Mary Shepherd on Nonlinguistic and Prelinguistic Cognition: A Case of Nonconceptualism?

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This paper considers the question whether the Scottish philosopher Mary Shepherd (1777–1847) endorses a form of nonconceptualism about mental states or their content. While the paper does not arrive at a definitive answer to the question, it paves the way to answering it in the future by demonstrating that there are *prima facie* promising ways to relate Shepherd to either of the previously mentioned forms of nonconceptualism – although I tentatively conclude that, ultimately, it will be more profitable to consider her views in the context of content nonconceptualism. In arguing the way it does, this paper, then, also aims to bridge the often-lamented gap between the history of philosophy and our contemporary debates.

The aim of this paper is to consider whether or to what degree Mary Shepherd (1777–1847) can be said to endorse a form of nonconceptualism.[1] When speaking about nonconceptualism it is important to keep two, closely interrelated issues, separate: nonconceptualism about mental content and about mental states. As van Cleve, referring to Heck's[2] distinction, notes:

> Discussions of whether perceptual states have nonconceptual content typically define the issue in a way that is bound to be confusing to anyone entering the debate for the first time – they conflate questions about the nature of contents *per se* with questions about the requirements on perceivers if they are to be in states with those contents.[3]

Simply put, nonconceptualism about the contents of mental states is the thesis that some mental states – usually sensory or perceptual states – have nonconceptual content (i.e., no conceptual content at all), which then can or does serve

1 For the sake of clarity and brevity, I will use the following common abbreviations: ERCE for Mary Shepherd: An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect, controverting the Doctrine of Mr. Hume, concerning the Nature of the Relation; with Observations upon the Opinions of Dr. Brown and Mr. Lawrence, Connected with the Same Subject (London: printed for T. Hookham, Old Bond Street, 1824), EPEU for Mary Shepherd: Essays on the Perception of an External Universe, and Other Subjects connected with the Doctrine of Causation (London: John Hatchard and Son, 1827) and LMSM for Mary Shepherd: Lady Mary Shepherd's Metaphysics, in: Fraser's magazine 5/30 (1832) 697–708.

The page numbers refer to the original pagination and all emphases are, unless explicitly noted, in the original.

2 See Richard G. Heck: Nonconceptual Content and the Space of Reasons, in: The Philosophical Review 109/4 (2000) 483–523.

3 James van Cleeve: Defining and defending nonconceptual contents and states, in: Philosophical Perspectives 26 (2012) 411–430, 411.

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as the input for the content of conceptual mental states.[4] Thus, according to content nonconceptualism, mental states may have different types of content: conceptual content, non-conceptual content or a mixture of both.

Content nonconceptualism needs to be distinguished from state nonconceptualism, which is less concerned with the content of mental states and more with their bearer, the concepts the latter possess, and the way concepts are employed. State nonconceptualism, simply put, holds that there are mental states that are "concept-independent" in some way to use the formulation of Bermúdez and Cahen.[5] According to this view a state counts as nonconceptual, or 'concept-independent', if the bearer of the state does not possess the concepts that would be required to give a (correct) characterization of the content of said state, or if they possess these concepts but do not activate or draw from them. State nonconceptualism is, thus, less concerned with different kinds of content. In fact, on this view "perceptual states and belief states [may] have the same type of content"[6] because the crucial question does not concern the content of mental state but whether bearers of those states possess, activate or draw from concepts or not. This is different from content nonconceptualism, which is usually taken to entail that mental states may have different types of content such as nonconceptual, conceptual, or hybrid content.

In the following sections both types of nonconceptualism are considered in relation to Shepherd as there are promising ways of relating her to either type. Take the case of state nonconceptualism: in this context, the cognition of non- and prelinguistic beings plays an important role because it seems that these beings can have mental states even though they are not concept possessors – or if they are, their usage of available concepts seems to be limited.[7] Thus, if someone does not explicitly discuss nonconceptualism, but endorses a comprehensive notion of, call it, pre- and nonlinguistic cognition, it makes *prima facie* a lot of sense to see whether this person also (implicitly) endorses state nonconceptualism. Similarly, it is worth considering whether Shepherd may have endorsed content nonconceptualism. For as will become evident, Shepherd is committed to the existence of a 'latent' conception or reasoning. Simply put, this entails that a being may (cognitively) possess material but does not draw on it, and this lack of 'concept activation' may lead to nonconceptual content.[8] In closing this pa-

4 A well-known proponent of this is Michael Tye: Nonconceptual Content, Richness, and Fineness of Grain, in: Perceptual experience (2006) 504–530. Tye is famous for saying that the nonconceptual content needs to be poised to serve as such an input.

5 José Bermúdez; Arnon Cahen: Nonconceptual Mental Content, in: The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2020 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/content-nonconceptual/.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 See Ned Block: The border between seeing and thinking (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023) chap. 4 for a recent articulation of this idea.

per, I will further substantiate this possibility of Shepherd endorsing a form of content nonconceptualism by taking a closer look at the difference between the two types of consciousness that Shepherd introduces: feelings and ideas. For this difference potentially tracks a commitment to two types of mental states with different kinds of content.

The paper is structured as follows: in the first section I introduce the basics of Shepherd's notion of mind and causation. For to understand these is a prerequisite for making sense of her account of non- and prelinguistic cognition in the second section. This account, in turn, is the basis for my discussion of whether Shepherd endorses state or content nonconceptualism in the third section. There I, tentatively, conclude that the case for understanding Shepherd as endorsing a form of content nonconceptualism is *prima facie* promising – particularly if we can further corroborate the suspicion that Shepherd holds at least some 'feelings' to have nonconceptual content.[9]

Thus, even though the paper does not arrive at a definitive conclusion about Shepherd's nonconceptualism, it lays the groundwork to answer this question in future research by putting her views in conversation with the modern-day discussion about nonconceptualism in the first place. In doing so the paper also attempts to bridge the often-lamented gap between the history of philosophy and our contemporary debates.

9 In this sense the paper also lays the foundation to challenge the assumption that, in the Western tradition, Kant ought to be seen as the forefather of nonconceptualism (e.g., Hanna Robert: Beyond the myth of the myth: A Kantian theory of non-conceptual content, in: Kant and Non-Conceptual Content, ed. by Dietmar Heidemann (London: Routledge, 2014) 11–86). Thus, by considering nonconceptualism in relation to a historically marginalized figure such as Shepherd, the paper also contributes to the currently ongoing effort in the history of philosophy to expand the (early modern) canon (see Jessica Gordon-Roth; Nancy Kendrick: Recovering Early Modern Women Writers: Some Tensions, in: Metaphilosophy 50/3 (2019) 268–285; Eileen O'Neill: HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY: Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History, in: Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions, ed. by Janet A. Kourany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 17–62; Lisa Shapiro: Revisiting the early modern philosophical canon, in: Journal of the American Philosophical Association 2/3 (2016) 365–383). For more on Kant's stance on the issue of conceptualism see Colin McLear: Kantian Conceptualism/Nonconceptualism, in: The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2021 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/kant-conceptualism/). For a consideration of nonconceptualism outside of the 'Western' tradition see Amit Chaturvedi: Taking non-conceptualism back to Dharmakīrti, in: European Journal of Philosophy 31/71 (2023) 3–29.

Shepherd's Understanding of Mind and Causation

Despite a surge in scholarly attention, Shepherd is not well-known beyond the confinements of the history of philosophy.[10] Her most important philosophical outputs are her two currently known books: the *Essay Concerning the Relation of Cause and Effect* (ERCE) and the *Essay on the Perception of an External Universe* (EPEU) published in 1824 and 1827, respectively. While ERCE is dedicated to the project of rejecting "Mr. Hume's Doctrine on the 'Nature of the Relation of Cause and Effect'" (ERCE 1), EPEU is primarily focused on offering her "own views" (EPEU 2).[11] In that sense, these two works can be described as comprising the negative and positive aspect of Shepherd's overall project. As she puts it: "[T]he subjects of the two Essays are capable of being considered independently of each other, yet of throwing a mutual light upon each other" (EPEU xiv–xv). The reason for this is that the issue of causation lies at the heart of both books. Shepherd emphasizes this point by saying that, if you take her "two essays together as one whole, the knowledge of Cause is supposed to be first" (EPEU xii).

In ERCE, Shepherd argues against an understanding of causation as constant conjunction by rejecting the Humean notion[12] that the "*necessary connexion* of cause and effect is only a custom of mind" (ERCE 41). Shepherd, instead, advances the view that "necessary connexion of Cause and Effect, and our knowledge of it, in opposition to mere *fancy or custom*, is the governing proposition in every science" (ERCE 192). To put it differently, Shepherd believes that cause and effect are necessarily connected – although to keep in line with Shepherd's views it would be more precise to say 'causes' because Shepherd rejects the Humean notion that causation is a binary relation between events.[13] This becomes evident when looking at her definition of a cause as "an object, as shall enable it, in conjunction with another, to form a new nature, capable of exhibiting qualities varying from those of either of the objects unconjoined" (ERCE 63). It is important to note about this definition that it entails that causation

10 While Shepherd's works were discussed during and shortly after her lifetime (see e.g., Robert Blakey: History of the Philosophy of Mind: embracing the opinions of all writers on mental science from the earliest period to the present time (London: Trelawney Wm Saunders, 1848) and John Fearn: Parriana: or, Notices of the Rev. Samuel Parr, LL.D. (London: Henry Colburn, 1828)), her works – similar to those by other women philosophers (O'Neill: Disappearing Ink, op. cit.) – were subsequently ignored and neglected until the mid-1990's, when scholars such as Margaret Atherton and Jennifer McRobert led the effort to recover them. Today there is a growing community of Shepherd scholars with interest in her work surging since the beginning of this decade.

11 That is not to say that she entirely refrains from critiquing others. For instance, she critically engages at length with George Berkeley (see e.g. EPEU, Essay 1–3; Margaret Atherton: Lady Mary Shepherd's case against George Berkeley, in: British Journal for the History of Philosophy 4/2 (1996) 347–366).

12 E.g., EHU 7.2.28 in David Hume: Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

13 See T 1.3.14.35 in David Hume: A Treatise of Human Nature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

always requires *at least* two partial causes to unite or mix, and these partial causes are not events but objects.

Shepherd illustrates her understanding of causation by using mathematical analogies: "Cause and Effect, might be presented by A × B = C, therefore C is included in the mixture of the objects called cause" (ERCE 141; EPEU 281–282). She admits that it is almost impossible for us not to think of this combination in terms of a "before and after", but nonetheless denies that the effect *follows* the conjunction, holding instead that the production of the effect occurs "instantly" and "immediately" (ERCE 50). That is, for Shepherd it is precisely at the time when the causes interact that the effect comes into existence; the interaction of causes is simultaneous to the coming about of the effect. Shepherd, however, prefers the language of synchronicity in this context, (often) saying that causes and effect are "synchronous" (e.g., ERCE 50). Shepherd's understanding of synchronicity or simultaneity can be nicely illustrated with an example by John Heil. Heil who also rejects a "traditional Humean picture of event-causation", puts it thusly: "Your pushing and the car's moving are apparently simultaneous. Of course you set about pushing the car prior to pushing it and prior to its moving. The car is not moved by your setting about pushing it, however, but by your pushing it".[14]

Although there is a lot more that could be said about Shepherd's notion of causation, it suffices for the purposes of this paper to introduce two so-called principles which she argues for in ERCE (ERCE 10–11):

> The Causal Principle (CP): "[N]othing can 'begin its own existence;'" (e.g., ERCE 94).
> The Causal Likeness Principle (CLP): "[L]ike causes, must generate like Effects" (e.g., ERCE 194).[15]

14 See John Heil: Philosophy of mind: A contemporary introduction (London: Routledge, 2002) 187. For more on how Shepherd conceives of the relation between our will and causation see Essay 9 of EPEU and Louise Daoust: Shepherd on Causal Necessity and Human Agency, in: Journal of Modern Philosophy 4/1 (2022).

15 For a thorough discussion of Shepherd's rejection of Hume see e.g., Martha Bolton: Lady Mary Shepherd and David Hume on Cause and Effect, in: Feminist History of Philosophy: The Recovery and Evaluation of Women's Philosophical Thought, ed. by Eileen O'Neill; Marcy P. Lascano (Cham: Springer, 2019) 129–152. Shepherd's understanding of Causation as 'synchronous' is discussed and defended in detail by David Landy: A Defense of Shepherd's Account of Cause and Effect as Synchronous, in: Journal of Modern Philosophy 2/1 (2020). A concise overview on the state of scholarship along with further details concerning Shepherd's notion of causation (including a reconstruction of her arguments for the causal principles) is contained in Deborah Boyle: Mary Shepherd: A Guide (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023) chap. 2–3 and Antonia LoLordo: Mary Shepherd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) §2. Note that Boyle (Shepherd, op. cit., 43) and A. LoLordo (Mary Shepherd, op. cit. 9) disagree about whether Shepherd holds causes and effect to be numerically identical.

These principles will become important when I illustrate the limits of non- and prelinguistic cognition. For now, what is important to note is that Shepherd endorses a notion of causation that is a synchronous form of combination and which requires at least two partial causes to give rise to an effect. For when Shepherd characterizes the mind as a "capacity or cause, for *sensation in general*" (EPEU 155)[16] this gives rise to two questions: (i) What are these sensations, the mind is a cause for? and (ii) What does it combine with to cause it? I answer these questions in the remainder of this section.

Sensation', for Shepherd, is a technical term which denotes "any consciousness whatever" (EPEU 9). Shepherd's writings allow to distinguish two main types of consciousness, which we can call 'feelings' and 'ideas'. Feelings include the sensations of present sensible qualities such as colors, sounds (EPEU 311) or motion (EPEU 230) or the sensations of passions or emotions such as pleasure and pain (EPEU 66).[17] What unites the sensations that make up this type of consciousness, according to Shepherd, is that all of them are "felt" (EPEU 142). That is, they are all sensations that refer to things where we have a "consciousness of their immediate presence" (EPEU 142).

The second type of consciousness encompasses the various sorts of ideas, which Shepherd calls a "distinct class of sensation" (EPEU 133). There are, for instance, ideas of reason, memory, or imagination (EPEU 136) and in general every sensation that is about "existences, which *have existed, may exist, will exist, must needs exist,* but whose qualities are not presently determined upon the mind" (EPEU 136) counts as an idea for Shepherd. That is, we have an idea when the content of our sensation refers to something that is not immediately present to our five organs of sense and motion (such as the river I can see from my bedroom window at home) – or if it cannot be (such as God). Another thing that sets ideas and feelings apart is that ideas require an additional mental process to come about. Feelings are, as it were, just there. But ideas result from reasonings or observations "which show[s] that under certain conditions, there must needs be an existence when we cannot perceive it" (EPEU 133–134). Put differently, to have an idea one needs to be able to abstract by which Shepherd means "the consideration of any quality apart from others with which it may be usually united, in order to notice what inferences may be drawn from its nature" (EPEU 291).

Briefly put, there is a difference between two main types of consciousness or mental states in terms of their content and in terms of what mental processes

16 See also e. g., also EPEU 15, 56–57, 163–164, 217, 242, 310–311, 375.

17 It might be the case that apparently more complex sensations like "satisfaction or disgust" (EPEU 267) as well as "moral feelings" such as "friendship" (ERCE 125–126) and the "emotions of self-love" (EPEU 382) are also part of this class. For the moment I will bracket those sensations for reasons that will become evident in section 3, when Shepherd's views are discussed in relation to content nonconceptualism.

are needed for these states to come about. This will become important, when discussing Shepherd's views in relation to content nonconceptualism. For now, however, we can turn to the second question, which arose in light of Shepherd's notion of causation: What does the mind causally interact with to produce consciousness?[18]

The short answer to this question – at least as far as living beings are concerned – is the following: the body, or more specifically, the brain.[19] Shepherd conceives the brain to be "the exponent of the powers of the soul" (EPEU 37). That is, she holds that a "different action of brain is wanted for each *variety of sensation*" (ERCE 171, EPEU 156). This is why she says that there is a particular "action of the brain and the mind" which is "deemed colour" (EPEU 95). The close causal interconnection in the production of consciousness is, moreover, the reason Shepherd states that to "address the mind is to address the body, […] And to address the body is to address the mind—for *every sensation*, however popularly called *bodily;* requires *mind*" (ERCE 172).

Of course there is, again, much more that can be said about the relation between mind and body, and the way the body causally influences the production of consciousness.[20] For our present purposes it suffices, however, to note that a mind for Shepherd is a partial cause which, in the very least, requires interaction with the body, to give rise to consciousness. With this outline of Shepherd's understanding of causation and consciousness in place, we can now turn to her views of (the limits of) non- and prelinguistic cognition.

18 Another interesting feature of Shepherd's account of the mind, which is not important for the present purpose, is her understanding of 'perception' as a "SENSATION TAKEN NOTICE OF BY THE MIND" (EPEU 9). Following this definition Boyle (Shepherd, op. cit. 117) has aptly described Shepherdian perceptions as "second-order sensation", which consist in an explicit mental awareness of the first order sensation. I have suggested that these perceptions might have interesting parallels with higher-order theories of thought (Manuel Fasko: Mary Shepherd's Threefold 'Variety of Intellect' and its Role in Improving Education, in: Journal of Scottish Philosophy 19/3 (2021) note 10). For instance, Shepherdian perceptions, at first sight, are similar to Carruthers' higher-order thoughts, which are "parasitic" on the content of the first order mental states (i.e., Shepherdian sensations) (Peter Carruthers: Consciousness: Essays from a higher-order perspective (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005) 66).

19 Although there are instances where the causal interaction of mind and brain suffices to produce consciousness – as for instance in dreams (cf. EPEU 160) – often the production of consciousness requires further causally contributing factors such as the organs of sense or external objects (e.g., EPEU 72). Also note that Shepherd believes in an afterlife and believes it is possible that the cause that is the mind still manifests itself there (see D. Boyle: Mary Shepherd, op. cit., 257–263).

20 For on overview cf. ibid. chap. 8; LoLordo: Shepherd, op. cit., §4.

Non- and Prelinguistic Cognition and Its Limits

Towards the end of her first book, Shepherd writes that even the "meanest worm must *feel* and *think* as well as man" (ERCE 174). The claim that animals[21] have a mind is also repeatedly emphasized in Shepherd's second book where she, referring to the mind as a 'power to feel', writes that "the animal power to feel [is a] given property to EACH, and therefore to ALL *men and animals*" (EPEU 396) or contends that "the mysterious eternal power of feeling […] has been conveyed to each animal" (EPEU 376). In light of comments such as these, it does not come as a surprise that Shepherd's notion of animal cognition has already attracted scholarly attention.[22] In the following, I highlight some of the most important aspects concerning their cognition. In particular, I focus on two features of her view: namely, that (i) animal cognition is a case of nonlinguistic cognition, and that (ii) it is similar to prelinguistic human cognition.[23]

Concerning (i), it is worth noting that Shepherd, in distinction to many of her precursors such as Montaigne[24], has very little to say about language-use or communication by animals. While Shepherd never explicitly invokes language use as a distinguishing feature between humans and animals, there is no indication that she believes that animals can speak. Even though she credits animals with a "voice" (EPEU 258), Shepherd never clarifies what she means by this. Also, saying that animals have a voice in itself does not say much about whether one believes that they can speak.[25] After all, even Descartes, who infamously holds animals to be mere (biological) machines, holds that e.g. a parrot can ut-

21 Shepherd never defines her notion of 'animal', but her remarks suggest that it roughly corresponds to the group that Ernst Heckel, a couple of decades later calls, metazoa – that is, multicellular animals (as opposed to single-celled organisms, the protozoa).

22 See for instance Manuel Fasko: 'The Meanest Worm must Feel and Think' – Mary Shepherd on Animal Cognition, in: Mary Shepherd: Causation, Metaphysics, and Mind ed. by Keota Fields (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); LoLordo: Shepherd, op. cit., § 4.3.

23 In fact, Shepherd compares the intellectual level animals can reach not only to that of human infants, but she assimilates the cognition of animals also to that of human children more generally; and even to a group of human adults to whom Shepherd refers as "peasants" (EPEU 1, 5 73, 17, 189, 319, 324; LMSM 704). As I noted elsewhere (Variety, op. cit., note 18) Shepherd uses this term as a derogatory stand-in for lower class adults with little to no education. This grouping together by Shepherd raises various questions. It also becomes implausible if we read Shepherd as claiming that e.g., the previously mentioned worm can reach intellectual heights similar to an uneducated adult. For the present purposes this problem and other questions can be put aside because my focus only lies on the similarity of non- and prelinguistic cognition, and their difference to linguistic cognition. For this it suffices if animals and infants belong to the former category and at least some human adults to the latter. For more on this problem of Shepherd's indiscriminatory comparison and how she can solve it see Fasko: The Meanest Worm, op. cit.

24 Essais 2.12 in Michel de Montaigne: Essais (Paris: Éditions Fernand Roches, 1931).

25 Aristotle, for instance, holds that every animal who breathes has a voice (see Ronald A. Zirin: Aristotle's biology of language, in: Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-) 110 (1980) 325–347).

ter noises that may seem as if it is speaking; but since it does not express (rational) thoughts, the noises cannot be counted as language.[26] Consider also that the little Shepherd does say about language in connection to animals suggests that they cannot speak. For Shepherd stresses that animals, or rather beings with their level of intellect, cannot "argue formally" (EPEU 314) on any subject, nor can they "express" the results of their analyses (EPEU 105). I say more about what these 'analyses' are in the following. For now, the crucial thing to note is that, in light of the lack of any pronouncement to the contrary, the obvious reason accounting for why animals cannot argue formally on anything or express the results of their analyses is that they lack the language to do so. Thus, there are *prima facie* good reasons to assume that Shepherd conceives of animal cognition as a case of nonlinguistic cognition.

Next, I turn to the second point and outline the ways in which Shepherd assimilates the nonlinguistic cognition of animals with the prelinguistic cognition of human infants. In doing so, I draw on her commitment to the previously introduced principles CP and CLP.

The basis for animals and infants knowing and using the two causal principles is that they are capable to "perceive" and "analyse" relations (EPEU 105–6, 171, 315). In other words, Shepherd thinks that animals and infants can have an explicit mental awareness of relations and examine them. For Shepherd thinks of 'analysis' as a form of examination (e.g., EPEU 210) which ultimately aims at reducing complexity by breaking down the subject of analysis into smaller parts (EPEU 221, 263–65, 309, 373). In addition to this, animals and infants, as any mind with ideas, engage in abstraction (EPEU 291, 304) – a process that Shepherd calls the "origin of all science" (EPEU 291). While Shepherd does not think that animals and infant can do science, she holds that they are capable to draw inferences from the "impressions made upon them" and the relations they perceive between them "as occasion requires into *practical* results [my emphasis]" (EPEU 189). For instance, Shepherd believes that "any ordinary affair of life" already illustrates that animals or infants can "predicate of the future by experience of the past" (LMSM 704). For this they (implicitly) draw on the CLP – i.e., the thesis that "*like Causes must ever produce like Effects*" (ERCE 144) – which Shepherd deems necessary to recognize that the "past […] governs the future" (EPEU 287). This usage of the CLP, in turn, depends on having the CP available – i.e., knowing that everything needs a cause – which every child "under the faintest and most indistinct form of latent conception" (EPEU xiii) does. As she puts the point elsewhere, children (and animals) "Can Perceive the Relation of Cause and Effect, on Account of Their Being Capable of a Latent Conception of Ideas" (EPEU 314).

26 See AT IV 574–575 in René Descartes: Œuvres de Descartes (Paris: Vrin, 1897–1910).

Shepherd, however, never clarifies what she means by a "latent conception". Yet following Boyle, we can understand having a latent conception or reasoning as someone having the material available (such as ideas) that is required to justify a given belief – up to a point where this individual could give an argument for why they e. g., believe in the CP.[27] Crucially, the conception or reasoning is latent inasmuch as the individual has not explicitly used this material or drawn on it – and maybe, especially if they are a non- or prelinguistic creature, they never do so. In such cases, the latent conception is almost akin to an instinct. It is worth noting, however, that Shepherd is adamant that the conscious awareness of CP or the CLP, which expresses itself through the actions of a given animal or child (e. g., their learning from the past), is actually the "conclusion of a latent reasoning" (EPEU 170).

In the end, however, it is only those individuals that can become aware of this latent reasoning and spell it out that have the potential to reach the intellectual heights of the "soundest understandings" who are capable of the "wisest determinations" (EPEU 116). From everything that Shepherd says (or does not say) it can be assumed that this can only be achieved by some human adults. Only human adults are able to reason at the level required to do science and only they can e. g. draw inferences that are correct to the best of our knowledge. In contrast, the inferences drawn by animals and infants – though sufficient for the *practical* purposes of their daily life – yield only limited theoretical results inasmuch as they are incorrect to the best of our knowledge. For instance, Shepherd thinks that they are too liberal in applying the CLP and consequently "too readily" deem objects to be "similar" (EPEU 291–292). They follow the rule of thumb that whenever "things appear like" to them and the circumstances "*seem* also to be similar," they will believe that they are alike (EPEU 323). Thus, an animal might for instance avoid an electric candle if they have previously burnt their paw on a real candle because of the similar appearance.

To summarize, according to Shepherd the cognition of human infants and animals is similar in terms of the intellectual heights they can reach and the mistakes they make. What is interesting to note, however, is that at least some human infants will develop into the previously mentioned 'soundest understandings' and will be able to reason on a scientific level at some point.[28] Animals, on the other hand, seem to have reached their intellectual peak as it were. Shepherd does not explicitly offer a reason for this, but as I argue elsewhere in detail, the

27 D. Boyle: Mary Shepherd, op. cit. 142, 303. Note that Boyle speaks of tacit "belief in a principle" in this context. But given this is not Shepherd's language and that this would seem to imply that children and animals have concepts as a precondition for having beliefs, I prefer a more neutral rendering.

28 I have previously argued that education broadly conceived plays a crucial role for this intellectual development and for whether certain intellectual heights are actually reached (see M. Fasko: Threefold Variety, op. cit., §5).

differing physiological structure of humans and non-human animals play an important role here. For one important physiological difference concerns the fact that humans are the only beings that have the capacity to exhibit a level of neural control over the vocal tract that is required to form the complex sounds that make up human languages.[29] To put it differently, part of the reason that human beings can reach unique intellectual heights is their capacity for language use (which is derived from their unique physiological structure). In that sense, then, Shepherd ought to be understood as being committed to the view that there is a difference between non- and prelinguistic cognition and linguistic cognition.

Shepherd and Nonconceptualism

The previous section has established that Shepherd has a comprehensive notion of non- and prelinguistic cognition in terms of the abilities of individuals with such a kind of cognition. Nonetheless, there seems to be a difference between this kind of cognition and linguistic cognition which expresses itself in terms of the intellectual heights that can only be reached if an individual possesses linguistic cognition.[30] With these clarifications in the background, it is now possible to tackle the question whether Shepherd can be seen as endorsing a form of nonconceptualism. I begin to tackle this question by looking more closely at the relation between the two types of nonconceptualism and Shepherd's view.

Those who endorse *state* nonconceptualism often believe that it can be found in beings that are not concept possessors. If we look at the current debate an important reason why non- and prelinguistic beings are seen as particularly promising candidates in that regard, is that many believe there to be a strong link between language and concept possession. There is, for instance, a broadly McDowellian[31] way of thinking about concepts, on which the possession of a concept requires that I can provide justifications. The latter, in turn, are thought to require language, and so individuals with non- and prelinguistic cognition cannot possess concepts. Applied to Shepherd, this would entail that animals and human infants, in fact, exhibit a large variety of nonconceptual mental states because they are unable to use language and are thus incapable of providing the required justifications. The problem with this way of relating Shepherd to state nonconceptualism is the following: It is unclear whether Shepherd would endorse such a strong link between language-use and concept possession. As we have seen in section 2, language does not play an important role in her overall

29 M. Fasko: The Meanest Worm, op. cit.

30 Note, however, that linguistic cognition is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition for reaching such heights. As I pointed out Shepherd believes that even many human adults (the 'peasants') do not reason on a level much higher than that of (some) animals (cf. note 22).

31 John McDowell: Mind and world (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1996).

account of cognition. This may be taken to suggest that language is also not important when it comes to concept possession. For even though reaching highest levels of cognition seems to require language, this, in itself, does not say much about whether there is a connection between language and concept possession.

Still there is a promising way to relate Shepherd to *content* nonconceptualism – a way that even remains promising if we, for the sake of the argument, assume that Shepherd endorses the notion that possessing a concept of F "simply requires being able to discriminate Fs from the rest of the perceptual environment and/or to act on them in a suitable manner".[32] Simply put, this way concerns the importance of latent conceptions in Shepherd and the following idea – e.g., recently advocated for by Ned Block[33]: the content of a mental state ought to count as nonconceptual even if a being possesses concepts, as long as these "concepts are not essentially involved in determining the content" of said state.[34] That is, the content of a state is nonconceptual, if a being possesses concepts, but does not activate them when having said mental state or when determining its content.

There is, *prima facie*, good reason to believe that even if concept possession is something very fundamental for Shepherd, the latency of some reasoning can be made sense of in terms of a lack in concept activation. After all, the whole point of the latency is that you have the material available, needed to justify your reasoning, but that you do not draw on it while performing the reasoning – and in some cases you may never draw on it (see section 2). Similarly, Shepherd may hold in a Blockian vein that someone can be in the possession of concepts, yet they do not activate them when having certain mental states or determining their content. That is, these concepts (and not only some reasonings) remain latent in Shepherd's terminology.

This interpretation can be substantiated by considering that the content of Sheperdian feeling may be determined without activating concepts. For consider that 'feelings' are nothing but the effect of causal interactions – containing no further mental operation – between the mind, the brain and body more generally, and (often) the external world and its objects (EPEU 142). Crucially, this results in a "chaos"[35] of seemingly unconnected sense impressions, which can only be resolved if one has the ability to abstract (EPEU 314–315). Given one does not have to use this ability, it may seem as if there is room for the notion that the content of a particular feeling (i.e., a mental state) may be determined without the activation of concepts. In other words, the concepts may remain 'latent' in Shepherd's terminology. Ideas, on the other hand, require mental processes such as abstraction (which also helps to structure our sensations) to come

32 J. Bermúdez; A. Cahen: Mental Content, op. cit. §4.3.

33 N. Block: Border, op. cit., chap. 4.

34 Ibid. 268.

35 See M. Fasko: Threefold Variety, op. cit., 191and ibid. § 2 for more on this.

about (e.g., EPEU 291, 304) because they refer to something that is not, or cannot be, immediately present (EPEU 136). These operations, in turn, seem to require the activation of concepts, which would set ideas further apart from feelings. Particularly if we consider that ideas (usually) result from using certain mental operations such as abstraction on feelings, and so the content of these ideas is also based on the mental content provided by feelings. In that sense feelings could also be understood as serving an input function. That is, they could be the type of states with nonconceptual content, which often serves an input function for other states (i.e., ideas) with conceptual (or hybrid) content (see Introduction).

This is, admittedly, a very brief outlook on how Shepherd's distinction between feelings and ideas could be profitably understood in terms of a difference between mental states with and without conceptual content. Yet there are some important challenges that need to be met in future research to substantiate this *prima facie* plausible understanding of Shepherdian feelings and ideas. The first challenge concerns further substantiating the notion that Shepherd's understanding of 'latency' can be spelled out in terms of concept activation or, rather, the lack thereof. Second, it is important to shed more light on what Shepherd would understand to be a concept or a conceptual content of a mental state. This is closely tied to the third challenge of demonstrating that Shepherd would not consider the class of feelings to be concepts or conceptual mental states.[36] But even if it turns out that feelings should be considered as mental states with conceptual content and that the latent conception cannot be spelled out in terms of a lack in concept activation, there is still the previously mentioned possibility that Shepherd can be understood as endorsing state nonconceptualism – although getting clear on this requires more work on how Shepherd conceives of the relation between language and concepts. For now, however, it suffices to have shown that there is initial plausibility to the idea that Shepherd endorses a form of content or state nonconceptualism.

Conclusion

In this paper I have considered the question of whether Shepherd endorses a form of nonconceptualism. To this end I have, first, outlined her closely intertwined views of causation as a non-bipartite, necessary, and synchronous relation and the mind as a cause for consciousness. In the second section I have established that Shepherd has a comprehensive notion of the non- and prelinguistic cognition of animals and human infants respectively, which became im-

36 In this context it will be particularly important to consider the previously mentioned cases of 'moral feelings' etc. (see note 16) because if e.g., friendship is also part of the feelings it seems that at least some feelings as mental states have a conceptual content.

portant when relating her to state nonconceptualism in particular. Finally, I have outlined a promising avenue for considering, in future research, whether Shepherd endorses state nonconceptualism. I argued that, at first sight, her distinction between feelings and ideas can be profitably understood in terms of a difference between nonconceptual and conceptual content of mental states – i.e., as Shepherd (implicitly) endorsing a position that is best described as content nonconceptualism from today's point of view. While there are many challenges that need to be met to substantiate the idea that Shepherd does in fact endorse a form of nonconceptualism, this paper has laid the groundwork for this and in doing so put Shepherd's historical position in conversation with an important contemporary debate.[37]

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