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Knowing What Things Look Like: A reply to Shieber

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ABSTRACT

In 'Knowing What Things Look Like,' I argued against the immediacy of visual objectual knowledge, i.e. visual knowledge that a thing is *F*, for an object category *F*, such as avocado, tree, desk, etc. Joseph Shieber proposes a challenging dilemma in reply. Either knowing what *F*s look like requires having concepts such as *looks* or it doesn't. Either way my argument fails. If knowing what *F*s look like doesn't require having such concepts, then he claims we can give an immediacy-friendly anti-intellectualist account of knowing what *F*s look like, one that I neglected. If it does require having such concepts, then knowledge of what *F*s look like plays no important role in ordinary cases of knowing things to be *F* by their looks. I argue for several claims. First, Shieber's anti-intellectualist proposal fails for independent reasons. Second, I give reasons for thinking that knowing what *F*s look like doesn't require having a general concept of looks, which lessens worries about nonhuman animals having such knowledge. Finally, I consider the possibility, important to Shieber's argument, that nonhuman animals are simply incapable of knowing what *F*s look like. I argue the implications for human knowledge are far from clear.

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In 'Knowing What Things Look Like,'¹ I argued that we lack immediate visual knowledge of object kinds. If we ever have such knowledge, I assumed, we have it in certain paradigm cases, such as the case of seeing unmarked avocados in the supermarket and knowing they are avocados. I then argued that in these cases, the knowledge is not immediate, because of the way it relies on other knowledge, namely knowledge of what the relevant kinds of objects look like. For instance, in the supermarket case, you know that the things you see are avocados only because you know what avocados look like.

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¹In what follows, unless otherwise indicated, all references to my work are references to this paper (McGrath 2017).

My argument differs from well-known arguments against immediate perceptual knowledge. It doesn't appeal to higher-level requirements on justification or knowledge,² nor to the need to avoid bootstrapping nor to 'easy knowledge.'³ It is restricted in scope: it takes as its target not immediate perceptual knowledge in general, only immediate perceptual knowledge of object kinds. But if the argument succeeds, then certain popular, even dominant, views in epistemology are false, including liberal forms of foundationalism according to which perception affords one immediate knowledge of a wide range of rich properties of objects.⁴

In 'Looks and the Immediacy of Visual Objectual Knowledge,'⁵ Joseph Shieber gives a forceful critique of my paper. We can resist my argument, he thinks, if we attend carefully to issues concerning the conceptual requirements of knowing what objects of a kind *F* look like.. His paper raises important questions about and problems for my argument, ones that need addressing. I am grateful to have a chance to address them here.

1. My only-because argument and Shieber's dilemma

I start with an informal sketch of my argument. You're in the supermarket. You know, by the way they look, that those unlabeled things are avocados. Where does this knowledge come from? What are your sources? Well, you know what avocados look like – that's one source for your knowledge that those things are avocados, but it's a source of mediate knowledge. Do you have another source, one for immediate knowledge? If you do, then you would still have it if you didn't know what avocados looked like. But if you didn't know what avocados looked like, you wouldn't even be in a position to know those are avocados. Thus, you know those are avocados only because of some other knowledge of yours, i.e. your knowledge of what avocados look like. Thus, you lack any immediate source for your knowledge that those are avocados; and thus this knowledge isn't immediate.

We make this reasoning more rigorous as well as more general. First, a bit of terminology. My argument presupposes an account of immediate

²Cf. Bonjour 1985 and Wright 2007.

³Cf. Cohen 2002.

⁴Adherents of such liberal views include epistemologists sympathetic to versions of 'phenomenal conservatism' and 'dogmatism,' such as Huemer (2001), Tucker (2010), and Pryor (2001), Siegel (2012), as well as reliabilists such as Goldman (2008) and Lyons (2009).

⁵This is Shieber 2017.

knowledge in terms of ‘epistemizers.’ One has an epistemizer E for a proposition p just when E is a (possibly complex) factor that positions one to know p . Epistemizers can be mediate or immediate. An epistemizer is mediate if some factual knowledge appears in it; otherwise, it is immediate.⁶ One has immediate knowledge that p just if one’s belief that p is based on an immediate epistemizer for p . This account fleshes out the intuitive idea of immediate knowledge as factual knowledge that doesn’t ‘rest on’ other factual knowledge.

Now for the more careful general argument (McGrath 10-11). Imagine in a paradigm case that you know, by their looks, that some things are Fs (e.g. where Fs could be avocados, cats, trees). Then we have:

The only-because argument.

- (1) You know that those things are Fs , and you know what Fs look like (where the latter helps put you in a position to know that those are Fs).
- (2) If you have an epistemizer for those are Fs that doesn’t include your knowledge of what Fs look like, then if you didn’t know what Fs look like, you’d still be in a position to know that those are Fs .
- (3) However, if you didn’t know what Fs look like, you wouldn’t be in a position to know that those are Fs .
- (4) So, every epistemizer you have for *those are Fs* includes your knowledge of what Fs look like. (From 2 and 3). (Colloquially: you know those are Fs only because you know what Fs look like.)
- (5) So, your knowledge that those are Fs is not immediate. (From 1 and 4)

Step (4) doesn’t strictly entail (5). For, suppose that knowing what Fs look like isn’t factual knowledge but rather a kind of visual ability to recognize Fs (one not grounded in factual knowledge). Then a kind of anti-intellectualism would be true of knowing what Fs look like, akin to anti-intellectualism about knowing how. If some such form of anti-intellectualism were correct, then even if your knowledge of what Fs look like figures in all your epistemizers for *those are Fs* , this fact need not compromise the immediacy of your knowledge based on it. To complete the argument from (4) to (5), we would require what Shieber calls the ‘Looks-Fact-Link Principle’:

⁶I modify these conditions slightly in the final version given in the paper (6), but they will do for our purposes here.

LFL: Every route by which your knowledge of what *Fs* look like serves as an epistemizer for *those are Fs* includes some factual knowledge of yours. (Shieber 742)

Much of the burden of my paper was to argue against forms of anti-intellectualism which undermine LFL.

Now for Shieber's response. Shieber claims that my discussion of knowing what *Fs* look 'relies for much of its plausibility on the assumption that knowledge of what an object looks like requires possession of 'the concept of "looks," of how things appear visually.' (741) Once we give up this assumption, he thinks we can endorse an account of knowing what *Fs* look like that enables us to resist the only-because argument. Knowing what *Fs* look like is part of all epistemizers in the paradigm cases, but its inclusion doesn't make an epistemizer mediate. This blocks LFL. Moreover, he claims that 'even if one accepts the close connection between knowing what an object looks like and possession of the concept of "looks", one can resist the force of McGrath's argument by denying that possession of the concept of "looks" is necessary for visual objectual knowledge.' (741) In that case, the only-because argument will fail at step (3).

I will take up his invitation to view his overall argument as a dilemma (747). Either knowing what *Fs* look like requires possession of the concepts such as that of a look, or it doesn't; in either case, my argument fails. This present paper replies to this dilemma. I focus almost exclusively on its first horn, although I will mention the second horn near the end.

2. Knowledge of what *Fs* look like – de dicto vs. de re

Before responding to this dilemma, it's important to note that one may use 'knows what *Fs* looks like' in two different ways, only one of which is employed in my only-because argument.

Consider Dmitri, who regularly helps pack avocados into cartons for shipping, along with many other sorts of fruits and vegetables. He can easily distinguish avocados by sight from the others. And he knows of them that they are a kind of fruit or vegetable. But he doesn't know which kind they are. So, he knows, of individual avocados he sees, that they are of that kind, where 'that kind' refers to the kind avocado. But he doesn't know they are avocados. It's not that he lacks the concept *avocado*; he knows propositions such as avocados are used in making guacamole and avocados are grown in warm climates. But he hasn't connected up the avocado-appearance with the concept *avocado*.

Does Dmitri know what avocados look like? In one (salient) sense, no. He won't learn this until someone points out to him that these things are avocados or, say, until he watches a friend cut into them and make guacamole. This sort of knowledge of what avocados look like, the sort he is missing, is precisely the sort that connects up the appearance with the concept *avocado*. Having this knowledge would – given the relevant background facts – position him to know of things with that appearance that they are avocados. However, even in his present state, when looking at the avocados he is to pack, Dmitri does know, of that kind of thing, i.e. of avocados, what they look like. For want of better terminology, let's call the first sort of knowledge of what avocados look like **de dicto** knowledge and call the second **de re**.⁷ Dmitri lacks de dicto knowledge of what avocados look like but has de re knowledge. The de dicto knowledge is attributable using 'knows what avocados look like' in such a way as to give 'avocados' an opaque occurrence; the de re knowledge is attributable using this verb phrase giving 'avocados' a transparent occurrence.⁸

It is the de dicto knowledge of what *Fs* look like that is under discussion in the only-because argument. We can see this by just looking at the first premise. If you had only the de re knowledge, and not the de dicto, you wouldn't be positioned to know those are *Fs*, and premise 1 would be false.

Going forward, when evaluating accounts of knowing what *Fs* look like, with a goal to evaluating the only-because argument, we should evaluate them as accounts of de dicto knowledge of what *Fs* look like.⁹

⁷Two clarifications here. First, by using 'de dicto' I do not mean to imply that the knowledge in question is knowledge of a dictum, i.e., a proposition. Recognitional abilities, which aren't themselves knowledge of propositions can be de dicto vs. de re in the sense I'm describing. One can use 'S has an ability to recognize *Fs* by sight' in a way in which '*Fs*' occurs transparently, but also use it in a way in which it occurs opaquely. In the first case, the truth of the ascription requires that S have the ability, of an *Fs* S sees, to recognize it's one of them/that sort; in the second, what is required is that S have the ability, of an *F* that S sees, to recognize that it is an *F*. Second, I use 'de re' with respect to the object kind, not with respect to the look. (How the look is conceived or cognized is an important issue under 'intellectualist' theories of knowing what *Fs* look like (see McGrath 2017, 16–17), but not the present concern.)

⁸This point is noted by Sainsbury and Tye (2012, 167). See also McGrath 2017 (17 n19).

⁹There is a third way to use 'know what *Fs* look like', one in which 'what *Fs* look like' is used as a free relative. (See Stoljar (2016) for discussion.) When used in this way, the knowledge attributed – call it *free relative knowledge* – is knowledge of a property, knowledge of a certain look, a look that *Fs* in fact have. Compare knowing 'where Jon is' merely by knowing that place. If you know Houston, and Jon is in Houston, then even if you don't have any knowledge about Jon, you would count as having this sort of knowledge of where Jon is. This free-relative knowledge is even further removed from the *only-because* argument than the de re knowledge is. When we explain someone's being positioned to know that a thing is *F* by referring to their knowing what *Fs* look like – as done in step 1 of the *only-because* argument – we're not offering up as *explanans* of their being so positioned the fact that they know a certain look. Knowledge of the look, unlike de re knowledge of what *Fs* look like, doesn't even suffice for knowledge *concerning* *Fs* at all.

3. Problems with Shieber's first horn

Let's suppose that knowing what *Fs* look like does not require having the concept *looks* or similar concepts. In that case, Shieber claims there will be an attractive anti-intellectualist¹⁰ account of knowing what *Fs* look like which falsifies LPL and so blocks the move from (4) to (5) in my argument.

Shieber acknowledges the inadequacy of certain forms of anti-intellectualism (743). He grants, for instance, that knowing what *Fs* look like is not a mere ability to know by sight of an *F* with the characteristic *F*-look, that it is an *F*. One can know what humans look like even in the world of *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, a world in which one lacks this recognitional ability (McGrath 22). Nor does he contest my claim that knowing what *Fs* look like isn't a disposition to believe or categorize *Fs* as *Fs* by their look in the absence of evidence they aren't *Fs*.¹¹ But he thinks I've missed a defensible anti-intellectualist account, namely the:

Anti-intellectualist anti-intellectualist theory: to know what *Fs* look like is to have the ability to recognize *Fs* by their characteristic look *W*; i.e. to have the ability visually to distinguish *Fs* from non-*W*-looking things; in some cases, this ability is not grounded in the possession of factual knowledge. (Shieber 745)

For short, he calls this *anti-intellectualism*². He sees it as more thoroughly anti-intellectualist than any of the accounts I mention.

Shieber claims that anti-intellectualism² has certain virtues, as compared with the immediacy-friendly anti-intellectualist accounts that I consider and reject. It allows that one can know what humans look like in the body-snatchers world, because in that world one can distinguish humans from non-human-looking things. It accommodates the Ringers Principle (McGrath 24), according to which, if one understands what ringers are, one knows what *Fs* look like iff one knows what ringers for *Fs* look like, because one can distinguish ringers for *Fs* from things that don't have

¹⁰Anti-intellectualist accounts of knowing what *Fs* look like take such knowledge to be neither identical to or grounded in factual knowledge. The intended comparison is anti-intellectualism about knowing how. See McGrath 2017 (section 5) for discussion.

¹¹As I note in McGrath 2017 (23), you can know what a perfect ringer for an avocado looks like without having any such disposition. Here *F* is *ringer for an avocado*. Moreover, the view that knowing what *Fs* look like is such a disposition fails for more 'normal' categories as well. Consider *F* = *powered sugar*. Suppose a person learns what powdered sugar looks like. Must they be disposed to respond to this distinctive look with a belief or seeming that it is powdered sugar, in the absence of evidence it's not? Not plausibly. They might leave open the possibility that it is flour. Indeed, consider *F* = *avocado*. One might learn what avocados look like but lack the disposition to respond to this look with a belief or seeming that it is avocado because one leaves open the possibility that other kinds of things in her normal environment might have the same appearance. Maybe they *shouldn't* leave this possibility open if they have no evidence for it, but their leaving it open is no bar to their learning and knowing what avocados look like.

the F-look. It doesn't require possession of concepts such as that of a *look* and therefore doesn't preclude us nonhuman animals and small children from having such knowledge. And it is immediacy-friendly: if it is correct, then in paradigm cases such as the supermarket case, one's knowledge of what Fs look like gives one an immediate epistemizer for those are Fs. Thus, LFL fails and with it the only-because argument.

To evaluate anti-intellectualism², we need to be clear about the nature of the relevant discriminatory ability. What is the ability visually to distinguish Fs from non-*W*-looking things?

3.1. *Anti-Intellectualism*² – *response ability version*

Understood in the most natural way, the ability in question doesn't even require possessing the concept *F*, let alone that of a look. It is the ability to respond consistently, based on vision alone, to Fs and other *W*-looking things in one way and to non-*W*-looking things in another way, where *W* is the way Fs look. The ways of responding here could be purely behavioral, e.g. putting all the *W*-looking things in one pile and the non-*F*-looking things in another, or, in the case of pigeons, pecking in the presence of the former but not the latter.¹² What underwrites such an ability is a subject's disposition to be affected differently in vision by members of the two classes of things: the *W*-looking things look some way to the subject that the non-*W*-looking things don't. Call this version of Shieber's anti-intellectualism² the response ability version.

However, a pigeon who has this sort of response ability for cell phones, say, would not thereby have the sort of knowledge of what cell phones look like that is at issue in the *only-because* argument – the *de dicto* knowledge, which involves linking the relevant appearance to the concept cell phone. Nor would Dmitri, the avocado stocker, despite having the concept avocado. Interpreted in this way, Shieber's anti-intellectualism² is of no help in blocking my argument.

At this point, one might begin to worry that I've stacked the deck in my favor. My *only-because argument* didn't employ any technical talk of 'de dicto' knowledge. True, in the supermarket case, the *de dicto* knowledge of what avocados look like would position you to know those are avocados, and mere *de re* knowledge without *de dicto* knowledge wouldn't.

¹²Watanabe, Sakamoto, and Wakita (1995) taught pigeons to distinguish Monet paintings from Picasso paintings. I very much doubt that these pigeons have the concept of a Monet painting, or that they know that the painting is a Monet, as opposed to knowing it has a certain complex shape/color feature (or appearance). For more on pigeons' visual abilities, see the references at the end of Shieber's paper.

But perhaps the combination of de re knowledge and a suitable ability/disposition to apply the concept *avocado* would position you to know those are avocados. If so, we could say that the de re knowledge goes ‘some distance toward’ positioning one to know of avocados, by their looks, that they are avocados. It ‘helps’ position one to know such things.¹³ So long as the anti-intellectualism² succeeds as an account of this de re knowledge, then, it might seem that Shieber has all he needs to defend the first horn of his dilemma.

There are two problems with this line of reasoning, even setting aside the issue of de dicto knowledge. The first is that the account of how the de re knowledge helps position one to know makes it hard to see how it positions one to have immediate knowledge. The story seems to be that the de re knowledge in the supermarket case gives you knowledge, of avocados, that those things are of that sort, and then that knowledge – which is factual knowledge – is connected up to the concept *avocado*, resulting in your factual knowledge that those are avocados. The problem is that this is mediation: the epistemizer described includes factual knowledge and so cannot ground immediate knowledge.¹⁴

Second, anti-intellectualism² in the current version is a poor account even of de re knowledge of what *Fs* look like. Yes, it accommodates the Ringers Principle. But it also implies the truth of a stronger and undesired principle:

(Lookalikes Principle): where *Fs* and *Gs* look alike, you know what *Fs* look like iff you also know what *Gs* look like.

According to the *Lookalikes Principle*, if you know what diamonds look like, you also know what cubic zirconia stones look like. This is certainly false for the de dicto case: one might have de dicto knowledge of what diamonds look like while lacking the concept of cubic zirconia stones entirely. But it is also false for the de re case. Suppose one knows, of diamonds, what they look like; it doesn’t follow that one knows, of cubic zirconia stones, what they look like.¹⁵ Similarly, if I know of my friend Jessica,

¹³I thank an anonymous referee for this question. The question fits well with Shieber’s comments in footnote 6 of his paper (747).

¹⁴One might object that I’m presupposing an overly fine-grained account of propositions here. However, I don’t think fineness of grain is a crucial issue. If the objects of belief and factual knowledge are coarse-grained propositions, then guises will enter into beliefs/knowledge, and the distinction between mediate and immediate knowledge will be sensitive to these guises. One knowledge state will be capable of mediating another even if they have the same proposition as object. For instance, suppose Lois Lane knows that Superman can fly. This is knowledge of a proposition $\langle x \text{ flies} \rangle$ under a ‘Superman’ guise. She then learns that Superman is Clark Kent. This is knowledge of an identity proposition under a pair of guises. These together give her knowledge of $\langle x \text{ flies} \rangle$ under a ‘Clark Kent’ guise. The latter is mediated by the former, despite their having the same proposition as object.

what she looks like, and it turns out that a woman Jane Frye who lived in seventeenth century York looks the same as her, it doesn't follow I know, of this person Jane Frye, what she looks like. Even de re knowledge of what an object -- or kind of object -- looks like requires the subject to have established a link between an appearance and some representation of that object or kind of *F*. Such a link is needed in order to know anything of an object or kind of object. A mere response ability for *F*s doesn't require any such link, and so doesn't suffice for even de re knowledge of *F*s.¹⁶

Moreover, the insistence on de dicto knowledge is justified. Even if one could explain in the way adumbrated above how the de re knowledge might help position you to know *those are avocados*, and thus one could secure step (1) of the *only-because argument*, one would run into more serious problems with the counterfactual reasoning at step (3). This step claims that if you didn't know what avocados look like, you wouldn't be in a position to know those are avocados. In evaluating this claim, what is the relevant counterfactual situation you are considering? Ask yourself, intuitively: you're in the supermarket looking at the avocados; if you didn't know what avocados looked like, what would the situation be like? Well, you'd still be there in the supermarket with very same avocados in front of you. And you'd still be positioned to know, of that kind of thing -- i.e. of avocados -- what they look like. That is to say: you'd still have the de re knowledge. The knowledge you'd lack is precisely the knowledge linking the appearance and the concept avocado, i.e. the de dicto knowledge of what avocados look like.¹⁷ It's the de

¹⁵It's unproblematic that the implication would go through if one also knew that diamonds and cubic zirconia stones look alike, or even if one knew, of diamonds and cubic zirconia stones, that the former look like the latter. But the implication does not go through when such knowledge is absent.

¹⁶You might worry that this same objection would undermine the *Ringers Principle*, interpreted so as to apply to de re knowledge of what *F*s look like. I don't think it would. Suppose I understand what ringers are, and suppose I know, of *F*s, what they look like. Understanding ringers, I'll also know, of *F*s, that they look the same as ringers for them. But then it seems I'll know, of ringers for *F*s, that they look this way, too. The converse works as well, I think. If I know of ringers for *F*s, what they look like, and understand what ringers are, I'll know that they look the same as ringers for them. But then I'll know, of ringers for ringers of *F*s -- i.e., of *F*s -- what they look like.

If we try to apply the same reasoning to subclasses of ringers, it fails. Suppose I know, of diamonds, what they look like. I know, of them, that they look the same as ringers for them. So, I'll know, of ringers for them, i.e., ringers for diamonds, what they look like. But if I don't know, of cubic zirconia stones and ringers for diamonds, that the first is a subclass of the second, I won't know, of cubic zirconia stones, what they look like. It can be an epistemic accomplishment to learn, of a pair of classes, that one is a subclass of the others. This is so even under a liberal conception of what it takes to know, of a class of things, that it has a feature.

¹⁷Notice, as well, that when you evaluate the counterfactual, you certainly don't suppose yourself to be severely impaired or somehow abnormal in such a way that you can't distinguish avocado-looking things from non-avocado-looking things. In the relevant situation, you still have the Shieber-style response ability for avocados.

dicto knowledge of what *F*s look like that is relevant to the argument from start to finish. If one is to resist the argument using an account of knowing what *F*s look like, it must be an account of the de dicto knowledge.¹⁸

3.2. Anti-intellectualism²: the ‘know which is *F* and which isn’t’ version

Although it is a strained reading of his text,¹⁹ there is an alternative understanding of Shieber’s description of the relevant visual discriminatory ability, one on which it amounts to being able to know, upon perceiving an *F* and a non-*W*-looking thing, which is an *F* and which isn’t. Having this ability requires possession of the concept *F* and linking a certain appearance to that concept.

However, this proposal runs straight into the counterexamples I presented for the other immediacy-friendly forms of anti-intellectualism. For example, you retain your knowledge of what humans look like even in the body-snatcher situation, but in that situation you wouldn’t have the ability to know, when you see a human and a non-human-looking thing, that one of them is a human (it could easily be a pod-person), and so you wouldn’t have the ability to know, of such a pair, which is a human and which isn’t. At best you would know only that if one is a human, it is this one and not that one.²⁰

3.3. A general problem for immediacy-friendly forms of anti-intellectualism

Shieber hopes to identify knowing what *F*s look like with a visual discriminatory ability that will support immediate knowledge. We’ve seen that the two natural candidates for the ability he describes in his formulation of anti-intellectualism² cannot support any such identification. But are

¹⁸One might wonder whether the response ability version of anti-intellectualism² would perform better if construed as an account of free-relative knowledge of what *F*s look like. I will not explore the matter. See note 9 for reasons for setting aside free-relative knowledge of what *F*s look like in our discussion.

¹⁹Shieber writes that anti-intellectualism² ‘doesn’t place **any** conceptual requirements on the possession of knowledge of what things look like’ (475). The emphasis is mine. The current interpretation does place a conceptual requirement on this knowledge: possession of the concept of the relevant object kind *F*.

²⁰Could Shieber explain anti-intellectualism² in terms of an ability to have this knowledge of conditionals? No. The ability to have that knowledge will not issue in immediate knowledge in paradigm cases: to arrive at knowledge that *this is a human* from knowledge of the conditional, you would also need knowledge that one of them is a human, and the incorporation of this knowledge into the epistemizer would make it mediate.

there others? What we would need is an ability that meets the following two conditions.

(1) Having the proposed ability does not imply having the ability to know, of an *F* whose look *W* one perceives, that it is an *F*, nor does it imply having dispositions to believe *W*-looking *F*s are *F*s, or even to have it seem to one that they are *F*s, in the absence of counterevidence.

(2) Having the proposed ability helps position one in paradigm cases, such as the supermarket case, to have immediate knowledge that the thing seen is an *F* and it does so by linking the *W*-appearance with the concept *F*. That is to say: in these cases, the proposed ability figures in an immediate epistemizer for *the thing is F*.

(1) is necessary because, as we've seen, knowing what *F*s look like doesn't require having any such ability or disposition. If the relevant discriminatory ability is to be necessary and sufficient for knowing what *F*s look like, it must have the same entailments. As for (2), a combination of two things make it necessary for anyone hoping to identify knowing what *F*s look like with a visual discriminatory ability that will support immediate knowledge. First, knowing what *F*s look like does position one in paradigm cases to know that the thing seen is *F* and it does so in the appearance-concept linking way. So, if the relevant ability is knowing what *F*s look like, it must do this as well. Second, the aspiration is to develop immediacy-friendly an anti-intellectualist account, and thus the ability must not merely position one to know the thing is *F* but to know this immediately. It must figure in an immediate epistemizer.

I do not see any plausible candidates for such an ability. The only candidates that satisfy (2) seem to violate (1). We have seen an illustration of this predicament in the two versions of anti-intellectualism². The response ability version violates (2); the 'knowing which is which' version satisfies (2) but violates (1).

4. On to the second horn?

At this point, if you agree with what I've argued so far, you might think it is time to turn to the second horn of Shieber's dilemma. Your reasoning might be as follows: if there really is no way to understand the relevant discriminatory ability so as to meet the above conditions, we should conclude that knowing what *F*s look like requires having concepts of a *look* or *looking like*. But then the second horn of Shieber's dilemma kicks in: if knowing what *F*s look like has these requirements, then nonhuman animals aren't capable of it. Nevertheless, such animals can visually recognize and know things to

belong to certain object categories. It follows that knowledge of what *Fs* look like is not part of what positions them to have such knowledge. Rather, when they know an *F* by their looks, they have an immediate epistemizer for its being an *F*, one comprised principally of an appropriate recognitional ability. Next, since ordinary adult human knowledge of object kinds is in relevant ways similar to that of nonhuman animals, we, too, have this same immediate epistemizer in the paradigm cases. What goes wrong in the only-because argument would then be step (3). If you lacked knowledge of what *Fs* look like, you would still have an immediate epistemizer and so would be positioned to know the thing is an *F*.

However, in my paper I did offer a proposal that, if correct, would block claim that the second horn 'kicks in.' The proposal is that to know what *Fs* look like is to know that *Fs* are ... , where '...' picks out the property of looking *W*, where that property is grasped in an appropriate way, e.g. via a perceptual concept or via acquaintance(14). In the paper, I use '*W*' for this property, perhaps confusingly, given my use of '*W*' for ways things can look. Let's instead use '*W*-looking' as an adjective expressing this property. The hyphenation should be understood to indicate that this expression is semantically simple, while also indicating to the reader what sort of property it expresses. We can think of the property of being *W*-looking as a particular look. It is necessary and sufficient for having this look that a thing *look W*. These fine details aside, the important point is that on this view knowing what *Fs* look like does not require having any general concept of appearance, such as the concept of a *look* or of *looking like* but only concepts of particular appearances. I suggest that nonhuman animals could count as knowing what *Fs* look like by knowing such facts.

Shieber acknowledges the proposal but sees two problems with it (748). The first is that it's not clear that nonhuman animals do have this sort of knowledge, or that all those who do have the relevant visual recognitional abilities have it. I grant that this depends on empirical issues, and here I will only speculate. Nevertheless, I see good grounds for optimism, as I'll explain.

If such animals can perceive relevant appearances (which can be thought of as complexes of low-level properties), and if they have the power to form repeatable representations of those complexes, in a perceptual or imagistic format, this may be all that is needed to have perceptual concepts of those features. They might link the concept *F* to the perceptually formatted concept of looking-*W* in a way that is sufficient for factual knowledge that *Fs* are *W*-looking. Such a linkage might help

explain not merely how the animal knows from its looks that a thing is *F*, but a variety of other facts. For instance, it might help explain why, when searching for an *F*, the animal is on the lookout for things with that sort appearance, or how the animal knows a thing isn't an *F* when it sees something that clearly isn't *W*-looking.²¹

Admittedly, no such story about animals possessing perceptual concepts of appearances could be correct if there were highly demanding requirements on concept possession, e.g. requirements of recombability such as Evans' Generality Constraint.²² Whatever representations of appearances such animals might have, they won't be sufficiently recombinable to qualify as genuine concepts under such requirements. The same would go for representations of object kinds as well. If we accept such strong requirements on concept possession, we presumably ought to be skeptical about whether factual knowledge that *p* really requires possession of concepts corresponding to the constituents of the proposition that *p*. On the other hand, if we reject these requirements, this would open the door to thinking that certain non-human animals do have concepts, including concepts of object kinds and perhaps concepts of certain appearance properties.²³ And if they have these concepts, they might know facts such as *F*s are *W*-looking.

In short, however things fall with respect to demandingness of conditions on concept possession, it's not only far from clear that nonhuman animals are incapable of knowing that *F*s are *W*-looking, but there is some plausibility to the thought that they are capable of it.²⁴

Shieber sees a second problem with the proposal:

²¹For convenience, in this discussion I have ignored issues about the identity and determinateness of looks. I have proceeded as if object kinds have a single characteristic look. This is an oversimplification. In my 2017 (36-38), I discuss some of the complexities. This topic is relevant here, because certain species of nonhuman animal will of course be unable to perceive some appearance features that normal humans can perceive (and vice versa), e.g., certain color properties. In my 2017, I noted the context-sensitivity of 'what *F*s look like.' But I suspect that this doesn't go far enough. In addition, different subjects can know what *F*s look like in virtue of associating *distinct looks*, which are all genuine looks of *F*s, with the concept *F*.

²²Evans writes: '... if a subject can be credited with the thought that *a* is *F*, then he must have the conceptual resources for entertaining the thought that *a* is *G*, for every property of being *G* of which he has a conception.' (1982, 104)

²³For instance, we might think the pigeons in experiments by Watanabe, Sakamoto, and Wakita (1995) have concepts of certain complex appearance properties (ones distinctive of Monet paintings) and have the ability to recognize and thereby know them when present.

²⁴Even independently of recombination considerations, is it plausible to think that nonhuman animals have the concept *avocado*, or even *tree*? I have assumed so here, but the assumption is inessential. They might lack these concepts but still have concepts of the same categories – concepts that they associate with expectations concerning properties of the categories' members, e.g., not only their appearance properties but their affordances.

'McGrath is arguing that, given all plausible readings of knowing what *F* looks like, objectual visual knowledge turns out to be mediate rather than immediate. Given this argument, McGrath cannot now defend step 3 [the claim that if I didn't know what *F*s looked like I wouldn't know this is an *F*] by saying that there is at least one reading of knowing what *F* looks like according to which step 3 can be defended.'

On further thought, I now suspect that the conditions for knowing what *F*s look like aren't as rigid as Shieber seems to assume in this passage (and which I may have implied in my paper). I suspect we don't have to choose between the proposal that knowing what *F*s look like is knowing *F*s look *W* and the proposal that it is knowing that *F*s are *W*-looking.

Let me explain why. Consider the matter first from the perspective of intellectualism. Under intellectualism, knowledge of what *F*s look like is grounded in the right sort of factual knowledge of a suitable answer to the question what do *F*s look like? One suitable answer is *F*s look *W*. But so is: *F*s are *W*-looking, where '*W*-looking' is semantically simple, expressing a particular look property. There may be other suitable answers. If this is right, then a nonhuman animal might count as knowing what *F*s look like despite lacking general concepts such as *a look*, *looking like*, and *looking some way*. For, the animal may know that *F*s are *W*-looking. Such knowledge requires possessing a concept of a particular look but not the general concepts of appearance. Normal mature humans, though, might know what *F*s look like in virtue of knowledge states that do require possession of general concepts of appearance, namely by virtue of knowing that *F*s look *W*.

I suspect the same will hold true under anti-intellectualism. In my paper, I suggested that a plausible, although immediacy-unfriendly, version of anti-intellectualism was to take knowledge of what *F*s look like to be an ability to know, of an *F*, that it looks like an *F* (McGrath 25). Call this the looks-like-an-*F* ability. Compare this ability with the ability to have a slightly different piece of factual knowledge, namely to know, of an *F*, that it is like an *F*, where the concept like, when employed in the manifesting the ability, has as its content similarity of appearance. (This ability is just as immediacy-unfriendly as the looks-like-an-*F* ability. Knowledge that it is like an *F* figures in the epistemizer for knowing that it is an *F*.) Call this the like-an-*F* ability. The like-an-*F* ability should be enough to qualify the subject as knowing what *F*s look like, just as much as the looks-like-an-*F* ability. Manifestation of the looks-like-an-*F* ability requires possession of a concept of *looking like*, but this isn't true

of the like-an-*F* ability, which requires only possession of a concept of similarity and a disposition to employ that concept to capture a certain respect of similarity in particular cases, namely similarity of appearance.

The basic thought here – which I’m only sketching – is that knowing what *F*s look like might be capable of being grounded in different knowledge states, ones with different demands on the conceptual repertoire of the knower. If this is right, one needn’t choose between the slightly different proposals for what knowing what *F*s look like. For, one could say in response to Shieber that, yes, on all the most plausible accounts of knowing what *F*s look like, step (3) of the only-because argument retains its force, and that is because, on the most plausible accounts, whether intellectualist or anti-intellectualist, knowing what *F*s look like doesn’t require one to have general concepts of appearance. I am optimistic about the prospects of this line of thinking, although I admit that more needs to be said about which knowledge states/abilities can and which can’t ground one’s knowledge of what *F*s look like and why.

5. Concluding remarks on the dialectical situation (and comments on the second horn of Shieber’s dilemma)

In his conclusion, in preparing to recap his dilemma, Shieber writes that.

nonhuman animals’ differential responses encourage us to say either that (i) those non-human animals know what *F*s look like or (ii) they know *F*s by their looks, where knowing *F*s by their looks puts them in a position to know that those objects are *F*s. (747)

I think this under-describes what we’re encouraged to say. We’re encouraged to say both (i) and (ii) – that they know what *F*s look like and that they have the ability to recognize *F*s by their looks. Shieber himself seems clearly pulled to say both of these things in many instances, as am I. It is hard to resist saying that our cats not only can recognize birds by their looks but know what birds look like, and indeed that they can recognize them because they know what they look like. These strong inclinations, in the face of nonhuman animals’ differential responses, make it difficult to be satisfied with a theory according to which knowing what *F*s look like plays no role in nonhuman animals’ knowledge of objects by their looks.

However, let’s suppose that, given the empirical facts, we are stuck with the surprising conclusion that certain nonhuman animals which show the differential responses in question are incapable of knowing

what *Fs* look like on any plausible account of what such knowledge requires. If, despite this, we still want to say that these animals do know *Fs* by their looks, we will be forced to explain their knowledge in broadly reliabilist terms, e.g. in terms of abilities to know *Fs* by their looks or to get it right reliably (in normal situations), where these abilities are not grounded in factual knowledge and so yield immediate knowledge when manifested.

This would not yet refute the *only-because* argument, because it is about us, about normal adult human beings. Shieber would have us conclude that if a certain broadly reliabilist account holds of nonhuman animals, it applies to us as well, including in the paradigm cases. But this inference is not a simple matter. In order to make it reasonable one would need to answer a number of questions. I'll end by laying out three for consideration here.

I. If our visual knowledge of *Fs* as *Fs* in paradigm cases is explained in the broadly reliabilist way, what epistemic role is there for our knowledge of what *Fs* look like? Is it merely a second and independent route that we have to knowing that a thing is an *F* in addition to the route through the reliable ability? That seems *prima facie* unlikely. But if one route, one epistemizer, depends on the other, what is the nature of the dependence? On the reliabilist approach of the sort in question, it can't be that our ability depends on our knowledge of what *Fs* look like – that would make our ability fundamentally different from that of nonhuman animals, assuming they are incapable of that knowledge. The task is then to explain how the knowledge of what *Fs* look like somehow derives from the ability. But how?²⁵

II. Can the broadly reliabilist approach yield a good account of the ways our perceptual justification can be defeated? When you learn there are plastic lookalike-avocados abounding in the store, this defeats your justification for thinking, of an avocado-looking thing you see, that is an avocado. How? On an account of justification in terms of knowledge of what avocados look like, the story is presumably this: the knowledge of the look-alikes gives one reason to think that being avocado-looking in the circumstances isn't indicative of being an avocado, and this undermines the support for those are avocados which one had from one's knowledge of what avocados look like. Notice that no reasoning about one's mental states enters in here. And that seems plausible. Can the

²⁵These issues are discussed in McGrath 2018 (126-129) and briefly in McGrath 2017 (26n26).

reliabilist explain how there is defeat in this case without appealing to one's gaining reasons to think that one's perceptual state is unreliable?²⁶

III. Very often positive recognitional abilities come with a corresponding negative recognitional ability. The ability to know avocados by their characteristic look normally brings in its train the ability to know something isn't an avocado by its not having that look. This is certainly true for normal adult humans. We can see why the negative ability should come along with the positive one if the positive ability depends on knowing what *Fs* look like, at least if the latter is grounded in factual knowledge to the effect that *Fs* look *W* (or that *Fs* are *W*-looking). For, perception of something as not looking *W*, together with knowledge that *Fs* look *W*, would position one to know, in normal situations, that the thing isn't an *F*. But what would explain the fact that negative abilities come along with the positive ones under reliabilism? Suppose you have an ability to go from the perception of *Fs* as looking *W* to the knowledge that they are *Fs*. Why should this positive ability bring with it the negative ability to go from the perception of non-*Fs* as not looking *W* to the knowledge that they aren't *Fs*? Why do such abilities so often come in pairs?

If we cannot answer such questions satisfactorily within the broadly reliabilist framework, and if the empirical facts rule out the possibility that nonhuman animals know what *Fs* look like, we may find it more plausible to think that our abilities to recognize *Fs* as *Fs* by their looks are grounded differently than those of nonhuman animals incapable of knowing what *Fs* look like. This would not amount to impalement on a horn of a dilemma but to a reasonable acceptance, after much theorizing, of a surprising conclusion.²⁷

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²⁶For further discussion, see McGrath 2021.

²⁷I am grateful to a referee for *Inquiry* for excellent comments which improved the paper in many ways, as well as to Joseph Shieber for writing such a thought-provoking paper.

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