

## PERCEPTUAL CONTENT AND THE UNITY OF PERCEPTION

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**ABSTRACT:** In recent work, Scott Soames (2010, 2013, 2015, 2019) and Peter Hanks (2011, 2013, 2015) have developed a theory of propositions on which these are constituted by complexes of intellectual acts. In this article, I adapt this type of theory to provide an account of perceptual content. After introducing terminology in section 1, I detail the approach proffered by Soames and Hanks in section 2, focusing on Hanks's version. In section 3, I introduce a problem that these theories face, namely, how to account for the unity among the relevant intellectual acts. Section 4 provides an answer to this problem of unity, while section 5 explicates the relation to Soames and Hanks. In section 6, I extend the model to a theory of the unity of experiential consciousness. Finally, in section 7, I apply the preceding considerations to debates about the nature of perceptual representation. The upshot will be that experiential unity is not simply a phenomenal feature of consciousness, but central to an account of the role perceptual representation plays in perceptual cognition.

As we perceive something, we rouse ourselves, so to speak, as though from a sleep with respect to the object. We grasp [it], comprehend it, we grasp ourselves with respect to it, [and] reflect upon ourselves.

—J. N. Tetens (1913, 284)

A concept should thus be understood as *consciousness of an act*, and more precisely of an act of *combining and grasping together*.

—Béatrice Longuenesse (1998, 46)

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In recent years there has been an increased interest in Kant's theory of perception<sup>1</sup>, and specifically Kant's view of the nature of "intuitions" (*Anschauungen*): immediate confrontations with objects.<sup>2</sup> Questions of interest include Kant's distinctive thoughts on the relation between perceptual awareness and self-awareness: the question of whether or not intuitions have representational content in the contemporary sense of the term, and if so, whether this content should be considered to be conceptual or non-conceptual.<sup>3</sup> However, one difficulty in approaching these issues from a contemporary point of view is that Kant appears to start from a very different mental metaphysics than is the contemporary standard. Specifically, Kant starts from a metaphysics of mind on which there is a critical place in cognition for certain mental *acts* associated with the mind's *faculties*. This model was standard for the early modern period, but contrasts with the contemporary model of understanding mental states in terms of attitudes or relations to propositions. Consequently, it is not entirely clear how to map a position in Kant's thinking to a position in twenty-first century philosophy of mind or perception.

In this article, I will bring Kant's thinking about perception into contact with an important recent reappraisal of "activist" mental metaphysics.<sup>4</sup> In recent work, Scott Soames (2010, 2013, 2015, 2019) and Peter Hanks (2011, 2013, 2015) have argued that we should reject act-object conceptions of propositional attitudes, and have developed instead a view broadly in the early modern mold, on which subjects constitute propositions through mental acts—acts like predication and referring to objects.<sup>5</sup> As I will argue, focusing on this contemporary development of the early

<sup>1</sup> References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1998) use standard A/B notation. Further Kant references: R = ('Reflexionen'; Kant 1882 Kant handschriftlicher Nachlaß AA ('Akademieausgabe') 14–19; Prol. = *Prolegomena for Any Future Metaphysics* (2001).

<sup>2</sup> There is a distinction between "pure" and "empirical" intuitions, only the latter of which have a perceptual character. I will only be concerned with empirical intuitions.

<sup>3</sup> For nonconceptualist readings, see Hanna (2005, 2008, 2011); Allais (2009); Tolley (2013); McLear (2014, 2015, 2016a, 2016b); Schulting and Onof (2015). For conceptualist readings, see Ginsborg (2006, 2008); Wenzel (2005); Griffith (2012); Van Mazijk (2014a, 2014b); Gomes (2014, 2017); McDowell (2009); Engstrom (2006); Connolly (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Strictly speaking, the work on which I will focus is in semantics, as it focuses on the nature of propositions. However, I will be focusing on the mental acts that, per these accounts, are involved in propositional representation.

<sup>5</sup> For the connection between perceptual content and mental acts, see also Susanna Schellenberg's recent work, on which: "perceptual consciousness is constituted by a mental activity . . . this view is in fact a version of representationalism" (Schellenberg 2019, 530). For Schellenberg, perceptual representation is constituted by the preconceptual exercise of "basic" or "simple" discriminatory capacities. By contrast, on the present account, the relevant capacities will have a more intellectual character.

modern conception of propositional representation brings to the fore an otherwise rarely discussed feature of Kant's account. For Kant, a core function of our cognitive faculties is to bring *unity* to our representations, including those implicated in perceptual experience. As I will show, this notion of cognitive capacities as playing a unifying role has clear application to the type of reappraisal of the early modern view developed by Soames and Hanks. Moreover, the role of such a unifying function is a central and distinctive feature of Kant's account of intuitions and is of special significance when considering the relevance of Kant's account of intuitions for contemporary thinking about perception. Specifically, I will argue that the relevant perceptual unity provides a novel and compelling way of developing the notion of perceptual content, which is at the heart of most contemporary accounts of perception.

This article will proceed as follows. After introducing terminology in section 1, I detail the "activist" theory of propositions as developed by Hanks and Soames in section 2, focusing on Hanks's version. In section 3, I introduce a problem that these theories face, namely how to account for the unity among the relevant intellectual acts. Section 4 provides an answer to this problem of unity, and section 5 explicates further details in the relation to Hanks and Soames. Section 6 extends the model to a theory of the unity of experiential consciousness. In section 7, finally, I apply the preceding considerations to debates about the nature of perceptual representation. The upshot will be that experiential unity is not simply a phenomenal feature of consciousness, but central to an account of the role perceptual representation plays in perceptual cognition.

## 1. CONSCIOUS UNITY AND PERCEPTUAL REPRESENTATION

Conscious experience is a unified phenomenon, in which the parts of experience seem to belong to a single whole. I am making my way across a narrow bridge, flanked by stone cliffs on either side. I look at the depths around me, the floor of the gorge shrouded in a thick mist. I attempt to focus my view on the movement of my feet, as I strain to control my fear on my way across this narrow path. All these different aspects present themselves in a unified manner, all of them parts of a single whole that is my visual experience, which is, in turn, part of my lived conscious life. As Michael Tye has put this idea:

The simplest hypothesis compatible with what is revealed by introspection is that, for each period of consciousness, there is only a single experience—an experience that represents everything experienced within the period of consciousness as a whole. (2003, 97)

In what follows I will refer to this part-whole relationship as the “unity of experience.”

My claim in this article is that the unity of experience is related to a second feature of experience: its representational content. According to theories in which perception has representational content, these representations capture the cognitive contribution of experience.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, so-called phenomenalist representational views hold that perceptual representations determine the phenomenal character of experience.<sup>7</sup> In this article, I will argue that all these features are connected: the unified character of experience is constituted by the way the experience has representational content, and both are associated with the cognitive apparatus of the perceiving subject. In short, I will argue for the following claim:

Unity Content Thesis: The unity of a conscious visual experience is constituted by the representational content of that state.

This claim raises a question that requires a brief answer for the purposes of this article: What is perceptual representational content? Roughly put, perceptual representation constitutes a particular answer to the question of how perception affords us awareness of the environment surrounding us. For a significant period of time, the dominant answer to this question in the analytic tradition was that perception includes direct awareness of *sense data*, nonphysical objects bearing particular sensory qualities.<sup>8</sup> More recently, however, the most common answer has been that perception *represents* the environment to be some way, and that a subject can accordingly *judge* that the environment is that way.<sup>9</sup> Martin Davies puts the idea as follows: “An experience may present to the world

<sup>6</sup> There are nonrepresentational theories of perception, on which perception does not have content, but I will not consider such theories in this article. For example, see Campbell (2002) and Fish (2009).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Tye (2002).

<sup>8</sup> As H. H. Price writes, “The term sense-datum is meant to be a neutral term. . . . The term is meant to stand for something whose existence is indubitable (however fleeting); something from which all theories of perception ought to start” (Price 1932, 37).

<sup>9</sup> While frequently still characterized as orthodoxy, the prominent debate between representational and relational views makes it more accurate to say the field is divided. I will not address this controversy here.

the subject as containing something square in front of her; and the subject may take that experience at face value and judge that there is something square in front of her” (1992, 22–23). Just so, John McDowell writes: “That things are thus and so is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgment: it becomes the content of a judgment if the subject decided to take the experience at face value” (1996, 26). I will here refer to this view that visual experiences represent, or alternatively that visual experiences bear representational contents, as *representationalism*.

There are different popular forms of representationalism. The classic idea as articulated by John Searle in his seminal *Intentionality* is that perceptual experience partakes in the intentional character of other mental attitudes like belief and desire by relating the subject to propositions (1983, 40).<sup>10</sup> Recently, the propositional version of representationalism has been less popular than a competing version, which understands perceptual content to be nonconceptual, that is, cognitively less sophisticated than a propositional attitude.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, some representationalists have emphasized the role of representational *capacities* over experiences bearing representational *contents*.<sup>12</sup> On these views, we may recognize the role of these capacities in experience without attributing to experience any content. For purposes of keeping this article straightforward, however, I will leave both of these distinctions and others aside and focus on the traditional propositional view. Accordingly, I will consider the view that, like beliefs, experiences bear propositions as their contents.

What is it for perceptual experiences to bear propositions as their contents? On the standard view, it means that perceptual experience is a relation between the subject and an item, namely a proposition. To be sure, this is not to *identify* perceptual experience with a propositional attitude like belief, but nevertheless the experience is supposed to relate the subject to the same proposition that she can subsequently believe. In this light, consider the following claim:

Content Thesis: The cognitive contribution of perception, that is, the significance perceptual experience has in the acquisition of perceptual knowledge, is captured by the experience’s representational content.

<sup>10</sup> The idea that perception, like belief and desire, is a propositional attitude has more recently been defended by Alex Byrne and Michael Tye.

<sup>11</sup> See Peacocke (1992, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> This distinction is sometimes referred to as the opposition between “content” and “act” versions of representationalism. See for example the discussion in Toribio (2008). I will not discuss this distinction here, although my view may be expressed in either mode.

Understood this way, the core idea of perceptual content is that it spells out what, on the basis of the experience, the subject can know, should judge, or has *prima facie* entitlement to believe.<sup>13</sup>

To take the full measure of the traditional representationalist view, it is worth asking how this is so. What makes perceptual content salient to capturing the cognitive contribution perception makes? Commonly, if often implicitly, the thought is that a representational content spells out *a way* that the environment can be judged to be. Matthew Boyle expresses this conception as follows:

The notion of perceptual content . . . is the idea that perception presents objects *as* being certain ways (or equivalently: as having certain properties or features.) . . . the idea is that perceptual content involves a referential element (marked by “things”), on the one hand, and a classificatory element (marked by “thus-and-so”), on the other hand. (Boyle, manuscript, 10)<sup>14</sup>

In this passage, Boyle specifies what we can characterize as a content’s “attributive complement”: the part of the representation that assigns a property to a perceived particular. The reason why the attributive complement is essential to this conception of perceptual content is that it articulates the logic of perceptual cognition expressed by the idea of perceptual content. It is the fact that perception represents an item *as F* that licenses the subject to judge that the item *is F*. As I will discuss in what follows, this focus on the attributive complement in perceptual representation coincides with a certain conception of the capacities involved in such representation, which I will come to argue is mistaken. Accordingly, it will be part of the account of mental representation I develop that the emphasis in perceptual representation will lie on something other than the attributive complement.

<sup>13</sup> Note in this context the aspect of both Davies’s and McDowell’s characterizations of the propositional view that characterizes a proposition as the “face value” of a perceptual experience. The idea of a “face value” is a gloss on the cognitive contribution that perception makes. The strength of this contribution—whether it is *prima facie* or indefeasible—depends on the form of representationalism in question.

<sup>14</sup> Compare a similar characterization by Ned Block (2014, 560): “every percept is constituted by a “perceptual attributive” (that represents an attribute) and a singular element (that represents an individual).” A slightly different variant on this characterization is endorsed by Charles Travis (2013), who holds that perceptual content spells out *a way* the world can be, but he does not appear to think of this as the attribution of a property to an individual. Instead, Travis’s idea is that the representation posits a general way of being that the particularity of the world is taken to instantiate.

## 2. THE ACT CONCEPTION OF PROPOSITIONS

On the representationalist conception at issue in this article, perception is relevantly akin to a propositional attitude: a mental state in which, on the traditional conception, the subject is related to a proposition, that is, an item with intrinsic representational features that are logically prior to the mental acts by means of which subject holds the propositional attitude. Recently, however, Scott Soames (2010, 2013, 2015, 2019) and Peter Hanks (2011, 2013, 2015) have done important work done to revive an understanding of an “activist” account of propositional attitudes, which was dominant among early modern philosophers but largely neglected in analytic philosophy after Frege. For Soames and Hanks, propositions themselves should be understood in terms of mental *acts* that *constitute* a representational structure.<sup>15</sup> The representational character of propositions accordingly does not precede the mental activity of the thinking subject, and propositional attitudes are not attitudes towards preexisting items. As Scott Soames has put the idea:

Once we have a proper understanding of what propositions really are, it will be easy to see that to entertain one is *not* to have any thought or cognition of it at all, but to perform the cognitive operations in terms of which the proposition is defined. (2015, 8)

Call this idea

Activism: Propositional representation is constitutively associated with certain mental acts, i.e., the exercises of certain representational capacities.

Although Soames’s and Hanks’s accounts are relevantly similar in taking propositions to be constituted by a mental act, they differ in some important respects. While I will here largely focus on Hanks’s account specifically, it is significant to briefly highlight a core distinction between the two.<sup>16</sup> For Hanks, propositions are complexes of various subpropositional acts, including (critically) acts of predication that Hanks identifies with *judgment*. As Hanks characterizes this view (Hanks 2015, 4):

[I reject] a picture of the relation between content and thought on which the contents of judgments have their representational features in a way that is

<sup>15</sup> To be sure, it is not by and large correct to think of a proposition as the “product” of mental acts: this suggests more of an act-object model than is appropriate. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this article, I will be happy to speak of “constitution” as the relevant relation. Likewise, I will say that mental acts “combine” representations, but again this should not be taken as metaphysically substantive.

<sup>16</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer at *Southern Journal of Philosophy* for attention on this point.

explanatorily prior to the representational features of particular acts of judgment. . . . Representations and truth conditions begin with acts of predication, and propositions inherit their representational features from these acts.

In this sense, for Hanks predication by definition involves an assertive element. This means that Hanks abandons the central Fregean distinction between the force and the content of a proposition. This is not the case for Soames. Soames makes clear we should distinguish between judgment and a more basic mental act of “entertaining” with which, for Soames, a proposition is constitutively associated. Accordingly, Soames writes the following:

To entertain a proposition is not, as Frege or the early Russell would have you believe to think of it in a special way; it is to perform it. *This is the attitude on which other propositional attitudes are based.* To judge that B is red is perform the predication in an affirmative manner, which involves accepting it as a basis for possible action. (2015, 18; emphasis added)<sup>17</sup>

As this passage makes clear, for Soames the act of “entertaining” the proposition does not by itself amount to judging things as the proposition represents them to be. Instead, judgment involves entertaining a proposition in a distinctly “affirmative” matter, which for Soames involves dispositions to act and reason on the basis of the truth of the proposition.<sup>18</sup> I will return to the distinction between the views of Hanks and Soames in section 5, but for now I will take Hanks’s version as the basis of my discussion.

For Hanks, propositions are constituted by mental acts that are (a) *types* and (b) *complex*, and which have as their tokens individual mental judgments or their verbal expression—assertions. Consider the following example Hanks introduces:

Suppose Ann asserts that George is clever. Ann’s assertion is a composite action; it is composed out of more basic actions. In asserting that George is clever, Ann *refers* to George and she *predicates* the property of being clever of him. (2011, 12)

Taking this example, we can understand Hanks’s view as follows:

- a. Propositions are *types* of actions because individual assertions can constitute tokens of the same propositional action-type. For example, Ann might assert that George is clever, but so might Betty. Indeed, the

<sup>17</sup> Compare further: “The intentionality of a proposition *p* just is the intentionality of the conceptually fundamental ur-attitude of entertaining *p*” (Soames 2015, 19).

<sup>18</sup> In further passages, Soames makes clear that we should not conceive of judgment as a meta-act that takes an act of “entertaining” as its object. Instead, we should take entertaining and judging as different ways of performing the same act. Accordingly, judging is the same type of act as entertaining, except done “affirmatively.”



- relevant type of action can be specified without being tokened.
- b. Second, propositions are *complex* because they are composed of multiple more basic acts. Specifically, as Hanks continues to develop the view, propositions are composite actions consisting of a referential act and a predicative act, where predicative acts are in turn composites of more basic acts: acts in which a property is singled out (Hanks calls this “expressing” a property), and acts in which the relevant property is applied to an object. Accordingly, the proposition in the example consists of three basic elements: (i) a referential act singling out George; (ii) an “expressive” act picking out the property “clever”; (iii) an attributive or “applicative” act of applying “clever” to George.

### 3. THE UNITY OF THE PROPOSITION

As Hanks discusses at length, any activist account of this broad shape must address at least three traditional objections: (1) the accounts seem to violate Frege’s context principle by construing full thoughts from more basic elements; (2) the account seems to violate the force-content distinction by taking predicative acts to involve an assertive element;<sup>19</sup> and (3) the accounts can seem to endorse a type of pre-Fregean psychologism in identifying representational contents with mental acts. For purposes of this article, however, I will focus on a fourth difficulty raised in a recent paper by Jeff Speaks (2020). This difficulty is a version of the so-called “problem of the unity of the proposition”: the problem of securing a suitable coherence between the various elements that co-constitute a single proposition. As Speaks notes, the “problem of the unity of the proposition” has historically been used to describe a variety of topics, and arguably there is no *general* difficulty concerning unity that accounts of propositions are required to solve.<sup>20</sup> However, activist accounts of the proposition specifically cannot afford to be blasé about the question of unity. After all, if for Hanks a proposition is a *complex* act, then it is a requirement of the view that the various “basic” acts cohere suitably. In

<sup>19</sup> As discussed above, Soames, of course, does not face (2). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer at *Southern Journal of Philosophy* for attention on this point. Hanks proposes to deal with (2) by introducing *force-canceling contexts*, as opposed to *force-neutral contents*, which lie beyond the reach of this paper to evaluate (for discussion of this proposal, see Brigham 2017). For the account in this article, (1) will not arise, since the present account will attribute priority to acts that encompass the full proposition over subpropositional acts.

<sup>20</sup> For a thorough treatment of the problem in both a historic and systematic context, see Gaskin (2009).

order for these acts to be co-executed in such a way as to form a proposition, it does not suffice if somehow the subject were to engage in acts of reference and predication *separately*.<sup>21</sup> Without suitable coherence, the “activist” account simply fails to explain how the mental acts it posits co-constitute a proposition.

In an example of the type of unity that requires explanation, consider the following proposition as understood by Hanks:

Paul von Hindenburg was a hero of World War One



Referential Act

Predicative Act

For this to be a proposition, the referential act and the predicative act must be executed *together* in such a way that the referential act is suitably “unified” with the predicative act. What might be meant by this “togetherness” or “unity”? To focus discussion, I will here concentrate on one particular feature that is clearly part of a suitable “togetherness”: the *identity* of the referential act needs to carry over to the predicative act, so that in thinking of *someone* as a hero of World War I, I am aware it is *Paul von Hindenburg* I am thinking of that way.

To illustrate the challenge here for the activist view, consider that it is a feature of Hanks’s view that propositions can be individuated by different ways of referring to the same item.<sup>22</sup> Now, suppose I single out an item *o* by an instance of a referential act *A*, rather than *B*. Suppose further that I, as part of the same propositional act, predicate *F* of *o*. As Jeff Speaks

<sup>21</sup> I should note here that, strictly speaking, activists do not think one can conduct sub-propositional acts in isolation. For example, Hanks writes the following (2015, 23; I thank reviewers at *Southern Journal of Philosophy* for pressing this issue and pointing me to this passage): “There are no bare acts of predication. As a matter of necessity, an act of predication must involve a property. It must also involve an object, or some other kind of target for the act of predication, or at least an attempt to identify a target. It makes no sense to predicate a property with no intended target for your act of predication.” In my understanding, this passage does not address the concern at issue in this article. It is one thing to *state* that sub-propositional acts are mutually interdependent. But for purposes of this article, this is the explanandum, not the explanans. The present aim is to provide a philosophical underpinning for this interdependence (and, as I will argue, the above passage and Hanks’s general account does not provide the resources for doing so).

<sup>22</sup> For instance, two propositions may be differentiated by the way I refer to Von Hindenburg through two distinct types of referential acts, for example, the act expressed by “Paul von Hindenburg” and the act expressed by “The Victor of Tannenberg.”

helpfully observes, whatever else goes under “the unity of the proposition,” it includes the following: my propositional act is unified in such a way that in predicating  $F$  of  $o$ , I do so of  $o$  as singled out in way  $A$ .<sup>23</sup> As such, propositional unity rules out a certain identity question: that the predicative act concerns  $o$ , but leaves open whether it concerns  $o$  as singled out by  $A$ . In what follows I will refer to this relation between the elements of a propositional act as follows:

Identity Condition (IC): Propositional unity includes a common identity between the elements of the proposition, such that the identity of the referential and predicative acts necessarily coheres.

As Speaks notes, it is not immediately clear how an activist view along the lines proposed by Hanks might provide an account of (IC). Speaks considers three salient options, but convincingly shows that none of these none of these appear satisfactory:

- (i) *Co-exercise*: The mere co-exercise of referential and predicative capacities does not ground (IC). Merely simultaneously engaging in  $A$  and predicating  $F$  of  $o$  does not ensure the act meets (IC).
- (ii) *Causation*: It is not clear that a referential act  $A$  causing the predicative act  $F$  of  $o$  suffices to meet (IC). After all, there may be a causal relation between  $A$  and predicating  $F$  of  $o$  while nevertheless the predicative act does not retain *the identity* of  $A$ .
- (iii) *Intention*: It would be problematic to introduce into the propositional act an intention to meet (IC) (i.e., the intention to not merely predicate  $F$  of  $o$ , but to do so of  $o$  as singled out by  $A$ ). Intentions are themselves states with propositional contents, and, accordingly, an infinite regress ensues.

For the purposes of this article, I will agree with Speaks, and I will set aside attempts to accommodate (IC) on versions of (i)–(iii). However, where Speaks does not provide a positive solution, I will suggest there is a natural fourth alternative, which indeed has a clear pedigree within early modern treatments of judgment. I will turn now to this account.

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<sup>23</sup> From a desire not to introduce further unnecessary terminology, I will not speak this way, but one way to put the point is that the *Fregean sense* of the Referential Act is (necessarily) maintained through the Predicative Act.

## 4. PROPOSITIONAL ACTS AND THE CAPACITY TO JUDGE

The “activist” view of propositions is not new: it revives an early modern conception of the relation between propositions and intellectual activity.<sup>24</sup> In an example, consider the view presented in the standard textbook of early modern logic, Arnauld and Nicole’s *Port-Royal Logic* of 1662. Introducing the nature of judgment, the *Logic* provides the following characterization:

we unite or separate [ideas]. This is called *affirming* or *denying*, and in general *judging*. This judgment is also called a *proposition*. . . . It is not enough to conceive [the terms of the proposition], but the mind must connect or separate them. (Arnauld and Nicole 1996, 82)

As this passage describes, on this view thought-contents—propositions—are constituted by the subject’s introduction of either of two relations among its elements: “connection” by affirmation, and “separation” by denial. While this conception does not explicitly posit the referential and predicative acts of Hanks’s account, the views are clearly akin in conceiving of propositions as constituted by the subject bringing together (or in this case, holding apart) more basic subpropositional referential and predicative elements.

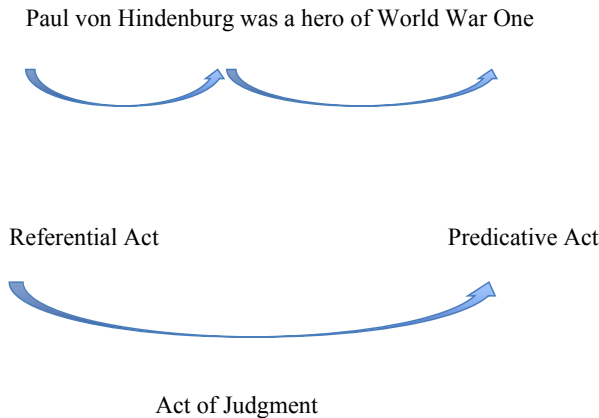
The account of the *Port-Royal* is worth mentioning because it serves to introduce Kant’s distinctive contribution to the theory of thought: Kant’s focus on the *unity* of representations in a judgment, which is our present topic. As stated in the above passage, the *Port-Royal Logic* characterizes judgment in terms of either combining representations (“affirmation”) or separating them (“negation”). By contrast, Kant famously insists that *any* judgment presupposes a prior *combination* of representations, insofar as this union is required for the “comparison” of subject and predicate that judgment involves.<sup>25</sup> Suppose, for example, that I am “comparing” some curtains with my representation of the color white, and I come to the conclusion that the curtains are *not* white. While my ultimate judgment may be characterized as a “separation” of the idea of the curtains and the idea of white, still I must first have brought the representations together mentally in order to conduct the

<sup>24</sup> For an exposition and defense at length of early modern activist approaches to the intellect, see Marušić (2014).

<sup>25</sup> As Kant writes on the nature of the comparison (R 4634, 17: 616; cf. A260–1/B316–7): “In every judgment, therefore, there are two predicates we compare to one another. One, which constitutes the given cognition of the object, is the logical subject, the other, which is compared with it, is called the logical predicate.” I do not here consider complexities in Kant’s account, as, for example, the idea a judgment involving *two* predicates. Likewise, since my concerns are not historical; I will not draw fine-grained distinctions between Kantian usage of “judgment” (*Urteil*), “cognition” (*Erkenntnis*) or “thought” (*Gedanke*). I will speak of a judgment or thought interchangeably. For further discussion of Kant’s use of “comparison,” see Longuenesse (1998, 111ff).

comparison. In other words: to see that a proposition is false, it must first meet the unity required to be a *proposition*. In Kant's terminology, this mental unity required by all cognition is the result of what Kant calls the "synthetic function" of the intellect (i.e., the faculty Kant calls the understanding). As Kant characterizes "synthesis," it is "[the] action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition" (A77/B103). I will suggest this is a natural place to look for an account of (IC).

What is the "unity of the proposition" that the activist account needs to secure? The requirement captured by (IC) is that there must be a common *identity* between the subpropositional mental acts that co-constitute a proposition. In judging "*A* is *F*," I judge that *F* is true of an item *as singled out by A*. The Kantian account that I will here develop meets this requirement through a natural idea: the common identity of the subpropositional acts is grounded in a *further* act, which spans the full proposition, namely a *judgment* (or, in other words, a thought). That is, the manner in which the subject engages in a unity of the various subpropositional acts is determined by the way these acts are elements of the overarching act of judgment in which she is engaged.<sup>26</sup> To take up the example introduced above, then, the picture I develop below will look as follows:



<sup>26</sup> Hanks briefly considers the idea that there are full propositional acts that are "primitive," but rejects this view because it cannot provide a genuine explanation of propositional unity as truth-evaluable unities (Hanks 2015, ch. 2). However, Hanks's idea is not quite the one considered here: judgments will not be "primitive" or "unanalyzable." While the topic lies beyond the purview of this article, for the Kantian view the relation between judgment and truth will lie in the faculty responsible for judgment, which for Kant is a faculty for *knowledge* or *cognition* (*Erkenntnis*).

Now, introducing an “act of judgment” does not by itself settle the question about (IC). This is because characterizing subpropositional acts as elements of a unified judgment does not by itself ensure that the *identity* of the referential act carries over to the predicative act. Consider the above example. It is one thing to say that my singling out of Von Hindenburg and my predicating of the same person that he is a hero are both elements of the same united thought. But it is quite another thing to ensure that heroism is predicated of this person *as singled out* as Von Hindenburg. An account needs to be given of the distinctive coherence of the subpropositional elements within the whole act of judgment.

It is on this topic—the way subpropositional representations cohere in a judgment—that the Kantian account introduces its most distinctive posit: the *self-awareness* (or “apperception”) with which a subject engages in an act of judgment. Since this is a difficult topic, I will in this section provide a schematic account of the relevant type of self-awareness, counting on further sections to provide its concrete application to representational states like perception. To see the application of the Kantian account to (IC), consider:

4. *Constitution*: In the relevant respect, the “unity of the proposition” is constituted by the subject’s self-awareness of engaging in a unified act that encompasses the full proposition, namely, thinking a unified thought. Specifically, the identity of the referential act is retained in the predicative act in virtue of both acts being aspects of a single self-consciously unified propositional act.

What (iv) posits is that in engaging in an act of judgment, the subject is self-aware of engaging in a single act that unifies multiple representations within it. For Kant, it is important that this self-awareness is not a type of *meta-awareness*: as if the subject *cognizes* or *judges* that her act of judgment contains multiple representations. Rather, this self-awareness is *part of* the act of judging itself.<sup>27</sup> In other words, a single act of thinking is associated with an *awareness of its own unity*. Being part of the very act of judging, this self-awareness is intended to be neither prehensive of (logically posterior to) the relevant unity nor productive of (logically prior to) this unity: the awareness does not grasp an independent unity, nor

<sup>27</sup> First-order self-awareness is the centerpiece of discussion in Rödl (2007, 2013) (contrast Gennaro [2006], who enlists Kant in defense of a higher-order view of consciousness). More can also be found in the lucid discussion of empirical self-knowledge and apperceptive self-knowledge in Boyle (2009). I will not defend this view at length here and focus instead on the association between unity and representation.

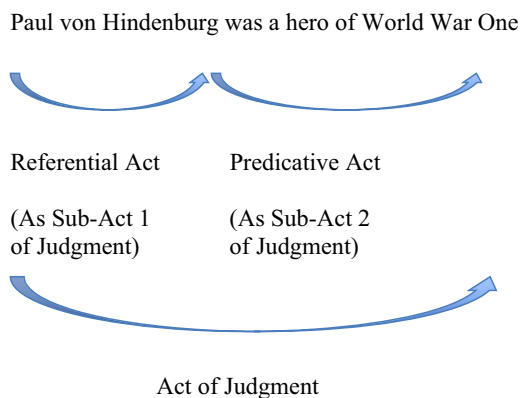
does it produce such a unity. Rather, the self-awareness *is* the unity: it “holds together” the representations contained within the judgment. This sounds more mystifying than it needs to be, given that our discussion concerns the nature of thought. Consider again the referential act of singling out Von Hindenburg and the predicative act of describing him as *F* (a hero of World War I). On the present view, the coherence between these two acts is nothing other than the subject’s self-awareness of the coherence: the way, when the subject predicates *F* of *o*, she is self-aware of predicating *F* of *o* as *singled out by A*. Given that the topic is thought, that is, an activity within the subject’s self-conscious management of her mental life, it really is not surprising or mysterious that she could engage in two acts as *self-consciously united* within a larger act. This is the present account of (IC). In this sense, (iv) should not seem unnatural as an account of (IC). When a subject singles out an item and predicates a property of it, she does so being self-aware that the two acts are united within a single act of judgment.<sup>28</sup>

I should forestall two salient confusions that will be relevant to the discussion to follow. The first is that the point of (iv) is not *temporal*, as if being self-aware of the relevant unity is an act of *memory*. In predicating *F* of *o*, the subject does not *recall* referring to *o* by *A*. Instead, the ordering between the two acts is logical: the unity is between two (in principle) temporally simultaneous but logically complementary and “successive” mental acts.<sup>29</sup> Second, it is not as though the self-awareness of judgment, so to speak, “glues” the subpropositional representations together. Instead, there is a sense in which the act of judgment is logically prior to the subpropositional acts. To appreciate this contrast, consider that for Hanks subpropositional acts are “basic,” and full propositional acts are *composites* of such basic acts. On this picture, an act that suitably unifies

<sup>28</sup> It may not seem entirely obvious how this account avoids the problem with (iii) above, that is, the regress problem incurred by the intention-based account (thanks to an anonymous referee at *Southern Journal of Philosophy* for attention on this point). The regress problem at (iii) is due to the fact that intentions *themselves* have contents, which then require further intentions to be unified, and so on. The account presented in this article avoids this problem because on the present account the parts of the propositional act (singling out the referent, predicating, etc.) are part of the *same* self-conscious act that spans the entire judgment. Moreover, the subpropositional acts are constitutively dependent on this larger act: the subject only singles out a referent in consciousness of forming a judgment. Therefore, the crux is that, unlike the “intention-based account,” this account posits no metapropositional act like an intention, which must in turn have a propositional content. Thus, the regress is avoided.

<sup>29</sup> Of course, it is possible that study of the brain reveals a temporal order, but this is not part of what the subject *thinks* in thinking her thought, while the relevant unity is part of this.

the relevant “basic acts” must take a broadly relational form, forging a coherence relation between its elements. By contrast, on the present account, subpropositional elements are “unified” because *within their character* as subpropositional acts is included a self-awareness of the unity of the full thought. Consider a subject engaging in an act of judgment that encompasses a referential and a predicative act. On (iv), the subject’s referential conscious will include a self-awareness of engaging in *one part of a larger act*, namely, a judgment. Just so, in her predicative act the subject is self-conscious of engaging in another part of the same single act. Stephen Engstrom has characterized this as Kant’s idea that “the consciousness of the whole [thought] must . . . precede the specific consciousness of the components” in the sense that “[consciousness] of the whole must be *in* each of the conscious thinkings that make up the components” (Engstrom 2009, 99). Referential acts and predicative acts are united because one does not engage in the former without self-consciously doing it in union with the latter, and *vice versa*. Accordingly, we can now give the following visual rendering of our example as meeting (IC):



## 5. CONTENTS AND JUDGMENTS

So far, I have broadly followed “activist” accounts of propositions like the ones provided Peter Hanks and Scott Soames, and I have suggested a Kant-inspired model of the unity of the relevant mental acts. While the concentration of this article is to canvas an activist account of the unity of experience, and not to resist Hanks’s and Soames’s particular activist theories, it is nevertheless important to note briefly that in some critical respects



neither Hanks's nor Soames's model quite captures the thought presented here. I will take the views in turn.<sup>30</sup>

For Hanks, the mental act crucial to the constitution of propositions is an act of predication with an assertive or judgment-like character. There are two respects in which this view diverges from the one at issue here. First, the present account of "unity" is inconsistent with the idea that judgment can be understood merely through predication. Simply put, being an element of a proposition, the concept of "predication" cannot by itself account for the unity of this element with other elements that co-constitute the proposition. This point itself has two layers. On the one hand, the subject must first have the object in mind before she can engage in the act of predication. Therefore, the concept of "judging" cannot exclude the act involved in bringing objects present to the mind. On the other hand, it also follows that *the concept* of a predicate does not by itself contain what is required for the unity of the proposition: one element in the propositional complex cannot achieve this.<sup>31</sup> The second point is that, as an element of a judgment, the concept of a predicate *presupposes* the concept of judgment, and therefore cannot itself ground this concept. Without taking the point too far afield, a judgment is, for example, truth-apt. While an act of predication is crucial to attaining a truth-apt proposition, since the predicate itself does contain the whole judgment, it cannot *ground* the concept of the truth-aptitude of the whole proposition.

In contrast with Hanks's view, it is critical to Soames's view that the proposition-constituting act of "entertaining" a thought does not itself contain an assertive element. As noted, Soames is concerned to distinguish the mental act of "entertaining" a proposition from judgment. However, without an act of affirmation it is hard to understand how this could amount to representation. A proposition states *that things are thus-and-so*. To think a proposition is to conceive the world as being *this way*. To be sure, there may be a distance between considering the world conceived as such a way, and ultimately *believing* that it is this way. But that does not touch the fact that "entertaining" remains an empty designation if the representational structure first combined is not one according to which the world *is so*. One may say that "entertaining" *p* is entertaining a *possible* judgment that *p*; but this leaves it conceptually primary that it is a

<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, the aim of the below points is not to refute Hanks's and Soames's versions, but rather to distinguish them from the present view.

<sup>31</sup> Note, for example, that in Frege's famous "explanation" of the unity of thought, one requires *both* the complements of a "saturated" referring expression and an "unsaturated" predicate.

possible *judgment*. That is, the representational character of a proposition resides in its relation to an ability to judge *that things are so*, and not in a conceptually prior ability to “entertain” things. Mere “entertaining” does not yet provide the type of representational unity located in something of the form “*o* is *F*.”

Accordingly, the present position differs from both Hanks and Soames. As on Hanks’s account, the unity of propositions is associated with judgment. However, in contrast with Hanks, the account does not identify judgment with predication. Nevertheless, it follows that the account in this article, like the account presented by Hanks and in contrast with the one presented by Soames, must deny the force-content distinction. While this issue is not the focus of this article, it is nevertheless necessary to register a brief note on the topic. Since for Hanks any propositional content must be unified by an act of judgment, his view invokes “force-canceling contexts” to remove the implication of assertive force in non-assertive uses of propositions. This article is not the place to endorse or reject this suggestion, but it should be noted that the present view *need* not resort to such a solution. The reason is that Kant places the *capacity* to judge central in his account of mental unity, without identifying every use or exercise of this capacity with an act of belief or assertion.<sup>32</sup> Kant provides a complex catalogue of both the forms of judgment and other ways this capacity is implicated in cognition, which far exceeds the present purview. However, what is critical—and the topic of the next section—is that, for Kant, the unifying role of the capacity to judge also plays a sensory role: a role in perceptual experience. The qualification to register, then, is that this role is not necessarily to be thought of as itself *assertive*, even as it belongs to the subject’s intellectual capacity to judge.<sup>33</sup> I will return to this in my discussion of perceptual representation.

## 6. THE PERCEPTUAL CONCEPT

I have argued that the subpropositional acts posited by “activist” views of propositions should be associated with an intellect that “combines,” that is, that meets the Kantian view that all empirical consciousness “must be combined in one single self-consciousness,” which Kant characterizes as

<sup>32</sup> The *locus classicus* for understanding Kant’s thinking about this capacity is, of course, Longuenesse (1998).

<sup>33</sup> As Kant himself says (in a far from uncomplicated passage at A294/B350): “the senses do not err—not because they always judge rightly but because they do not judge at all.”

“the absolutely first synthetic principle of all our thought as such” (A117n; cf. Pröl. §22 4:304). However, what does this mean for *perceptual experience*? The answer is forged in the Kantian claim that the same mental unifying capacity implicated in judgment also plays a role in a sensory perceptual state. As Kant puts this claim: “the same understanding, and, to be sure, by just the same transactions [by which] it created the logical form of judgment, also [brings] synthetic unity to an intuition’s multiplicity” (B103/A79). Kant here explicitly links the intellectual capacity to judge, the understanding, to the unity of representations in an intuition, that is, a perceptual confrontation with an object. Based on this idea, consider the following

Unity Thesis: The same manner in which the intellect, the capacity for thought, unifies subpropositional acts in a judgment, so it also unifies the elements of visual consciousness within a single unified experiential episode.

In this section, I will develop this notion of sensory unity. In the next section, I will relate that unity to a conception of perceptual representation.

Kant tends to illustrate the unity operative in sensory consciousness with certain examples, and it will help us to do the same here. In one such example, Kant considers the imagistic awareness of drawing a circle. Here is how Thomas Land describes the example:

consider one of the geometrical examples Kant mentions, viz. the act of ‘describing a circle’: In drawing a circle, to apprehend what is before my mind as the representation of a single object, I must conceive of my act of drawing as a single act, in the sense that all the phases of this act belong to the generation of a single representation. I must not, for instance, forget that this is what I am doing as I move e.g. from the top right quadrant of the circle to the bottom right quadrant. More generally, during each phase of my activity I must think of this phase as being part of a more encompassing process; the process, namely, of generation the representation of a circle. (2015, 24)

To take up Land’s description, suppose I am drawing a circle on the blackboard. Starting from the top, I move my hand clockwise in a smooth motion until in due course I arrive back at the point I started, closing the circle. Suppose for purposes of this argument we divide up my drawing of this circle in a number of temporal segments: the first starting at  $t$ , the second at  $t + 1$ , the third at  $t + 2$ , and so on. The question animating the example is how we should think about the character of the acts determined by these temporal segments. The suggestion is that one cannot understand these acts without seeing them as unified in

the subject's consciousness as parts of a larger act she is self-consciously undertaking, namely, drawing the circle on the board. After all, unless throughout these acts I am self-aware what my project is (drawing the circle) as well as the way my current act is a particular part of this larger act, I would not be able to execute the particular act in which I am engaged. In this case, the subject does not unify referential and predicative acts into a proposition, as was the case in the previous section's discussion. Nevertheless, the Kantian point is that the same type of unity characterizes the act, that is, the elements are unified in the same manner within a single self-conscious act. In other words, the suggestion is that the same structure that characterizes the intellectual act of judgment also characterizes other aspects of conscious life, and in particular imagistic consciousness. To use the same type of visual representation as above:

Segment drawn at  $t$ ; Segment drawn at  $t+1$ ; [...] Segment drawn at  $t+n$ .



Act of Drawing a Full Circle

For my present purposes, the important point is that Kant takes this same unity to apply to conscious perceptual experience: for Kant, a “manifold” of sensory representations is unified within the subject's self-consciousness as a single experience (B131).<sup>34</sup> Consider being perceptually confronted with a pink-hued translucent cube.<sup>35</sup> For Kant, my sensory experience of this cube will involve a self-conscious unity of the same sort as the unity in judgment. Clearly, in this case the elements unified in the sensory experience are not referential expressions and predicates. Instead, the picture may include something like the following:

<sup>34</sup> For an account, see Golob (2011).

<sup>35</sup> This is the classic example introduced by Wilfrid Sellars (1982). Sellars himself develops the example in an attempt to capture the Kantian view.

“This”; “Translucent”; “Pink”; “Cube”; (“Before me”; “Visually Present to Me”)



### Single Unified Sensory Experience

As these “elements” of experience show, the point does not depend on perception being a temporally successive range of individual sensations.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, as was the case in our discussion of subpropositional acts, Kant’s point concerning sensuous unity does not assume a *temporal* progression but rather a *logical* unity of elements in a self-conscious state.<sup>37</sup> To see that Kant’s thought in all these examples is logical, consider Kant’s application of the same point about the relevant type of self-conscious unity to the process of counting, that is, adding units successively to a previously accumulated total:

If, in counting, I forget that the units that now hover before my senses were successively added to each other by me, then I would not cognize the generation of the multitude through this successive addition of one to the other, and consequently I would not cognize the number. (A103–4)

In this example, Kant makes explicit that it is a *logical* presupposition of the concept of counting that it requires awareness of the subact as part of a full act.<sup>38</sup> In the above passage, Kant points out that the subject must keep in mind her overall act of counting so as to be aware both of the accumulated total and the subsequent step of adding a further unit. However, Kant makes clear that this is a logical point by—immediately continuing on the above quotation—*identifying* the unity of consciousness

<sup>36</sup> This, despite frequent criticism of Kant to this effect. For example, Lewis White Beck criticizes Kant as follows (1978, 144): “Kant assumes that the manifold of representations is always successive. This is certainly wrong. When I open my eyes I do not scan the visual field as if my eyes or my attention worked like the electron ejector in a television tube, aiming first at one point and then at an adjacent point. But . . . Kant assumes that my apprehension does work in this way.” A similar idea is present in the reading of Golob (2011). By contrast, while I think such an idea does seem present in the thinker Condillac, there is much in Kant’s work to resist this type of empiricist “sensationism” (see Falkenstein 1990). I return to this point in section 7 below.

<sup>37</sup> In this sense it seems to me it is not quite accurate to understand Kant’s point as “I must not . . . forget what I am doing . . . during each phase of my activity.” *Forgetting* describes a failing in a distinctly temporally extended act, but the proper point is logical: any element of an intuition must be included within the same self-consciousness.

<sup>38</sup> To be sure, actual human counting is presumably a necessarily temporally extended act. But this is not the feature of counting on which the Kantian point depends.

with the concept of addition, writing that “this concept [i.e., a number reached in addition] consists solely in *the consciousness of this unity of the synthesis*” (A104). The point Kant makes here is that counting depends on elements that exhibit a certain *homogeneity*, allowing them to be units that can be treated as belonging to the same order (allowing me to count “one apple,” “two apples,” and so on). Accordingly, this concept of a number *just is* the way items belong to the same self-conscious unity: the way the subject views the element as belonging to a single whole.<sup>39</sup> The same logical point applies to perceptual experience, in which any of its elements are enjoyed within a self-conscious experience. In other words, Kant’s point is that we as self-conscious subjects have sensations (or other subperceptual states) only as parts of a self-consciously unified experience.<sup>40</sup>

## 7. THE PERCEPTUAL CONCEPT AND REPRESENTATIONAL CONTENT

The central claim of this paper is that attributing representational contents to experience can express the following idea: the same capacity exercised in judgment is also exercised in perceptual experience. The more particular claim is that this changes our understanding of what the notion of perceptual representation amounts to. Recall:

Content Thesis: The cognitive contribution of perception, that is, the significance perceptual experience has in the acquisition of perceptual knowledge, is captured by the experience’s representational content.

As the Content Thesis captures, the idea that perception bears representational content expresses a way of conceiving perceptual rationality. In this section, I will suggest the understanding of perceptual representation that follows from the considerations presented in the previous sections.

<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, Kant writes that “number” is “simply the unity of the synthesis of the manifold of a homogeneous intuition in general” (A142–3/B182). Golob (2011, 516) understands this awareness of homogeneity in terms of a “second-order capacity” to form “representations of our representations based on their shared properties.” By contrast, I have argued this type of unified self-awareness is *part of* first-order acts like judging and (for Kant) perceiving.

<sup>40</sup> *Pace* criticisms like the above from Lewis White Beck, this point evinces an *antiempiricist* tendency in Kant: like judgments hold logical priority over subpropositional acts, so too experiences hold logical priority over “sensations.” We do not start with sensations in need of unification; rather, we have sensations only as already understood against the background of self-consciously unified experiences.

In section 1 above, I noted that the idea of perceptual representation is usually understood through the “attributive complement” of a perceptual representation: the *way* an object is represented to be. This traditional conception of perceptual representation centers on a distinction between two elements present in the representation. In the above-cited characterization by Boyle (manuscript, 10): “the idea is that perceptual content involves a referential element (marked by ‘things’), on the one hand, and a classificatory element (marked by ‘thus-and-so’), on the other hand.” This view of perceptual representation dovetails with a traditional conception of the conceptual capacities involved in such representation. As canonically articulated by Gareth Evans, these capacities must meet a “generality constraint” on conceptual abilities. In Evans’s view, conceptual abilities must be *generally* deployable, such that, for example, I can judge of *a* not merely that it is *F*, but also *G*, *H*, etc.; and such that I can ascribe *F* not merely to *a*, but also to *b*, *c*, etc. While Evans’s generality constraint has gained very general acceptance, less attention has been given to the fact that Evans writes that such conceptual abilities come in two varieties, since “thought is a joint exercise of two distinguishable abilities” (1982, 104). As Evans develops this point in more detail:

It seems to me that there must be a sense in which thoughts are structured. I [prefer] the sense in which thoughts are structured, not in terms of their being composed of several distinct elements, but in terms of a complex of the exercise of several distinct conceptual abilities. (101)

In this passage, Evans characterizes the type of conceptual capacities employed in thought as inherently *bifurcated*: a combination of what Evans terms “Concepts,” which pick out properties, and “Ideas,” which pick out objects. For Evans, these are intrinsically different types of representational capacities, which are only together capable of relating a subject to a propositional content (102). This point is relevant because it underlies the emphasis in perceptual representation on the importance of the attributive complement: while by an “Idea” the subject (or the perceptual state) picks out an item, by a “Concept” she specifies *the way* this item is represented to be.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> This narrow gloss on “concepts” as identified with predicate-like abilities is common, as for example in the following passage from Alex Byrne (2005, 231; cf. 2009): “Concepts are certain kinds of Fregean senses, specifically Fregean senses of predicates (e.g., “is a horse”). They are supposed to be constituents, together with other kinds of senses (e.g., senses of singular terms like “Seabiscuit”) of the senses of sentences (e.g., Seabiscuit is a horse”), otherwise known as Fregean Thoughts.” Byrne here explicitly characterizes concepts as *one kind* of constituent of a full proposition, namely predicate-like constituents. Clearly this is an acceptable way to use the term “concept,” but the present point is that there must *also* be a use of “concept” that extends to constituents of thoughts generally, that is, to Fregean senses *qua* their character as senses (cf. McDowell 1996, 107).

As the previous sections have made clear, however, Evans's bifurcated characterization of conceptual capacities will not (by itself) suffice: there is also an account of what gives unity to referential and predicative capacities as *conceptual* capacities, that is, as capacities operative in a unified thought. This account has centered on the self-consciousness with which the subject deploys her conceptual capacities. Equally, the account has suggested a similar unifying self-consciousness may be operative in sensory experience. Here, then, is the present suggestion: it is this inclusion of experience within the subject's unified self-consciousness that provides the grounds for attributing representational content to experience.

To appreciate this suggestion, consider the way, in a recent paper in *Mind*, Anil Gomes expresses the upshot of the Kantian view:

[For Kant] consciousness of the world in perception thus involves *self-conscious* awareness of oneself consciously perceiving the world; perceptual consciousness is a form of self-consciousness. [I take] the representational element [of experience] to have a distinctive first-personal content: it seems to the subject as if *she* is intuiting the empirical particular. This first-personal content to visual experience arises whenever discursive subjects stand in intuitive relations to empirical particulars: perceiving an empirical object *ipso facto* puts one into a state with first-personal content. (2017, 571)<sup>42</sup>

As Gomes makes clear in this passage, the role of self-consciousness gives the experience a character that is naturally expressed through the first-person: to the subject, it seems *she* is confronted with a pink-hued translucent cube, or that *she* is perceiving a pink object over there, and so on. As such, experience expresses a subject's self-consciousness of perceiving. Consider what is involved in this claim. In perception, the subject is enjoying a state of experience unified in her self-consciousness by her rational capacity to judge, that is, her capacity to form perceptual beliefs. As such, the perceiving subject is undergoing her experience within the same unified self-consciousness as that from which she conducts her activity of perceptual judgment. The subject self-consciously enjoys her experience *as* something that provides the basis for the formation of judgments.

The present suggestion is that the above thought—for example, articulated by Gomes—provides a basis for attributing representational content to experience. Since the subject enjoys perceptual experience *as* providing a basis for

<sup>42</sup> There are several important differences between the account in Gomes (2017) and the present one, including Gomes's view of the subject the *object* of the representation (in this sense Gomes's view resembles self-representational theories as developed by, for example, Uriah Kriegel [2003, 2009] and Keith Lehrer [2006]). These differences lie beyond the purview of this article.



judgment, it makes sense to speak of the experience providing the subject with a content that she can endorse in judgment.<sup>43</sup> For example, the subject may enjoy a state of unified self-consciousness in which she judges that the apple is red because, self-consciously, she perceives that it is red. This may be put by the perceptual experience bearing the content “the apple is red.”

This understanding of representational perceptual content should be distinguished from the idea expressed through the focus on a representation’s “attributive complement,” for example, the representational view expressed by the claim that “every percept [is] constituted by a ‘perceptual attributive’ (that represents an attribute) and a singular element (that represents an individual).”<sup>44</sup> The two conceptions of perceptual representation are different because they are differently motivated, and in such a way that they face different constraints. To appreciate this point, consider that the focus on the “attributive complement” implicitly expresses a view of *how* perception is capable of contributing to judgment. Namely, to the representational view understood in this manner it is something about the *logical form* of a perceptual representation that grounds its distinct rational role. This idea may be put as follows

Premise Principle: The rational contribution of experience *E* to the judgment that *o* is *F* is determined by *E* bearing the structure of a premise supporting the conclusion that *o* as *F*.<sup>45</sup>

To be sure, most representationalists do not hold the implausible position that perceptual judgments are literally inferences from the contents of experience. However, the version of representationalism captured by the Premise Principle does express the idea that the *rationality* of perceptual judgments is to be understood on the model of one proposition providing premise-like support to another.<sup>46</sup> Understood this way, the representation-

<sup>43</sup> This idea is sometimes cast in representationalist language that characterizes experience as having a “face value,” which the subject “accepts” in judgment.

<sup>44</sup> See Block (2014, 560).

<sup>45</sup> For explicit adoption of this idea, Brewer (1999, 149).

<sup>46</sup> It may not seem entirely clear in what precisely consists the “restrictive” character of the Premise Principle (I thank an anonymous referee at *Southern Journal of Philosophy* for attention on this point). In short, it lies in the idea that perceptual rationality (rationally basing perceptual judgments on perceptual experiences) must exemplify the sort of formal rationality involved in inference—a form of rationality that requires propositional articulation. It is often argued this is not the correct paradigm for perceptual rationality (e.g., Brewer 2018 and Travis 2013). The relevant point is that the argument for the type of representational view in this article is entirely unrelated to the assumption about perceptual rationality that the “premise principle” expresses. On the present view, it is not the demand that perception exhibits an inferential type of rationality that motivates the idea that perception has representational content.

alist view of experience in effect imposes a type of restriction on how experience can contribute to judgment: without the way representation logically articulates the “attributive complement,” we are not supposed to find such a contribution.

By contrast, the form of representationalism presented in this article does not share a motivation in (or one similar to) the Premise Principle. Rather, it is the unity of the subject’s perceptual self-awareness—provided by her capacity to judge—that provides the relevant rational link between experience and judgment. To be sure, the following plausible questions now arise.<sup>47</sup> If the relation between the representational content of a judgment and the representational content of an experience is the unifying role of the mind, then is the suggestion that in perception the mind also unifies subpropositional acts, like referential and predicative acts? This might seem plausible, given that we are speaking about propositional perceptual contents. Alternatively, are the elements that are unified in some sense proposition-like, but not quite in fully articulate propositional form? This may seem to suggest the above example of observing a pink ice cube, in which the elements unified are glossed as “this-translucent-pink-cube-here.”<sup>48</sup> Yet again, if the view stays closest to its Kantian form, it may seem that the elements unified in experience should be distinctly sensory. This is the view criticized by Kant-interpreter Lewis White Beck, as cited above:

Kant assumes that the manifold of representations is always successive. This is certainly wrong. When I open my eyes I do not scan the visual field as if my eyes or my attention worked like the electron ejector in a television tube, aiming first at one point and then at an adjacent point. But . . . Kant assumes that my apprehension does work in this way. (White Beck 1978, 144; cf. n. 14)

Beck’s point here is that Kant—wrongly—assumes that perceptual experience consists of a succession of sensory elements, which must subsequently be unified. Is this the intended role for unity in experience?

The answer is that none of the above options fully capture the suggestion in this article, since they hinge on a misunderstanding of the intended relation between the unifying self-awareness and the elements unified. The suggestion is not that in states like thought and sensory experience we have first elements, that is, parts of the full state, which must subsequently be

<sup>47</sup> Thanks to anonymous referees at *Southern Journal of Philosophy* for attention to these points.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. McDowell (2009).

unified. On the contrary, the suggestion is that we can understand the parts of the state only against the background of the unity they enjoy *as* parts of the unified state of the subject. Each of the elements is constitutively dependent on the way the subject experiences it as part of a larger unified self-consciousness.

What does this mean for the above questions? First, it means that the focus on the idea of a self-conscious unity of experience does *not* lie on which elements are to be unified. Instead, the focus is on *whichever* parts of experience we choose to distinguish, they bear the distinctive unity of the self-awareness of the subject. In this sense, White Beck is wrong to suppose that the Kantian model is premised on the assumption that perception consists of a succession of sensory “atoms.” The point is more abstract: the sensory character of experience is to be understood against the background of the unified self-awareness of the subject. Still, does the idea of attributing to perceptual experience representational content not presuppose that this state involves the type of subpropositional mental that acts that a judgment does? The answer is, again, no. The idea of perceptual representation does not presuppose that perception *itself* involves an act of judgment by the subject.<sup>49</sup> By contrast, what the idea expresses is that, within the same unified self-awareness, the subject enjoys her sensory experience as a basis for judgment. The subject perceives that *p*, and therefore judges that *p*. Moreover, the former representational characterization of perception is based on the subject’s capacity for the latter mental act of judgment, since this capacity fundamentally shapes the conscious character of both mental states.

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<sup>49</sup> This concerns, of course, perceptual representation as understood on the present account.

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