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On the Non-Conceptual Content of Affective-Evaluative Experience

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ABSTRACT: Arguments for attributing non-conceptual content to experience have predominantly been motivated by aspects of the visual perception of empirical properties. In this article, I pursue a different strategy, arguing that a specific class of affective-evaluative experiences have non-conceptual content. The examples drawn on are affective-evaluative experiences of first exposure, in which the subject has a felt valenced intentional attitude towards evaluative properties of the object of their experience, but lacks any powers of conceptual discrimination regarding those evaluative properties. I also show that by accepting this thesis we can explain relevant features of evaluative understanding.

Introduction

One traditional point of agreement between the conceptualist and non-conceptualist is a concern with the representational content of sense-perceptual experiences. They are concerned with experiences through which something is (re)presented to the subject as being a certain way, as bringing an environmental reality into view.¹ In virtue of having representational content such experiences have correctness conditions, and so that content, as specified in terms of those correctness conditions, can be assessed for veridicality; a perceptual experience with representational content is veridical *iff* what it represents as being the case really is the case.

Most arguments for attributing non-conceptual representational content to experience have been framed in terms of the visual perception of empirical properties (e.g. shape, colour, motion).² This article pursues a different strategy, arguing that a specific class of affective-evaluative experiences have non-conceptual representational content. Affective-evaluative experiences are understood –

¹ See McDowell 2013: 147.

² See Evans 1982: 229; Peacocke 1992: Ch.3; 2001: 239-64; Martin 1992: 745-763; Kelly 2001a: 397-420; 2001b: 601-8; Crane 1988: 142-7.

broadly for now – as affective perceptual experiences of value, in which evaluative properties of objects (e.g. the beauty of a painting) are represented or presented through felt intentional attitudes. As such, the perceptual experiences I discuss have evaluative representational content; they are experiences in which their subjects – analogously to standard perceptual experiences – (seem to) gather information about their environment. It is just that these experiences seem to disclose evaluative properties of objects in the subject’s environment, and do so through felt intentional attitudes.³

Given the way I have framed affective-evaluative experiences (see section 1 for a detailed account) we could think of them as emotions (at least on some theories, e.g. the perceptual model, which argues emotions are perceptual experiences of value). So, the question would be ‘does emotional experience involve non-conceptual content’.⁴ Yet, answering that requires saying something about various emotion theories, some of which prejudice in favour of a particular answer. For example, if emotional experience essentially involves an evaluative judgement, then it is difficult to resist the conclusion that their evaluative content is conceptual, since it would be the evaluative judgement – rather than a felt intentional attitude – which is the representational vehicle for emotions’ evaluative content, and judgements are paradigmatic conceptual states.⁵

Second, according to some philosophers, emotional experiences can, in favourable circumstances, stand in reason-giving, and so justificatory, relations to evaluative judgements.⁶ Yet, as we shall see, explaining how an experience with non-conceptual content can be cognitively significant in this specific way, is difficult. It is this claim which John McDowell and Bill Brewer argue is not plausible in the sense-perceptual case, as expressed by the idea that the subject’s space of concepts exhausts

³ See Johnston 2001: 181-214; Döring 2007: 363-94 and Poellner 2016: 1-28. Throughout I remain uncommitted on the metaphysical standing of these evaluative properties; it is enough that such experiences seem to affectively (re)present evaluative properties of their objects (see section 3.2 for more on this).

⁴ See Gunther 2003: 279-88; Tappolet 2016: Ch. 1; Tye 2008: 25-50; Wringe 2015: 275-97.

⁵ See Nussbaum 2001: Ch.1.

⁶ Precisely how is matter of debate (see Deonna and Teroni 2012: Ch. 8, and Brady 2011: 135-49 for scepticism).

their space of reasons.⁷ For reasons articulated in section 3 and 4, I largely accept the latter restriction for the class of affective-evaluative experiences I am concerned with there.

So, identifying affective-evaluative experiences with emotions involves taking on unnecessary argumentative burdens. Affective-evaluative experiences, as outlined above, share certain similarities with emotions (on some theories), yet if certain kinds of affective-evaluative experiences have non-conceptual content, any further claim about emotions in general would need arguing for separately.

This paper argues, first, that the affective-evaluative conceptualist – someone who claims the representational content of affective-evaluative experience is entirely conceptual – has no obvious problem accounting for their content if the non-conceptualist appeals to fineness of grain (this move has been at the center of the debate). Nevertheless, I then argue that a specific class of affective-evaluative experiences have non-conceptual content on different grounds. The main example I use is an aesthetic case of first exposure.

While such cases are discussed at length (see section 3), let me outline them here. First-exposure experiences are, in general, those where the subject encounters something distinctively unfamiliar which they have not come across before. The specific kinds of first-exposure experiences that will be central are affective-evaluative ones, in which there is an evaluative significance to the object of the experience, disclosed on the basis of (represented or presented through) affectivity. Consider, for example, a subject who is affectively moved by a painting of distinctive genre (say paintings which represent the sublime), but has never come across this genre before. In such cases, it is plausible, and I argue for the view, that the subject is affectively moved by the evaluative significance of the painting (say) while lacking conceptual discriminatory powers with regard to some of its relevant evaluative properties. Central to this argument is the idea that in these cases the unfamiliarity in feeling the subject experiences is inseparable from an unfamiliarity with the evaluative properties affectively

⁷ See McDowell 1994; 2006: Ch.7; Sedivy 1996: 414-31; Brewer 1999. Christopher Peacocke argues personal level perceptual experience involves non-conceptual content and can play a reason-giving role (see Peacocke 2001: 239-64; Lerman 2010: 402-26). Gareth Evans holds a similar view, although it is unclear whether the non-conceptual ‘informational states’ he takes subjects to acquire through perception are personal level experiences (see Campbell 2005). However, Evans is clear that judgements, which are conceptual, can be based on non-conceptual experiences (see Evans 1982: 227; cf. McDowell 1994: 47-55).

represented by those feelings, such that once we provide a detailed account of those experiences they fail to satisfy the following two conditions on conceptual content.

First, (a) the re-identifiability condition, understood as the ability to re-identify the relevant property, as discriminated and so represented in experience, in absence of the object which instantiates the relevant property. Second, (b) cognitive significance, where if the content of the experience is conceptual then it can, *ceteris paribus*, contribute to the subject's reason for judging that the relevant object is *thus and so*; grounding a rational transition from experience to judgement, in which the property – so (re)identified along the lines of (a) – can figure in a predicative position in a proposition (a similar idea is also called the context principle). These two conditions serve as conditions for conceptual content, which I argue affective-evaluative experiences of first exposure fail to meet.⁸

If I am right, this suggests that not only much of the conceptualist vs. non-conceptualist debate transposes for the affective-evaluative domain – an interesting result in its own right – but by looking beyond paradigmatic sense-perceptual experiences of empirical properties, to affective perceptual experiences of evaluative properties, we find novel motivation for non-conceptualism. So, my thesis points towards a specific class of affective-evaluative experiences as evidence against the unboundedness of the conceptual.⁹ Moreover, while philosophers have examined the nature of affective-evaluative experiences, and their phenomenal intentionality, the precise structure of their content is often overlooked. By arguing that a specific class of affective-evaluative experiences have non-conceptual content I also clarify the structure of their content.

While my main thesis is that some affective-evaluative experiences of first exposure are examples of personal level representational states with non-conceptual content,¹⁰ I also argue this limits them playing a specific reason-giving role with regard to the subject's evaluative judgements (limiting their

⁸ Both conditions are developed in sections 2 and 3.

⁹ Cf. McDowell 1994: Ch.2 and Ch.3.

¹⁰ The way I am drawing the conceptual vs. non-conceptual distinction concerns a difference in the type of content an intentional experience can have. The term 'state' is intended as a synonym for experience, rather than staking any position on 'state non-conceptualism'. For the distinction between state vs. content non-conceptualism see Heck 2000: 483-523 (cf. Bermudez 2007: 55-72).

role in the subject's space of reasons).¹¹ This suggests the additional thesis – explored in the final section – that affective-evaluative experiences with non-conceptual content are examples of limitations in evaluative understanding. Once this is appreciated, we have a framework for explaining their typically troubling character and the psychological motivation for negative attitudes toward them. So, the question of whether affective-evaluative experiences have non-conceptual content bears on important issues in philosophy of mind and value.

The discussion is divided into four sections. Section 1 explains what affective-evaluative experiences are in detail. Section 2 considers appeals to fineness of grain as motivating non-conceptualism. Section 3 then discusses affective-evaluative experiences of first exposure, explaining why they involve (1) a non-conceptual representation of the relevant evaluative property, and (2) their content cannot be kidnapped by recognitional capacities of the kind John McDowell proposes, therefore failing the first mark of conceptual content in terms of the re-identifiability condition.¹² I also consider extensions of the argument to different cases. Finally, section 4 explains the correlative failure of such experiences to be cognitively significant, and what this implies about evaluative understanding.

1. Clarifying Affective-Evaluative Experience

To understand the claim that certain kinds of affective-evaluative experiences have non-conceptual content we need to clarify the state in question in detail. Here I define such experiences, then draw a number of distinctions and make qualifications, allowing me to justify the definition.

Examples of such experiences can be found in a range of aesthetic experiences, and those similar to them. Consider an affective response to a painting I am looking at in an art gallery, in which it seems I affectively perceive the beauty of the painting through a felt attitude of favour towards it, which registers the painting's (apparent) evaluative standing as beautiful. Or consider the experience

¹¹ See Sellars 1997: §36; McDowell 1994: Ch. 3. I focus on belief and judgement, rather than the more complex case of action (see Cussins 1990).

¹² See McDowell 1994: Ch.3. The idea of the conceptualist kidnapping candidates for non-conceptual content is from Luntley 2003: 402-26.

of disgust when witnessing a public execution; again, it seems I affectively perceive the disgusting nature of the execution through a felt attitude of disfavour, which registers the execution's (apparent) evaluative standing as disgusting. Moreover, there is intentional causality: I experience my felt response to the object, my attitude of favour or disfavour towards it, as causally (and intelligibly) motivated by its evaluative characteristic(s).¹³

On the basis of these examples we can provide the following definition, which I explicate in what follows:

(Def. of Affective-Evaluative Experience): A subject *s* enjoys an affective-evaluative experience, just in case *s* is in an occurrent intentional state which affectively represents an object *o* as possessing a determinate evaluative property on the basis of an intentional attitude of felt favour or disfavour.

The first, and most important point to note, is that the affective component of the experience is representational or presentational, and so affect is intentionalized or has intentional properties on this view – this is what is meant by ‘affective representation’. As seen in the examples, what is directly (re)presented through the affectively valenced response – the attitude of felt favour or disfavour – is an evaluative property, which appears as qualifying the object of the experience. This is, in one sense, analogous to how typical sense-perceptual experience directly (re)presents empirical properties as properties of objects in one's current visual field.¹⁴ However, since the personal level representational vehicle – the mental state that does representational work or carries phenomenal information – for affective-evaluative experiences is a felt attitude of favour or disfavour, such experiences essentially involve felt valenced intentional attitudes, which sense-perceptual experiences do not (or not essentially). This is the operative sense of affective representation in this paper.

¹³ Whether there is experience of causality in sense-perceptual experience is contested (see Searle 1983: Ch.4; cf. Soteriou 2000: 183).

¹⁴ The direct caveat forestalls worries about talk of representation, where this involves awareness of epistemic intermediaries like sense-data. Representation can be replaced with presentation if preferable.

The next point is that such states are personal level occurrent experiences, present to phenomenal consciousness. This is necessary to distinguish them from subpersonal (functional or information processing) states. The latter might more straightforwardly be non-conceptual as they, by definition, operate without the conscious awareness of subjects who exercise conceptual capacities at the personal level.¹⁵ Second, the notion of an object, and its properties, should be understood broadly as what the experience is about. So, for example, the object of an affective-evaluative experience could be an evaluatively qualified, perceptually present, physical particular, person, action, event, or state of affairs (its particular object).¹⁶ Finally, the affective component of these states – given the operative notion of affective representation – is not a non-intentional subjective felt quality. Whether an argument could be made for thinking of ‘raw feelings’ as contentful at all, and so potentially having non-representational non-conceptual content (if we can make sense of this notion), one reason for resisting this approach is that it is tangential to the debate as traditionally framed, which concerns the representational content of experiences.

Such affective-evaluative experiences are therefore instances of what Peter Goldie calls feelings towards,¹⁷ which, amongst other things, (re)present their objects as possessing (typically determinate) evaluative properties through intentional feelings. These felt valenced intentional attitudes are responsive registrations of values – as a felt uptake of the objects’ evaluative properties. These felt

¹⁵ For discussion of the subpersonal level see Stich 1978: 499-518, and on subpersonal non-conceptual representational content see Bermudez 1995: 333-69 and Raftopoulos and Muller 2006: 187-219.

¹⁶ See Lyons 1980: Ch. 6 and Teroni 2007: 395-415. According to some phenomenological thinkers, and Kant on one of his conceptions of objectivity (cf. below), the notion of an ‘intentional object’ of an experience necessitates its content being conceptual. It is said to be a necessary condition of something being an intentional object that the subject for whom that object figures in an intentional experience possesses the ability to form corresponding judgements about that object and its properties. Arguably this requires satisfying both conditions for conceptual content specified in the Introduction, (see Husserl 1973: Section 13; Kant 1998: A68 / B93, A69 / B94), and so the term is co-extensive with conceptual content. If one wishes to argue certain intentional experiences have non-conceptual content, this notion of ‘intentional object’ is too demanding. For the purposes of this paper I use the term ‘object’ in less demanding sense, as that ‘something’ which is given to the mind, under a certain aspect, in an intentional experience (see Crane 1998). This less demanding sense of ‘object’ also finds expression in one of Kant’s other conceptions of objectivity (‘everything, every representation even, in so far as we are conscious of it, may be entitled object’ (Kant 1998: A 189 / B 234)).

¹⁷ See Goldie 2000: Ch.3.

valenced attitudes are, however, not characteristics of the object, but are the personal level vehicle through which such experiences (re)present evaluative properties of their objects.¹⁸ So, these states can be theorized as affective perceptual experiences of value, where there is necessarily a feeling of favour or disfavour in the uptake of the value content. As such, they could also be described, in Mark Johnston's terms, as 'disclosures of sensuous values', sensuous in that the evaluative properties of the objects are affectively (re)presented through felt valenced attitudes.¹⁹

Given this explication, I am committing to a representationalist view of affective-evaluative experiences, which locates the evaluative dimension of such experiences at the level of content. While such a view is not uncommon, it is open to challenge, specifically from those who locate the evaluative dimension of such experiences at the attitudinal level (as evaluative modes).²⁰ Although I cannot here provide an independent defense of this representationalist view of affectivity, it provides one *prima facie* plausible way of cashing out the connection between their phenomenology and intentionality. If we agree that many such states have a valenced phenomenology that is connected to the evaluative standing of their objects, then such a view provides one explanation of that connection. For example, if I have an affective-evaluative experience of Beethoven's Op. 111 piano sonata as sublime when hearing it, then it is plausible that my affective response to the sonata involves a felt favour, which picks up on (affectively registers) that sublimity. It is in this way that we can understand how affective states (seem to) disclose value (I return to qualifications about the metaphysics of value in section 3). And, while it may not be plausible to extend this view to all states with an affective and evaluative dimension, it also has the benefit of differentiating non-affective evaluative judgements, which are necessarily conceptual, from affective experiences of value, the structure of the content of which seems open to investigation.

Moreover, by locating values at the level of content for these experiences we can carve out a domain of inquiry sufficiently similar to the conceptualist vs. non-conceptualist debate as traditionally framed (concerning the representational content of perceptual experiences) to address a similar range

¹⁸ See Mitchell 2017: 57-84; Poellner 2016: 13-14; Montague 2009: 187-188.

¹⁹ See Johnston 2001: 182.

²⁰ See Deonna and Teroni 2012: Ch. 7.

of concerns, while appreciating the novelty attendant to consideration of evaluative rather than strictly sensible properties. For attitudinal theories, which locate the evaluative dimension of such affective-evaluative experiences in their attitude, rather than content – which is said to be non-evaluative – the question of the structure of their content falls back into the traditional debate, as concerning the non-evaluative representational content of mental states. Given these considerations, there is sufficient motivation for committing to the above view of some affective-evaluative experiences, and seeing where it takes us with respect to the conceptualist vs. non-conceptualist debate.

Finally, I should highlight that I reject an aspect of McDowell's view, and one he finds in Gareth Evans, which claims that to legitimately talk of an experience having content, its content must be open to the 'faculty of spontaneity'; its content must be available to be taken up in the fully-fledged exercise of conceptual capacities canonically identified with forming beliefs and judgements.²¹ Only within a framework which accepts that the contents of experience are conceptual will this notion of experience, favourable to the conceptualist, have traction. The theorist arguing for personal level non-conceptual content has reason to resist this demanding constraint on contentful experience if they can point to experiential, representational states not necessarily open to the 'faculty of spontaneity'.²²

Having clarified the relevant experiences, and addressed caveats, the next section situates them in the context of the debate between the conceptualist and the non-conceptualist over fineness of grain.

2. Fineness of Grain and Recognitional Capacities

A point of entry into the debate between the conceptualist and the non-conceptualist is the fine-grained character of colour perception. Arguing for non-conceptualism, Gareth Evans asks, 'do we really understand the proposal that we have as many colour concepts as there are shades of colours that we can sensibly discriminate'?'²³ To understand how this question motivates the view that perceptual experience of colour involves non-conceptual content we need to see that the colour concepts referred to by Evans are general concepts, such as red, blue, and magenta, which meet his

²¹ See McDowell 1994: 48-52 and Evans 1982: 158.

²² Kelly 2001a: 414 and Martin 1992: 761-2 make similar points.

²³ Evans 1982: 229. The question is rhetorical, he thinks the answer is no.

Generality Constraint in the following way: for a subject to meet the possession conditions for a concept they must have the ability to re-combine the candidate concept in an indefinite range of propositions they would understand. For example, if I possess the concept RED there should be no cognitive barrier to me both entertaining and understanding an indefinite number of propositions where RED figures in the predicate position (e.g. ‘a is RED, b is RED, c is RED’).²⁴

The thought behind Evans’ question is as follows: given we possess a limited set of such linguistically expressible general concepts of colour, it is phenomenologically evident that in perceptual experience we are able to (and do) discriminate shades of colour in a way that outstrips those general color concepts. So, Evans concludes, our conceptual capacity for linguistically referring to and discriminating shades of colour by the use of general colour concepts is a coarsely-grained approximation of our colour experience. Such experience exhibits a discriminatory fineness of grain that resists being exhaustively captured by such general concepts as possessed by us.

Rephrasing Evans’ question for affective-evaluative experiences provides the following; ‘do we really understand the proposal that we have as many evaluative concepts as there are ‘shades’ of value we can affectively discriminate’ – allowing metaphorical license by talking of ‘shades’ of value. We can understand the reference to evaluative concepts in terms of determinate (thick) value properties, such as the beautiful, disgusting, and sublime, rather than determinable (thin) value properties such as the good, bad, or (dis)valuable. Like general colour concepts, such evaluative concepts can be in the predicative position in propositional attitudes, for example, judging that ‘a is beautiful’, ‘b is beautiful’, etc., and so satisfy the Generality Constraint. The question is whether subjects possess an ability to discriminate between evaluative properties, disclosed on the basis of a felt valenced attitude – a felt favour or disfavour which serves as an uptake of the relevant evaluative content – that outstrips what they can express in a codified vocabulary of general evaluative concepts.

As in visual perception of colour, the phenomenology might exhibit the relevant fineness of grain. For example, consider someone who is a novice when it comes to visual art and evaluative matters, and only possesses the general evaluative concepts ‘beautiful’ or ‘pretty’. Such a subject might

²⁴ Ibid: 100-5.

nonetheless be able, in experience, to discriminate between the determinate beauty of Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* compared with that of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. They could do so on the basis of registering a felt difference in the evaluative standing of the paintings which, through affective perceptual experience, (re)presents them as exhibiting distinct determinations ('shades) of beauty. Yet, similarly to the colour case, this subject might nonetheless lack the linguistic competence for expressing the distinct 'shades' they can distinguish – they are a novice when it comes to visual art and evaluative matters, and only possess the general evaluative concept 'beautiful'. So, their evaluative vocabulary, as encoding general evaluative concepts, may be a coarsely grained approximation to their non-conceptual affective experience of value, which exhibits a discriminatory fineness of grain that resists being exhaustively captured by such general concepts.

However, the conceptualist has a strategy for accommodating the fine-grained contents of perceptual experiences, which I now sketch. They appeal to the exercise, in experience, of short-lived recognitional capacities which purport to capture, in all their fine-grainedness, the properties of an object (e.g. a particular shade of colour). Such recognitional capacities allow the content of experience to be taken up in propositional attitudes, like judgements, by the use of context-sensitive demonstrative phrases like 'that shade', or their mental equivalents (e.g. what is singled out by acts of attention).²⁵ The ability to exercise such recognitional capacities requires I possess the sortal, or determinable, concept 'shade of colour', but the identity of such capacities is strongly linked to the activating experience of the shade in question, that is the shade which can then be entertained in thought and expressed by linguistic demonstratives.²⁶ Yet, arguably for the capacity to be conceptual it cannot be that a demonstrative re-identification, which exploits a recognitional capacity of this sort, is only possible in the direct perceptual presence of the sample (i.e. the object exemplifying the finely-grained property).²⁷ Rather, for at least a short time after the activating experience, and for as long as

²⁵ See McDowell 2009: Ch.14. So understood, demonstrative concepts expressed in propositional attitudes exploit recognitional capacities, rather than being deployed in experience. For further discussion see Kelly 2001a: 397-420, 2001b: 601-8, and Peacocke 2001: 239-64.

²⁶ McDowell 1994: 59

²⁷ Ibid: 57. There is room for dropping this requirement, although I am just interested in sketching this response as originally formulated by McDowell 1994, so will not consider conceptualist positions which do not require it.

the recognitional capacity lasts, I must be able to (a) reliably return to the sample in thought, with the aid of demonstrative concepts, without being in its direct presence, and (b) recognize the finely grained property, which is part of my experience, in different contexts as the same (e.g. if I was to see it again).²⁸ Absent such ability for re-identification it is doubtful whether we could think of such recognitional capacities as conceptual capacities, or even as recognitional capacities.²⁹ So, the conceptual grid can be expanded to include the fine-grained content of experiences which Evans claims are outside it by broadening the conceptual capacities in operation³⁰ in experience to include short-lived recognitional capacities.³¹

Will this strategy work for affective-evaluative experiences? Consider again our evaluative novice, who can affectively discriminate ‘shades’ of beauty; their experience is sensitive to an affective-perceptual discrimination between specific determinations of beauty which certain paintings exemplify in a way too finely-grained to be exhaustively captured by their coarsely grained, general evaluative concept ‘beauty’. Yet, as in colour perception, appealing to a short-lived recognitional capacity can do the work the conceptualist needs to resist positing non-conceptual content. Our individual would have to possess the sortal or determinable concept ‘shade of beauty’, but the same explanation could be given about an activating (affective-evaluative) experience of the relevant determinate value, which involves (drawing into operation) a recognitional capacity identified with the affective experience of value. Again, this would be a capacity which can then be exploited in thought by demonstrative expressions like ‘that kind of beauty’. Moreover, as above, arguably for the capacity to be conceptual they must be able, by way of the re-identifiability condition, to (a) reliably return to the evaluative property in thought without being in direct affective-perceptual presence of the sample, in this case the painting which instantiates finely-grained beauty, and (b) recognize the finely grained value, which is part of their experience, in different contexts as the same (e.g. if they

²⁸ McDowell 1994: 59. McDowell’s short-lived recognitional capacities therefore exploit memory capacities.

²⁹ See section 3.2 for more on re-identifiability.

³⁰ McDowell uses the phrase ‘passive occurrences in which conceptual capacities are drawn into operation’ to indicate that this is not an active exercising of conceptual capacities (1994: 22, see also Ibid: 31).

³¹ Kelly has a different explanation of why the ability for re-identification is essential to demonstrative concept possession, that is not dependent on memory (see Kelly 2001a: 403-9).

were to see the painting again). So, the evaluative conceptual grid can be expanded to include the fine-grained evaluative content of experiences that seemed, by Evans-type considerations, to involve non-conceptual content. We can do this by broadening the evaluative conceptual capacities in operation in affective-evaluative experience to include short-lived recognitional capacities.

Although the details, and potential responses, could be developed more for both cases, there is no obvious barrier, at least *prima facie*, to the affective-evaluative conceptualist providing a similar account to the standard conceptualist. This response, however, does not provide an independent argument for conceptualism about the content of those experiences, but, if successful, undermines one strategy in arguing for non-conceptualism. Nonetheless, if the above reconstructions of what an affective-evaluative conceptualist might say are plausible, there is motivation to rest the case that some such experiences involve non-conceptual content on considerations other than fineness of grain.³² The next section discusses a specific class of affective-evaluative experiences which resist capture in the above terms.

3. Affective-evaluative experiences of first exposure

3.1 Conditions for nonconceptual content

To clarify what affective-evaluative experiences with non-conceptual content have to be like we can begin by noting a problem. How is it that a subject's experience, in our case an affective perceptual experience of value, can (re)present an object as being a certain evaluative way – can (seemingly) bring an environmental evaluative reality into view – and yet at the same time the subject fails to have any cognitive command over that representation, in that it would fail the re-identifiability condition, and also fail to be cognitively significant, therefore failing both marks of conceptual content (see Introduction).

Explaining this possibility sets up the challenge for the non-conceptualist once appeals to fineness of grain are abandoned. What is required for non-conceptual content, as Michael Luntley puts it, are situations where 'it is correct to say both that the proposition expressed by such-and-such is *F*,

³² For further discussion of fineness of grain see Coliva 2003: 57-70.

characterizes [the relevant] part of the representational content of their experiences and that the subject has no resources for expressing a conceptual discrimination of *F*-ness. They must be conceptually blind with respect to *F*-ness'.³³ Importantly, if an experience does not meet the first half of Luntley's conjunction – such that no property *F* is represented by or in the experience – then it fails to be a state with representational content at all: it would have no correctness conditions, and so would not be a candidate for being conceptual or non-conceptual. This first condition, however, does not imply any putative non-conceptual content would be propositionally structured, but rather the proposition would be an approximately correct characterization of the experiential content. A proposition which, according to this criterion of non-conceptual content, the subject would lack the conceptual abilities to grasp.

Expanding on the second half of Luntley's conjunction ('and that the subject has no resources for expressing a conceptual discrimination of *F*-ness') signals something important about the two conditions on conceptual content specified in the Introduction – re-identifiability and cognitive significance – and their relation. Consider the following points:

(i) The inability of a subject to be able to conceptually discriminate the relevant property – to conceptually identify it in experience – means they will lack the ability to re-identify that property in absence of the sample.

(ii) Contrastingly, if the subject is able to re-identify the relevant property in absence of the sample, even if only for a short time – say while the relevant recognitional capacity lasts – then that property has been conceptually discriminated in experience.

(iii) If this re-identifiability condition is satisfied then the property, so conceptually discriminated, can, *ceteris paribus*, serve in reason-giving roles in rational transitions from experience to judgement, in which the property, so identified, can figure as a predicate (and so be cognitively significant in this sense). Further, on this basis, the property can figure in a proposition which could be a premise of an argument the subject could understand. For example, (i) 'such and such is *E*'; (ii) 'All *E*'s are *F*'; therefore 'such and such is *F*'.

³³ Luntley 2003: 404 (see also Gunther 2003: 14-15).

On the basis of these points re-identifiability and cognitive significance are not separate conditions for conceptual content, in that cognitive significance could be satisfied independently of re-identifiability. Rather, for some experiential content to be in a position to be cognitively significant it must already satisfy the re-identifiability condition; re-identifiability seemingly has logical priority over cognitive significance. This is not to claim re-identifiability is sufficient for cognitive significance, hence the *ceteris paribus* clause, but rather that cognitive significance (in this specific sense) requires re-identifiability, and so the latter is necessary for the former. Given this, failing to meet the re-identifiability condition for the relevant property necessitates that it cannot be cognitively significant (see end of section 3.3 for more on this point).

From this discussion, we can specify two conditions an affective-evaluative experience must satisfy to have non-conceptual content. It must (1) (re)present an evaluative property, such that a proposition of the form ‘such-and-such is *E*’ (where *E* is an evaluative property) would be a correct characterization of the experience (to re-emphasise, this is a condition on being a state with representational evaluative content at all, conceptual or non-conceptual). Yet, at the same time (2) the subject’s discrimination of that evaluative property in experience must fail to satisfy the re-identifiability condition, and therefore, by extension, also fail to be cognitively significant (i.e. the subject would lack the ability to grasp the above proposition). The question is whether there are examples of affective-evaluative experiences that satisfy these two conditions. Affective-evaluative states of first exposure, which are experienced by their subjects as genuinely unfamiliar, arguably do. I begin with one case, explain relevant features in detail (3.2 and 3.3), and then discuss similar cases (3.4).

3.2 First exposure experiences and conceptualist responses

Consider a subject’s affective-evaluative experience of a kind of visual art, say a distinctive genre or theme of painting, entirely unfamiliar to them. To make the example concrete say the distinctive genre is the sublime, and that our subject has never been exposed to anything in this genre (this could be for a range of reasons, for example, if a child has never come across this kind of art; the explanation for lack of exposure is not tremendously important). We could specify a particular

painting, say Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, which is paradigmatic of the way romantic painters used so-called epics of nature, often with human figures in contemplative poses, to depict and give expression to ideas of the sublime or sublimity (as allegorical landscapes). There is also an important distinction, addressed in detail by Burke and Kant,³⁴ between the beautiful and the sublime, both in terms of the particular objects to which these evaluative qualifications are typically applied, and the affective responses they elicit (e.g. perceptions of beauty are more typically associated with pleasurable feelings). On first exposure of being perceptually confronted with such unfamiliar visual art (for example, the Casper David Friedrich painting) say our subject has a distinctive feeling towards it - it consciously affects them in a particular way. This is only one possibility; the painting might, for whatever reason, not affect them. Nonetheless, in cases where the subject is consciously affected – and there are such cases – we might say, in broad terms first, our subject is uncertain of what to make of their encounter with this instance of an unfamiliar genre. We can bracket, for now, how widespread such cases are (see section 3.4), and focus on this example. Yet, more work needs to be done to substantiate any claim there is non-conceptual content here.

This is because the affective-evaluative conceptualist might suggest what is happening in such cases is that the subject lacks theoretical understanding of why the object of their experience has the value it is consciously represented as having, where theoretical understanding in this context amounts to knowledge of the relevant non-evaluative properties on which the higher-order evaluative property (putatively) supervenes. For example, someone may have an affective-evaluative experience of a painting as sublime, but only a vague idea about what non-evaluative qualities of the painting are leading them to experience it as sublime. So, they do not know what it is about the painting that makes it seem sublime, which creates an affective-evaluative experience including a sense of mystery, but not one which involves a non-conceptual representation of value.

However, we can distinguish these cases from those of first-exposure. In fact, for most aesthetic experiences, subjects do not possess a distinct awareness of the conjunction of co-instantiated, subtending, non-evaluative properties that the represented evaluative property putatively supervenes

³⁴ See Burke 2015; Kant 2011.

on (e.g. the particular configuration of colors, the brush work, the spatial representation of the figures etc.). One can be distinctly aware of an evaluative property, say the sublimity of a painting, without a corresponding distinct awareness of the specific conjunction of non-evaluative subtending properties. Discipline-specific theory, in this case art criticism, is partly a matter of highlighting those subtending properties of which we previously were not distinctly aware. So, the unfamiliar affective-evaluative experiences I wish to highlight are *not* those where an evaluative property is (re)presented but we have not theoretically (i.e. non-evaluatively) understood why yet, but those of first exposure where a distinctively unfamiliar genre of painting affects us, but we ostensibly have no conceptual grasp of what determinate value is instantiated.

Moreover, the unfamiliarity experienced in such cases is not merely an ambiguity expressible by way of statements of the kind ‘I am not sure how that painting makes me feel’, if the unfamiliar feeling is understood to be caused by a conceptually discriminated evaluative property. Rather, as we are dealing with a case of first exposure which involves an affective perceptual experience of value – where the affective component is the representational vehicle for the evaluative content – then the unfamiliarity in feeling is inseparable from an unfamiliarity in what those feelings are about, that is the evaluative standing of the painting.

We can flesh out the example by noting that from the subject’s perspective there will seem to be *something* about the painting they experience as evaluatively significant, which makes them feel a certain way towards it, but their ability to substantively grasp what that is or why that should be the case – at the affective-evaluative level – eludes them. It is in this sense that such an experience of first exposure is genuinely unfamiliar for them, rather than merely unfamiliar in part. And this point about an evaluatively relevant ‘something’ is important if we are going to argue that the experience meets condition (1) specified in section 3.1: the experience must represent an evaluative property, such that a proposition of the form ‘such-and-such is *E*’ (where *E* is an evaluative property) would correctly characterize the experience.

However, a different response from the conceptualist would be to deny there is any conscious representation of the relevant evaluative property. They may argue no reason has been given for thinking the subject is merely conceptually blind with respect to the relevant evaluative property *E*,

rather than entirely blind to it. Such that it would make more sense to say *E* – in our case, sublimity – does not figure in the content of their experience.

There are number of ways of taking this objection. The conceptualist might suggest, firstly, there is no conscious representation of the relevant evaluative property because there are no such properties. However, we can interpret this response in two ways, one of which is less problematic than the other. If the objection is motivated by metaphysical anti-realism about value, such that it is taken as (apparently) implausible than anything *in fact* possess evaluative properties, this will not challenge whether the proposed personal level phenomenology of (non-conceptually represented) value is correct. The central non-conceptualist claim is a phenomenological one, about what is (arguably) (re)presented in certain experiences, and this is not obviously undermined by worries about the metaphysical status of the values so (re)presented – the values could be *phenomenally* objective without being *metaphysically* objective. We could even hold onto the phenomenological thesis, and metaphysical anti-realism about value, by adopting a position similar to what Angela Mendelovici calls ‘figurative projectivism’, which holds that evaluative properties are experientially (re)presented in the relevant class of personal level affective-evaluative experiences, but since the properties specified in their correctness conditions do not exist, all such experiences are non-veridical.³⁵

On a second way of taking the objection matters are trickier. The conceptualist could claim evaluative properties are (at least in part) projections of affective experiences, or at least aspects of them, onto non-evaluative properties of their objects, and this is manifest at the personal level of experience – as a ‘literal projectivism’.³⁶ Whatever else we think about this (Humean) view, it is an ad-hoc route for the conceptualist to take, since they would be giving up on *affective-evaluative* conceptualism – evaluative properties would no longer be (re)presented in experience *at all* (whether conceptually or non-conceptually) – rather than taking issue with the case described. It also seems odd given that McDowell, who is the principal defender of conceptualism in the standard sense-perceptual case, rejects literal projectivism, arguing that it misdescribes the phenomenology of value, and fails to do justice to how many of our affective-evaluative experiences are readily intelligible by reference

³⁵ See Mendelovici 2014: 135-57.

³⁶ See Blackburn 1985.

values as qualifying objects in one's experience.³⁷ So, this way of taking the objection depends on contentious claims about the phenomenology of value, and generates further problems which take us far from the current debate.³⁸

Taking a different tack, the affective-evaluative conceptualist might claim whatever registering there is of an evaluative property in first-exposure experiences (if there is any) occurs at the subpersonal level, where we provide a third-personal causal explanation about why the subject's experience has an ambiguous character – that 'something' about the painting is affecting them.³⁹ In reply, we could say any subpersonal story involves glossing over features of the phenomenology. The subject's affective response in such cases is not experienced as entirely unintelligible; rather, there is something evaluatively relevant about the painting they affectively register. Indeed, it seems the evaluative standing of the painting is causally responsible for their feelings towards it, while being significantly opaque. This is reflected in the subject's ability to make certain non-inferential judgements in the presence of the sample painting of the kind 'it's not like anything else I've seen'.⁴⁰ In this sense, they possess a necessarily limited ability to engage in crude context-sensitive statements, implying some discriminatory awareness when in its presence. If the subject were not merely conceptually blind, but entirely blind to the evaluative feature which I am claiming they possess a non-conceptual awareness of, then such statements would be mysterious.

Importantly, this does not entail such experiences of first exposure are cognitively significant (and so meet that condition on conceptual content). Remember, cognitive significance was defined in more

³⁷ See McDowell 1985: 210-6 and Johnston 2001: 181-214.

³⁸ I thank an anonymous referee at *Synthese* for pressing me to consider these responses.

³⁹ Sonia Sedivy similarly objects to Peacocke's account of non-conceptual content and its reason-giving role (see Peacocke 1992: Ch.3 and Sedivy 1996: 428). However, one of the conditions on non-conceptual content specified here is failure of cognitive significance. So, when Sedivy says 'nonconceptual contents clearly do not *figure in* experience at the first-person perspective since at that perspective they are without use, the thinker by definition has no capacities with respect to them' (Ibid: 428), this is only a problem for non-conceptualist views committed to cognitive significance for those contents. The response is to ask why we are not justified in positing personal level non-conceptual contents at present 'without use' for the subject (first exposure affective-evaluative experiences are one example of this – see section 4).

⁴⁰ This contrasts with cases of blindsight, where the subject might deny they possess non-inferential knowledge of the object of their experience (see Poellner 2003: 44).

specific terms: if the content of the experience is conceptual then it can, *ceteris paribus*, contribute to the subject's reason for judging that the relevant object is *thus and so*; grounding a rational transition from experience to judgement, in which that discriminated property, can figure in the predicative position in a proposition. The cognitive significance necessary for conceptual content in this context would relate to a discriminated evaluative property (see section 3.1). And, in fact, the content of those crude context-sensitive judgements evinces the lack of such an ability. The minimal discriminatory awareness implied by such crude statements – awareness that something about the painting moves them – is not equivalent to the ability to *conceptually discriminate* that evaluative property, and it is the latter which our subject seems to lack. In fact, such statements are common-place among those confronted, in first exposures, by objects felt to be somehow evaluatively relevant – through affective uptakes of their evaluative standing – but that nonetheless remain significantly opaque to them. What such statements lack is the specificity a conceptual discrimination of that evaluative property would make possible.

3.3 Conceptual learning, memory and demonstrative identification

Other than insisting on a non-conceptualist take on the initial description of the phenomenology, and its reflection in the statements discussed above, which might be contested, we can strengthen the claim there is a non-conceptual personal level awareness of the relevant evaluative property in light of the following considerations pertaining to learning, memory and demonstrative identification.

Arguably our ability to come to understand distinctively unfamiliar or novel artistic and aesthetic genres, or themes, involves an ability to develop, and therefore learn, discriminatory conceptual abilities with regard to specific evaluative properties. In our case the evaluative property of the painting is sublimity, and our subject has never been exposed to this idiom. An ability to understand, and so apply, the relevant conceptual discriminatory capacities for sublime art forms is a skill learnt by, among other things, repeated exposure. When such artistic education is successful it involves abilities to conceptually recognize the evaluative properties characteristic of this idiom of expression, deploy the relevant concepts in thought and reasoning, and subtly articulate, and so type-identify, one's experience by reference to those evaluative features. If such affective-evaluative conceptual

capacities can be learnt, if one can bring one's intentional feelings to articulation by such training, then it is plausible that, for those not steeped in the relevant aesthetic idioms, first exposures can involve a non-conceptual awareness of those evaluative properties one then gains a conceptual discriminatory skill to identify.⁴¹

Supporting these considerations is the assumption that the learning of novel concepts is, in significant part, a personal level phenomenon, and therefore an achievement of the subject, involving conscious attention and awareness. However, consider a potential conceptualist response. They might appeal to a subpersonal brute-causal or 'triggering' story, whereby concept acquisition is explained without reference to subjects' awareness of any personal level content. Yet, there are a number of worries with this response. One would be that it fails to do justice to concept learning as an achievement, as something the subject does, and as a process they consciously go through. Another would be that it leaves unexplained the transition from the requisite subpersonal processes, to our possession of (usually) specific personal level concepts. As Adina Roskies puts it, 'the content of experience plays a role in fixing the content of the concept a thinker acquires',⁴² that is in fixing the content of the concept we then can actively deploy in thought. And remember it is this kind of cognitive significance that typical conceptualists take as central to having and deploying conceptual capacities.

The alternative conceptualist position, which accepts concept learning is a personal level phenomenon, is some form of concept nativism. The conceptualist could appeal to an 'experience activated' view, such that personal level content is non-trivially implicated in concept learning, in contrast with the brute-causal 'triggering' story. Nonetheless, such nativism is unattractive. While *some* primitive concepts may be innate in this qualified (experience activated) sense - perhaps primitive indexical concepts, or certain abstract concepts - it is implausible that evaluative concepts (not least the aesthetic-evaluative properties under consideration) are so innate, and this seems even

⁴¹ See Roskies 2008: 633-59 for a development of this learning argument in the standard sense-perceptual case – my discussion echoes points made there (see also Peacocke 2001: 252-3). Such learning is not possible when for unconscious representations at the subpersonal level.

⁴² Roskies 2008: 643.

more obviously true than for ordinary empirical sense-perceptual concepts. Moreover, it is unlikely evaluative concepts are compositional in that they could be ‘constructed’ out of other evaluative or non-evaluative concepts which could make a plausible claim to being innate. So, the learning argument provides a further consideration in favour of non-conceptual content for first-exposure affective-evaluative experiences.

However, one problem with the above learning argument (along with the considerations motivating nonconceptual evaluative content from 3.2), is that arguably they do not necessarily show that those very determinate properties one learns to discriminate and recognize were already represented – just nonconceptually – in the first-exposure experience. Granted, the critic might suggest, some (apparent) non-conceptual evaluative significance is picked up in the affective response, but that falls short of showing the novice’s awareness of that significance amounts to a nonconceptual representation on those determinate aesthetic values the subject learns to discriminate and to grasp conceptually. Relatedly, it might be argued the properties non-conceptually represented are, in some way, *determinable* rather than determinate.

These are a number of responses to these worries. First, we might weaken the first condition on non-conceptual content. Rather than saying (1) the experience must represent an evaluative property, such that a proposition of the form ‘such-and-such is *E*’ would correctly characterize the experience (where *E* is that determinate evaluative property), and *E* is that property the subject comes to learn and grasp conceptually, we amend this to (1)*, the experience must represent *some* evaluative property, such that a proposition of the form ‘such-and-such is *E*’ would still correctly characterize the experience. As such, we remain non-committal on whether *E* was that specific determinate aesthetic value the subject then learns to discriminate and to grasp conceptually. Arguably there will be a determinate property the affective experience represents – qua the non-conceptual evaluative significance picked up in the affective response of the novice – but just not necessarily that specific determinate aesthetic value the subject then learns to discriminate and to grasp conceptually. This is still a significant result, and allows the argument to proceed, since it grants that the first-exposure experience satisfies (1)*, which would be an amended (weaker) version of the first condition on non-conceptual content.

Alternatively, we might amend (1) to (1)**, whereby the experience must (re)present some *determinable* value or disvalue, such that a proposition of the form ‘such-and-such is *of (dis)value*’, would correctly characterize the experience. The idea would be that value is non-conceptually represented in such experiences as determinable, and so only affectively picks up on value at the general level of positive or negative significance. If this was true for our first-exposure experience, we would have to rule out that what was non-conceptually (re)presented was that determinate aesthetic value the subject learns to discriminate and to grasp conceptually. Although, whatever valence the determinable value had – as of value or disvalue – will likely be reflected in the determinate value concept that is learnt. Even accepting this amendment though still provides a significant result, and would allow the argument to proceed, since it grants that the relevant first-exposure experience satisfies (1)**, which would (again) be an amended (even weaker) version of the first condition on non-conceptual content. The non-conceptual (re)presentation of value would just be – at least in this case (and sufficiently similar ones) – sufficiently general or determinable.

One conceptualist response, however, might be that no reason has been given to think this representation is nonconceptual; rather it could just be a generic conceptual representation. However, this fails (again) to target the relevant class of experiences at issue, and their distinctive phenomenology as documented in section 3.2. A generic conceptual representation, say an affective-evaluative experience of a painting as *good*, as exemplifying a generic positive value, would typically possess no distinctive feeling of unfamiliarity, and the related limitations in rational capacities (expressed in those crude context-sensitive non-inferential judgements), which is a pervasive feature of first-exposure experiences. And it is that phenomenological datum that needs explaining, and arguably is left unexplained by merely posting a generic conceptual representation. Moreover, it is not that, in the relevant cases, the object is affectively presented as *generically good*, but we have no theoretical grasp of why that is the case, but rather the evaluative standing of the object, whether represented as determinate or determinable, strikes the subject as entirely unfamiliar.⁴³

⁴³ I thank an anonymous referee at *Synthese* for pressing me on these points.

However, we can hold on to a stronger link between the non-conceptual affective (re)presentation of value, and learnt conceptual discriminatory skills to identify the relevant evaluative properties, by drawing on considerations, originally presented by Mike Martin, concerning the link between the memory of a perceptual experience and learnt conceptual capacities. Consider the following example. Say our subject came, through suitable learning and repeated exposure, to acquire the concept of sublimity, but she had not yet gone back to see that painting, which was the object of her first exposure. Is it not plausible she might now, through episodic memory, realize that the original affective-evaluative experience was *in fact* an affective perceptual experience of sublimity? The subject would be realizing it was that determinate aesthetic value, now conceptually articulate after learning, which their affective response was picking up on when they were a novice; such that the content is revealed in a realization, through recall, that in fact things were that distinctively sublime way. We need to build into the example that the memory experience is reasonably faithful to the original experience and does not involve *post facto* modifications,⁴⁴ yet cases meeting these constraints are possible.

Moreover, one further phenomenological feature of such cases is as follows. It does not seem phenomenologically accurate to say the subject is consciously attempting to force their original, putatively non-conceptual, experience into the mold of their learnt conceptual discriminatory skill – that is, retroactively applying that concept to the relevant part of the experience in an arbitrary way (although that can happen). Rather, there is an intuitive sense, reflected in thoughts of the kind ‘ah, it now makes sense to me’, of a reasonably involuntary realization of a non-arbitrary connection between the content of first exposure experience and the learnt discriminatory skill.

While appeal to such cases, and the aspects of their phenomenology highlighted, may not show definitively that the non-conceptual evaluative significance picked up in first exposure affective responses of novices *is always* the determinate aesthetic value they then learn to discriminate and

⁴⁴ See Martin 1992: 753-759. One difference between the argument presented here and Martin’s argument for non-conceptual content (aside from being about different kinds of experiences) is that my argument does not turn on a subject’s failure to notice a distinct appearance in the original perceptual experience, but a subject’s experiential awareness of unfamiliarity, which pervades first exposure experiences.

grasp conceptually, it does enough to motivate considering this explanation as plausible. Moreover, the critic would owe us a persuasive alternative explanation, which makes sense of that experience of a non-arbitrary connection in cases where one realizes there is an important link between the memory of a perceptual experience and one's learnt conceptual capacities.

If these, and the points from 3.2 hold, then affective-evaluative experiences of first exposure satisfy the first condition for non-conceptual content (or a condition sufficiently close to it). We now need to explain how they satisfy the second condition: (2) the subject's discrimination of that evaluative property in experience must fail to satisfy the re-identifiability condition, and therefore, by extension, fail to be cognitively significant.

It is a condition of our example that our individual could not grasp a proposition of the form 'the painting is sublime', since what they lack, in their present state as a novice about sublimity, is any concept of the sublime through which such a proposition could be understood. Yet, they do not merely lack the relevant linguistic term or general concept, but rather they have not experienced the sublime before – the kind of experience through which they could begin a process of coming to understand that concept. Indeed, this is a condition of their experience being genuinely unfamiliar to them (a first exposure). Our subject does, however, possess some concepts relevant to the experience (e.g. the concept of a painting, colour concepts). I am not claiming such an affective-evaluative experience is entirely non-conceptual, but rather that it specifically involves a non-conceptual awareness of the relevant evaluative property. There is no claim such experiences satisfy the autonomy thesis, that a subject can be in an experiential state without possessing any concepts whatsoever.⁴⁵ Moreover, it is worth re-emphasizing a point made in section 1, that my thesis concerns

⁴⁵ For discussion see Bermudez 1994: 402-418. This raises a question about the possibility of cases of affective-evaluative experience where one does not possess the necessary means to *conceptualize the experience itself*, rather than just a property the experience represents. If there could be affective-evaluative experiences which satisfy the 'autonomy thesis' in this way, in which the subject had no conceptual capacities in play at all – even those very minimal ones of an 'experience' or primitive first-personal indexical concepts – it is likely the experience would not just be unfamiliar to them, but rather incomprehensible. It is difficult to say much about such cases given any conceptually articulate, introspective, report of them, would be, *ex hypothesi*, impossible, nonetheless they are interesting. My intuition would be that since introspective attention requires the deployment of conceptual capacities (minimally that one is having an experience of some kind), then in such

exclusively the representational content of experiences, rather than any non-representational, non-conceptual dimensions of such experiences, e.g. ‘raw feelings’ (if there are such). While this issue is interesting it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.⁴⁶

However, is there some evaluative recognitional capacity at work in this first-exposure experience, which could be exploited by way of demonstrative re-identification of the kind ‘the painting is that shade of value’, given the subject possesses the sortal concept ‘shade of value’? The affective-evaluative conceptualist will grant the recognitional capacity is in one sense context-dependent, in that it depends on the activating experience, but they might suggest, nonetheless, there is a context-independent proposition the subject could grasp, namely ‘the painting is that shade of value’. So, the affective-evaluative conceptualist could claim the content of the experience can be ‘kidnapped’ in the way appeals to fineness of grain were in section 2. That this response is not available should be clear given the analysis so far, but being explicit about why allows us to see how the experience satisfies the second condition on non-conceptual content – that of failing the re-identifiability condition, and what follows from it (failure of cognitive significance).

Why is it a demonstrative expression of the kind ‘the painting is *that* shade of value’, as exploiting a short-lived recognitional capacity, cannot be applied to our case of a genuinely unfamiliar affective-evaluative experience of first exposure? As was said when describing the case, we saw the unfamiliarity of the experience characterizes it in its entirety; one of the distinctive things about first exposure experiences is that the subject fails to conceptually discriminate the relevant evaluative property. There is something about the painting which they (affectively) feel to be evaluatively relevant, but they have no means for conceptually articulating what that is because they have not, and cannot discriminate, and so identify, the relevant evaluative property on the basis of their experience.

A demonstrative expression of the kind ‘the painting is *that* shade of value’, as exploiting some short-lived recognitional capacity, depends on the subject having discriminated the relevant evaluative

cases introspection would necessarily fail, or not be possible, rather than their being any higher-order non-conceptual representations in play.

⁴⁶ See Poellner 2003: 32-57 (section 3), for one such strategy, which draws on the intentional modes – not specified in terms of content – of ‘lived experience’ as motivating a case for non-conceptualism.

property in experience, which can then be exploited in absence of the painting (even if they do not possess the appropriate determinate general evaluative concept). Since our first exposure subject fails to discriminate the relevant evaluative property in experience, then they have failed to identify it in any conceptually meaningful sense, and therefore re-identification is not possible.⁴⁷

So, since they lack the requisite affective-evaluative skill, one it was suggested can be learnt, to pick out the evaluative property then they could not understand a proposition of the form ‘the painting is sublime’. In this way, our subject’s failure to meet the re-identifiability condition, where this would involve being able to re-identify that property in absence of the sample, is indicative of their having been unable to conceptually discriminate that evaluative property in experience. Therefore, our subject is conceptually blind with respect to the relevant evaluative property. Furthermore, for that aspect of the experience to become familiar they would have to be able to identify the evaluative property conceptually; they would have to conceptually discriminate the evaluative property and therefore not be conceptually blind with respect to it.

On this basis, genuinely unfamiliar affective-evaluative experiences of first exposure meet conditions (1) and (2) for non-conceptual content. One consequence of failure to meet the re-identifiability condition is that the evaluative property, of which they only have a non-conceptual awareness, is not available for cognitively significant moves in the subject’s space of reasons. I provide reflections on this issue in section 4 after discussing other cases which admit of the same analysis.

3.4 Further cases and clarifications

One worry about the argument presented is as follows. Even if we accept that the relevant case of an affective-evaluative experience of first-exposure – where the key dimension is the unfamiliarity of the experience – (re)presents value non-conceptually, the argument may only apply to a narrow range of cases. I now discuss this issue.

⁴⁷ See also Roskies 2008: 633-59.

First, what is being argued against is the ‘unboundedness of the conceptual’, so while the relevant class of experiences are specific this does not undermine the claim to have found an instance of personal level non-conceptual content. Moreover, cases for personal level non-conceptual content in non-affective evaluative perception appeal to specific, situation-dependent, examples, such as Tim Crane’s waterfall illusion, and Michael Luntley’s cases of expectations of melodic resolution in a novice’s auditory perception.⁴⁸ This reflects the fact – noted at the beginning of section 3 – that once broader arguments for non-conceptual content (e.g. fineness of grain) are abandoned, cases of non-conceptual content have to meet more specific conditions.

Nonetheless, the argument will be more significant if there is broader application, so how common are the first-exposure affective-evaluative experiences described in 3.2? Given some plausible assumptions they may not be excessively rare. Even just focusing on aesthetic cases, there is a wide-variety of distinctive genres and themes, ranging over aesthetic mediums, e.g. films, music, visual art, etc. For example, a similar argument could be made for affective-evaluative experiences of first-exposure to tragic art forms, if it is plausible that ‘the tragic’ is an evaluative property that can be affectively disclosed; consider a subject, ignorant of tragedy as a genre, who was exposed for the first time to Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*. Alternatively, consider someone’s first-exposure to surrealist or absurdist films (e.g. David Lynch’s *Eraserhead*).⁴⁹ Given individuals’ exposure to distinctive genres and themes is often significantly limited, first-exposures of this kind may not be particularly uncommon.

Beyond aesthetic cases, consider a first-exposure case of a child’s affective response to the evaluative significance of another individual’s behavior, that is later learned by them (say by parental testimony or repeated exposure) to be insincere – say it was a devious smile. It is plausible the child

⁴⁸ See Crane 1988: 142-7; Luntley 2003: 402-26.

⁴⁹ Affective-evaluative experiences of the ‘uncanny’ (if this an evaluative property) might be a related case. However, on the Freudian analysis, such experiences involve some (perhaps vague) sense of repetition or familiarity (in neurotic cases leading to repetition compulsion), while at the same time involving dissociation in relation to what is seemingly familiar. A detailed discussion is beyond my scope here, although the sense of non-conceptual content developed in section 3.2 and 3.3 is not co-extensive with any affective-evaluative experience one finds ‘troubling’ or peculiar.

may affectively pick up on something ‘off’ about the behavior, and so its evaluative significance, while lacking the conceptually discriminatory capacities to identify it as an instance of insincerity – so lacking the conceptual means for identifying, and so articulating, the relevant value (arguably) in play. The behavior affects them, making them feel uneasy and unsure (precipitating a negative affective attitude), but their ability to substantively grasp why that is case is significantly limited. So, if the kinds of evaluative predicates we apply to individuals’ behavior can sometimes be affectively disclosed in first-exposures, then a not insignificant number of social interactions, especially those of children, may involve non-conceptual evaluative content. Unfamiliarity is still central, but this shows the non-conceptual thesis extends beyond aesthetic cases.

However, there may be cases of affective-evaluative experiences which are in some sense unfamiliar but which involve a conceptually discriminated evaluative property. For example, say one was indifferent to ballet, but saw the *Nutcracker*, and was struck by the beauty and grace of the dancing. One could certainly have the concepts ‘beautiful’ and ‘graceful’, while nonetheless experiencing something *unfamiliar* instantiating these evaluative properties in a distinctive way. In such cases, what arguably happens is that the scope of one’s concept broadens to include something one previously did not (reflectively) consider to be subsumed under it. Nonetheless, this unfamiliarity with a distinctive way something instantiates a concept one already possesses should not be confused with affective-evaluative experiences of first-exposure to values beyond one’s conceptual repertoire.

Relatedly, what connection do affective-evaluative experiences of first-exposure share with the affective phenomenon of ‘being moved’? On the most sophisticated analysis of this phenomena in the literature, provided by Julien Deonna and Florian Cova, there are similarities.⁵⁰ These authors specify being moved as involving a felt intentional attitude which is directed at particular objects, and talk of a ‘feeling of depth in being moved that directly echoes the depth of what is apprehended...’⁵¹ However, they argue – plausibly – that being moved constitutes a distinctive type of emotion in which the values we attach most significance to (‘core values’) are brought back to attention, perhaps after being underappreciated, through affective phenomenology. These core values are, however,

⁵⁰ Deonna and Cova 2014: 447-66.

⁵¹ Ibid: 456.

conceptually understood and embedded in our cognitive economy; e.g. in thoughts, beliefs and desires relating to them. And while they may have become unfamiliar in a temporal sense, our being affected by them is an entirely intelligible conceptual identification of them, and their importance for us. So, similarities notwithstanding, 'being moved' in this sense is typically different from the cases discussed here.

What this discussion has shown is that there is application for the argument for non-conceptual content developed in 3.2 and 3.3 beyond the specific case considered there. The relevant class of affective-evaluative experiences are those of first-exposure, in which the feeling of unfamiliarity is central, yet it is plausible first-exposure experiences of this kind are neither excessively rare nor confined to aesthetic cases.

4. Evaluative Understanding and Non-Conceptual Content

What does it mean for an affective-evaluative experience, or some significant aspect of it, to lie outside the subject's space of reasons? It is a central feature of rational discourse that one is able to understand propositions involving properties referred to by the concepts in predicative position. Insofar as our subject could not understand such propositions *qua* the evaluative property of which they only possess a non-conceptual awareness, then they would struggle to make sense of rational discourse involving it. For example, if rational discourse involves an ability to understand inferences in arguments in which that evaluative property figures in the predicative position in a premise, then our subject could not fully understand the semantic content of such arguments. However, should it trouble them that there are experiences they go through, which cannot be cognitively significant in this way, and with regard to which they cannot enter into rational discourse, so understood? We can imagine someone not being particularly troubled by this, being more or less content to remain, in the relevant sense, inarticulate.

Yet, there is a more pressing problem which failure of cognitive significance points to. Insofar as there are affective-evaluative experiences in someone's experiential economy that they lack the ability to bring within their space of reasons, there are ways they are (or have been) affected – ways they feel toward evaluative aspects of the world – that they do not understand, or at least not fully. However,

this is not merely a reflection of the ordinary fact that, as Mike Martin puts it, ‘experience can on occasion be inert with respect to belief – one can simply fail to notice how things are experienced’.⁵² Rather such first-exposure experience is significantly ‘inert’ with respect to the subject’s space of reasons insofar as it is an experience they have not, and at present cannot, substantively make sense of. This inability is therefore expressive of a limitation of evaluative self-understanding, and it is harder to imagine not being troubled by this.

Once we appreciate this point, explanatory advantages are accrued by claiming first-exposure affective-evaluative experiences have non-conceptual content. First, we have a theoretical framework for explaining the phenomenological datum that such experiences are often (although by no means always) unnerving, troubling and confusing for their subjects. By contrast, it is not clear what the affective-evaluative conceptualist alternative explanation would be. By extension of considerations in section 3.2, it is not open to the conceptualist to claim this characteristic feature can be explained by the subject only having a limited theoretical grasp of why, say, a painting is sublime; as argued there, it is the determinate value, and its affective (re)presentation, that is unfamiliar, not the non-evaluative grounds for a conceptually discriminated evaluative property. On such a picture the conceptualist would be forced to say that for such affective-evaluative experiences to become ‘familiar’ we would have to discriminate the relevant subtending non-evaluative properties. Yet this fails to target the class of experiences at issue: there is nothing necessarily or even typically unnerving, troubling or confusing about an experience of a painting as beautiful (say) for which I nonetheless do not possess a distinct awareness of why it is so in this non-evaluative sense.

Second, and relatedly, since such unfamiliar affective-evaluative experiences expose a limitation in evaluative self-understanding, the non-conceptualist has a framework for explaining part of the psychological motivation for the attitude of evaluative chauvinism regarding them. It is a relatively familiar phenomenon that subjects of first exposures in aesthetic contexts, but also more broadly the affective-evaluative domain as a whole, react in defensive ways. One manifestation of this would be taking a dismissive attitude towards such experiences – closing oneself off from evaluative aspects of

⁵² Martin 1992: 753.

the world one does not comprehend. In technical terms, one central aspect of this kind of evaluative chauvinism involves a negative attitude towards the non-conceptual content of such experiences. If one is able to sustain this attitude – manifest, say, in the claim that the objects of such experiences are not worthy of one’s attention – their confusing or unnerving character, and its connection to revealing a limitation in evaluative self-understanding, can be avoided. In a different, but still primarily defensive strategy, it is again fairly common-place that subjects might, self-deceptively, claim such experiences (and their content) are not beyond their ken, and therefore avoid self-transparency with respect to them.

So, given that recognizing such experiences for what they are involves admitting there is an instance where one lacks comprehension of both some evaluative aspect of the world and one’s relation to it, then the psychological motivation for evaluative chauvinism, as documented above, is strong. This is especially so, when coupled with the fact that learning to be conceptually articulate with regard to such contents is a difficult process. Again, it is not clear the affective-evaluative conceptualist has an obvious alternative explanation for this phenomenon. Moreover, the non-conceptualist has a theoretical framework for explaining the alternative positive attitude, namely evaluative openness, and also why it is more rarified (and might be an achievement) given the strong psychological motivation for evaluative chauvinism. If one was evaluatively open, in this sense, the possibility of broadening one’s evaluative horizons, so to speak, would be a live option. So, there are explanatory advantages, within the context of evaluative understanding, to claiming affective-evaluative experiences of first exposure involve non-conceptual content.

Conclusion

This article has argued we can find a novel motivation for non-conceptualism about personal level representational content by looking to affective-evaluative experiences of first exposure. Once we describe experiences of that kind which are genuinely unfamiliar to their subjects they plausibly satisfy two conditions for non-conceptual content. However, the cost of these experiences having this character is being largely excluded from the subject’s space of reasons, which limits the subject’s

ability to engage in the relevant rational discourse, and an aspect of their evaluative self-understanding.

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