he insists that the subject see a certain region *as symmetrical*. Peacocke addresses such qualms in a two-part reply.

The first part insists that there must be room for perceiving complex properties without conceptualizing them. He illustrates the point by appeal to a native speaker's intuitive judgment that the sentence, 'Visiting royalty can be boring' is ambiguous, even though the speaker may not have an explicit grasp of the complex syntactio-semantic relations that account for its ambiguity. Peacocke forgets to note that such sophisticated discriminatory judgments are evidence that the native speaker does have an implicit mastery of 'grammar'. We would be very willing to attribute an implicit mastery of language to a native speaker who is disposed to present discriminatory behavior and judgments when prompted by appropriate stimuli. The speaker must have some grasp of the basic concepts of the grammar of his language, even though he may lack the vocabulary used by linguists. By Peacocke's own lights, the fact that the speaker finds such judgments primitively compelling is evidence that the speaker possesses the concepts of the complex syntactico-semantic properties.

Someone may object that the Nyaya notion of indeterminate awareness is prone to the same objection since we do appeal to discriminatory behavior and recognitional capacities of the subject to account for the intentionality of such awarenesses. However, there is a difference. The indeterminate awareness is restricted to simple, real properties (*jati*) and 'unanalyzable surplus properties' (*akhandā upādhi*) as opposed to complex or ascribed titular properties (*upādhi*). The latter may require comparing and contrasting several real properties possessed by particulars out there. Peacocke's examples of properties and relations like symmetry, same shape as, etc., which figure in protopositions fall into the category of complex properties. The grasp of complex properties requires the subject have some conscious access to the simple properties so that they can be compared and contrasted, and that, in turn, requires some conceptual apparatus including at least the first-person concept. It is for this very reason that the Naiyayikas do not allow complex properties as contents of indeterminate awareness. In the second part of the reply, Peacocke concedes as much. He accepts that perceptual experiences do have conceptual contents, but warns us that in giving an account of the mastery of concepts, we should restrict ourselves to non-conceptual contents of experiences as far as possible. He hesitatingly admits that we can appeal to the conceptual content of experiences provided we do not appeal to the part that presupposes the very concept in question. That is to say, in giving an account of the mastery of the concept of square we may appeal to other conceptual contents except that of a square. It is obvious Peacocke's

second layer of non-conceptual content involves explicit references to conceptual abilities some of which are as sophisticated as the very concept in question.

Peacocke's account collapses because the demands he places on the very notion of non-conceptual content seem to pull in different directions. On the one hand, he requires that such content characterize our animal heritage; on the other hand, the features included in varieties of non-conceptual content require that such content can be attributed only to a subject who possesses a sophisticated cognitive apparatus available only to conscious reflective beings. His requirement that the subject *employ* such content in spatial reasoning, rather than manifest his grasp in behavior, suggests that the subject must possess a rudimentary conceptual apparatus, including at least the first-person concept. This is where Peacocke's notion of non-conceptual content differs from that of Nyaya. Peacocke is forced to admit that non-conceptual content includes sophisticated conceptual elements because he wants to give a noncircular account of the mastery of basic observational concepts. This defeats the very purpose of introduction of non-conceptual content.

The failure of the attempt to provide an explanatory account of observational concepts in terms of non-conceptual elements is instructive, for it points to a principled reason why any such attempt will be unsuccessful. Our conceptual abilities are holistic and cannot be explained in a piecemeal fashion in terms of non-conceptual elements. Concepts are, in part, individuated by the role they play in explaining inferential and other structural relations that hold between contents of mental states. So we cannot give a noncircular account of a concept in terms of non-conceptual experiential content. We may do better to search for an informative account of concepts by looking up 'as it were' into the nature of propositions and structures, rather than down into sensory contents. Otherwise we are beguiled, like Peacocke, to introduce concepts to characterize conceptually innocent content.

Conclusions

Descartes held that sensory ideas or observational concepts are caused by, and thus derive their representational content from, physiological movements in the brain and the body. Peacocke tries to show exactly how such a causal-explanatory derivation can be carried out. This is yet another Cartesian heresy that we must reject. I propose we follow the Naiyayikas in regarding non-conceptual content as an indeterminate awareness the object of which is consciously inaccessible from a first-person point of view. Indeterminate awareness places minimal demands on the cognitive apparatus possessed by subjects of experience and thus can be invoked to reveal the shared content of human and animal perceptions. The Naiyayika account of perceptual contents gives us a neat framework for distinguishing conceptual and non-conceptual contents of experiences in terms of determinate and indeterminate awarenesses respectively. In the Nyaya scheme of things, though indeterminate awareness is a causal predecessor, and hence a necessary condition for determinate awareness, it is by no means a sufficient condition. Therefore, we should not hope to find a causal-explanatory account of concepts in terms of their non-conceptual counterparts.

In favoring the account of perceptual content given by Naiyayikas, I am not suggesting that we support the dualistic tendencies in their writings. The Naiyayikas posit soul (self) and mind and body (not-self) as distinct substances. The view I am advocating agrees with the modern philosophers about a metaphysical dependence of soul on the physical body. However, this reduction alone does not give reason to support a causal dependence of conceptual content on its non-conceptual counterpart.

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