DISCUSSION

ON PERCEPTUAL CONFIDENCE AND "COMPLETELY TRUSTING YOUR EXPERIENCE"

JACOB BECK iD
York University

1. Introduction

Our beliefs often assign degrees of confidence—*doxastic confidences.* For example, I am fairly confident that I will complete my grading today—not 100-percent certain, but definitely more than 50-percent confident. What about our perceptual experiences? Do they also assign degrees of confidence—*perceptual confidences*? In a beautifully crafted and strikingly original article, John Morrison (2016) considers the possibility that they do, a view that he calls "Perceptual Confidence." Morrison's official goal is rather humble. It's to show that Perceptual Confidence is "a promising and important new view" (p. 22).[1] With respect to this modest aim, I see no point in quarreling. But one might also wonder whether Morrison's main argument for Perceptual Confidence speaks in favor of its truth. And here I am more skeptical.

Although Morrison's argument is my primary target, the critique I will offer should be of wider interest since it concerns the nature of how we transition from perception to belief. At issue is what it means to take your perceptual experience at face value, or as Morrison sometimes puts it, to "completely trust your experience." I will argue that Morrison's argument presupposes a natural, but problematic, interpretation of that familiar phenomenon, and recommend a different way of thinking about it.

2. Morrison's Argument

Morrison considers a variety of cases in which you would be inclined to reach a probabilistic belief on the basis of your perceptual experience. In the case that I will call Isaac, he writes,

[1] All page numbers are to Morrison (2016) unless otherwise noted.

174

In the distance, you see a figure walking toward you. At some point you might say, "That looks as though it could be Isaac." A minute later, when he's fifty meters away, you might say, "That looks as though it's probably Isaac." Eventually, when he's only a few meters away, you might say, "This is Isaac." All of these reports reflect your confidence at the level of belief—your doxastic confidence. But they also seem to reflect your confidence at the level of perception —what I'll call your "perceptual confidence." Just as you assigned more and more doxastic confidence to the possibility it's Isaac and less and less doxastic confidence to the possibility it's not Isaac, your perceptual experience assigned more and more perceptual confidence to the possibility it's Isaac and less and less perceptual confidence to the possibility it's not Isaac. (p. 15)

And in a case I'll call CRIMSON, Morrison writes,

While you're dining in a candlelit room you look at a tablecloth. You might report high confidence it's red rather than brown, but among some shades of red—crimson, scarlet, etc.—you might report the same degree of confidence. As more candles are lit you might report increasing confidence it's crimson rather than scarlet. If enough candles are lit, you might even report near certainty it's crimson. All these reports reflect your increasing doxastic confidence. But they also seem to reflect your increasing perceptual confidence. A tablecloth doesn't just look crimson or scarlet. It sometimes looks more likely crimson than scarlet. (pp. 16–17)

Morrison gives several other examples of this sort of phenomenon, but these two should serve our purposes. In these cases, you arrive at a probabilistic belief on the basis of your perceptual experience. As your perceptual experience changes (because Isaac gets closer or more candles are lit), your doxastic confidence changes as well. And according to Morrison, it is not only your doxastic confidence that changes in these cases. Your perceptual confidence changes as well. This description of the cases is obviously tendentious. Many philosophers will want to resist it. But Morrison does not simply rely on his own intuitions from cases. He advances the following argument in favor of Perceptual Confidence.

(1) When you completely trust your experience, your doxastic confidence changes in step with your perceptual experience. For example, as Isaac approaches and your perceptual experience changes, your doxastic confidence that it is Isaac increases.

(2) The most plausible explanation of why your doxastic confidence changes in step with your perceptual experience when you completely trust your experience is that your perceptual experiences assign perceptual confidences. For example, your

175

doxastic confidence that it is Isaac increases because your perceptual experience assigns increasing confidence to the proposition that the approaching figure is Isaac.

Thus,

(3) Perceptual Confidence is true; perceptual experiences assign perceptual confidences. For example, when Isaac is 50 m away, your perceptual experience assigns moderately high confidence to the proposition that the approaching figure is Isaac (or perhaps something more specific, like a 55-percent confidence that it is Isaac).

Morrison takes premise (1) to be a "datum" (p. 28). Notice that this datum is compatible with the possibility that, on particular occasions, your confidence fails to change with your experience because you mistrust your experience. For example, if you have reason to think that Isaac is out of town, your doxastic confidence might not increase as he approaches. But that is just a case in which you do not completely trust your experience.

The burden of the argument thus falls to premise (2). Morrison's main defense of premise (2) consists in arguing, first, that it is *prima facie* plausible that your doxastic confidence changes in virtue of your perceptual confidence changing, and second, that various alternative explanations of why your doxastic confidence changes are problematic. I will argue that this defense does not succeed because it misconstrues what it is to completely trust your experience. First, however, I want to situate Morrison's argument in relation to some broader themes in contemporary discussions of the philosophy of perception and raise some preliminary worries about his view.

3. Context and Preliminary Worries

A debate has been raging in the philosophy of perception over which properties are represented in perceptual experience. While it is widely agreed that perceptual experience represents "low-level" properties such as shape, color, size, and motion, controversy abounds about whether perception represents "high-level" properties such as natural kinds (e.g. pine trees), artifacts (e.g. baseball bats), emotions (e.g. anger), affordances (e.g. edibility), and causation.[2] Most philosophical defenses of the view that vision represents high-level properties have relied on what Siegel (2010) calls "phenomenal contrast arguments."

---

[2] For a window into some of the controversy, see Bayne (2009), Begby (2018), Block (2014), Brogaard (2013), Burge (2010; 2014), Fish (2013), Helton (2016), Macpherson (2011), Nanay (2011; 2012), O'Callaghan (2008), Prinz (2013), Siegel (2006; 2010), and Siegel and Byrne (2016).

The basic idea is to compare two experiences whose difference most plausibly traces to the representation of a high-level property. For example, consider the visual experience of a nature-deprived urbanite when she sees a pine tree and contrast it with the visual experience she has after she takes a wilderness course and learns to visually identify pine trees. Arguably the two visual experiences differ in their phenomenal character, and this experiential difference is readily explained if we suppose that the new experience represents pine trees.

Morrison's argument for Perceptual Confidence is very different. It does not rely on a phenomenal contrast. In fact, Morrison never mentions phenomenal contrast arguments. This is probably no accident. Isaac and Crimson involve more than a change in the assignment of confidence. They also involve a change in the representation of low-level properties. As Isaac gets closer it is not just your perceptual confidence that allegedly changes, but also your perceptual representation of Isaac's distance. Similarly, your perceptual confidence that the tablecloth is crimson is alleged to increase as more candles are lit, and so your perceptual representation of the total luminance is plausibly changing as well. Thus, when perceptual confidence allegedly changes, it tends to change in tandem with the representation of some other property. This makes Morrison's cases ineffective fodder for phenomenal contrast arguments, which require a clean contrast between two experiences that differ only in their representation of the target high-level property.

In Isaac and Crimson, if perception is truly assigning confidences, those assignments appear to supervene on the perceptual representation of other properties, such as distance and luminance. Must perceptual confidence *always* supervene on the representation of other properties? I find it hard to imagine a case where it would not. Perhaps the most tempting counterexample is Morrison's case of being in a pitch-dark room in which an experimenter at some point begins to slowly increase the wattage of an exceptionally dim light. The subject's job is to report whether the light is on or off. Morrison claims that the subject's doxastic confidence that the light is on will increase with the wattage. Moreover, Morrison claims that this increasing confidence is reflected in perception. "The light doesn't just look as though it's off and then on. It sometimes looks more likely on than off" (p. 16). For this case to be a counterexample to the supervenience thesis, there would need to be a point in time at which the subject's perceptual confidence that the light is on increases without her experience of luminance increasing. It is far from clear, however, that the case is best described as involving any such point in time. At any given moment, the subject's experience of luminance is a result of at least two variables: the wattage of the light and random noise. When the wattage is very low, the noise swamps the signal, and so experience is a poor indicator of whether the light is truly on. Perceptual confidence is thus unlikely to smoothly increase with the wattage. But that does not mean that

177

perceptual confidence is varying independently of the perceptual experience of luminance. It could be that the perceptual experience of luminance also is not increasing smoothly with the wattage.

Morrison thinks that perceptual experiences assign changing confidences in cases such as ISAAC and CRIMSON. But the fact that it is so hard to find a clear case of perceptual confidence changing independently of the representation of other properties should give us pause. Perhaps it is not really perceptual confidence that is changing in Morrison's examples, but rather the representation of other properties.

The fact that perceptual confidence does not seem to vary independently of the representation of other properties means that phenomenal contrast arguments cannot be used to support Perceptual Confidence. And so Morrison turns to a new form of argument—the argument from completely trusting your experience that was summarized above. But now notice that an analogous argument might be used to support the representation of other high-level properties. For example, if you have the recognitional concept *pine tree*, see a pine tree, and completely trust your experience, you will immediately come to believe that there is a pine tree present. Following Morrison, we might argue that the best explanation of this fact is that your experience represents pine trees as such. Similarly, when you see a baseball bat, an apple, or a man with an angry expression, and you completely trust your experience, you immediately come to believe that the object is a baseball bat, is edible, or is an angry man. And so, following Morrison, we might argue that the best explanation of this transition is that your experience represents baseball bats, edibility, and anger as such. In fact, the argument could be extended even further. I do not know of any philosophers who have argued that we perceive the property of being expensive. But suppose you are looking at a jeweler's display case and see a large diamond. If you completely trust your experience, you might immediately come to believe that the diamond is expensive. Following Morrison's lead, we might argue that the best explanation of why you form this belief is that your perceptual experience represents the diamond as expensive. Even those who are sympathetic to high-level accounts of perceptible properties might be surprised to learn that their position could be supported and extended in this way.

One worry, then, is that Morrison's argument overgeneralizes. It makes it too easy to defend the perception of high-level properties. In response, Morrison faces a dilemma. On the one hand, he could deny that his master argument for Perceptual Confidence extends to the full range of high-level properties. He might insist that there are crucial differences between cases such as ISAAC and CRIMSON, which concern confidences, and cases involving other high-level properties. But if so, he owes us an account of what those differences are since, at least on the face of it, it is unclear why the argument would apply to the former cases but not the latter.

178

Morrison might propose that cases involving high-level properties draw on background beliefs in a way that cases involving confidences do not. When you recognize something as a baseball bat or pine tree, Morrison might claim that that is because you have a background belief to the effect that if something has such-and-such a shape, then it is a baseball bat or pine tree. But Morrison does not think that assignments of confidence rely on background beliefs. According to Morrison, it does not feel like you are relying on an antecedent belief when you assign a 55-percent confidence that it is Isaac. Your 55-percent confidence that it is Isaac feels non-inferential (p. 31). Moreover, Morrison maintains that your 55-percent confidence that it is Isaac is resistant to other background beliefs. Even if you believe that Isaac is out of town, you will have a feeling of recognition that increases as he approaches. But if your confidence that it is Isaac were the inferential product of a belief, it should be sensitive to other beliefs, such as your belief that Isaac is out of town (pp. 31–32).

The reasons that Morrison gives for thinking that confidences are not the product of background beliefs, however, apply equally to the perception of other high-level properties. At least for the expert, the recognition of something as a baseball bat or pine tree feels non-inferential. It does not feel to be the product of a background belief. Similarly, the fact that you believe that a baseball bat or pine tree is a wax replica does not reduce your feeling of recognizing it as a baseball bat or pine tree. If Morrison wants to drive a wedge between confidences and other high-level properties, he will thus need to look elsewhere.

On the other hand, Morrison could embrace the liberality with which his argument generalizes to all sorts of high-level properties. That he would be sympathetic to this horn of the dilemma is suggested by the way in which he applies his definition of 'perceptual experience'. Here is the definition itself.

> Perceptual Confidence is more fully described as the view that confidence is assigned by a state that's conscious, automatic, accessible, dissociable from doxastic states, directed toward perceived objects and properties, and fast enough that we can't detect any delay. While I think it's natural to classify such a state as a "perceptual experience" and the resulting kind of confidence "perceptual confidence", this choice of labels isn't ultimately important. If you have special reasons for using 'perceptual' or 'experience' in another way, feel free to substitute your own labels. (p. 20)

Later, when Morrison develops his argument using Isaac as his main example, he considers the objection that perception does not represent individual people such as Isaac. In addition to observing that his argument can be run using examples such as crimson that appeal to low-level properties, he replies that 'perceptual experience' in his sense surely represents individuals such as Isaac.

179

However, it's hard to deny that our perceptual experiences represent Isaac, given how we're using 'perceptual experience'. Recognition is conscious, automatic, accessible, directed toward perceived objects and properties, and fast enough that we can't detect any delay. It's also dissociable from our doxastic states, because you can have the feeling of recognizing Isaac even after you learn he's out of town. Given how we're using 'perceptual experience', that's all it takes for our perceptual experiences to represent Isaac. (p. 32)

Morrison thus takes a stand on at least one high-level property (apart from confidences). He maintains that individual people are represented in perceptual experience.

There is a real threat, however, that Morrison is defining 'perceptual experience' in a way that trivializes existing debates about which properties are represented in perceptual experience. It is fairly obvious that the recognition of natural kinds, artifacts, emotions, affordances, and causation can satisfy Morrison's criteria. Such recognitions can clearly be conscious, automatic, accessible, directed toward perceived objects, and fast. They can also be dissociated from doxastic states since you can recognize something as a pine tree or a baseball bat even if you do not believe it to be one. In fact, the same goes for the property of being expensive. So if we accept Morrison's gloss on 'perceptual experience', it would seem that we are forced, as a matter of definitional fiat, to conclude that perception represents myriad high-level properties. And while there are many philosophers who endorse the representation of high-level properties, they do not typically think that their view is true by definition.

There are various reasons that one might reject Morrison's definition of 'perceptual experience'. One might think that perception is a natural kind (Block forthcoming), and thus that its real essence cannot be reduced to a checklist of superficial properties. Or one might think that there are specific properties that Morrison has overlooked —perhaps certain functional properties (Beck 2018). But here is another way to appreciate the point. In discussions of the content of perceptual experience, it is common to distinguish perceptual experiences from cognitive experiences. Included among the latter are experiences that are associated with tokening a concept (Weiskopf 2015) and metacognitive feelings of confidence (Proust 2013; Beran et al. 2012). But nothing in Morrison's definition of 'perceptual experience' distinguishes such experiences from cognitive experiences. He is thus open to the charge that he is conflating perceptual experiences of confidences with cognitive (or metacognitve) experiences of confidences.[3]

[3] This is, I think, partly what is animating Denison (2017) in her critique of Morrison (2016). If so, then their disagreement is more substantive than Morrison (2017) takes it to be. Block (2018) also raises this worry about Morrison's account.

180

Morrison might reply that he is not intending to use the term "perceptual experience" in the same way that other people use it. While that would be his prerogative, it would threaten to undermine the significance of his account. For example, Morrison advertises that his account "fills a hole in our best scientific theories of perception" (p. 15). While science tells us that perception represents confidences, it does not tell us whether *conscious* perception represents confidences. But if Morrison means something different by 'perception' than what the scientists mean, he cannot be credited with filling a hole in *their* theories of perception. Similarly, Morrison advertises that his account challenges philosophers' widespread belief that perceptual experiences have accuracy conditions (pp. 36–41). But if Morrison means something different by "perceptual experience" than other philosophers, this challenge never takes root.

4. The Importation Model

Morrison's argument for Perceptual Confidence turns on the idea of completely trusting your experience. Morrison calls this a "familiar phenomenon" (p. 27), and I agree. We completely trust our experiences much of the time. And when we do not, we often know what it would be to do so. Confronted with the Müller-Lyer illusion, completely trusting your experience would be a matter of coming to believe, on the basis of your experience, that the line with arrows pointed out is longer than the line with arrows pointed in.

But even if we are familiar with the phenomenon, there is a further question of how best to characterize it. One fairly uncontroversial thing we can say is that when you form a belief as a result of completely trusting your experience, the relation between your experience and your belief is not merely causal. It is also rational. The content of your experience evidentially supports the content of your belief. All things equal, you thus acquire some (defeasible, pro-tanto) warrant for your belief in virtue of having the experience. Let us call this the 'rationality constraint' on completely trusting your experience.

What Morrison says about completely trusting your experience seems to go beyond the rationality constraint.

> What is it to *completely trust* your experience? When you completely trust a doctor, plumber, or rabbi, you follow her advice. Likewise, when you completely trust a thermometer, spectrometer, or barometer, you accept its measurement. Continuing this pattern, when you completely trust an experience you endorse the way it presents objects. To put it another way: you believe that x is *F* because x looks *F*. To put it yet another way: you endorse your experience. We regularly trust our experiences to lesser and greater extents, making this a limit case of a familiar phenomenon. (p. 27)

181

Parts of this passage are suggestive of what we might call the 'importation model'[4], which holds that when you completely trust your experience you simply 'import' what your experience says into a belief, and thus come to believe *exactly* what you experienced. By analogy, if you completely trust your plumber's advice when he says, "You should snake your pipes," you will come to believe that you should snake your pipes. Similarly, if you completely trust your visual experience when it represents that x is *F*, you will come to believe that x is *F*. The importation model fits well with Morrison's master argument for Perceptual Confidence. Thus, when you completely trust your experience and come to believe that the approaching figure is Isaac with 55-percent confidence, that must be because your experience assigns 55-percent confidence to the approaching figure's being Isaac. And when you completely trust your experience and come to believe that the tablecloth is more likely to be crimson than scarlet, that must be because your experience assigns greater confidence to the tablecloth's being crimson than to its being scarlet.

The importation model is very natural, but it is not compulsory. In fact, there are some views in the philosophy of perception that are incompatible with it. Some philosophers maintain that perceptual experiences have nonconceptual content (Evans 1982; Heck 2000, 2007; Peacocke 1992, Ch. 3). According to them, the contents of perceptual experience are not even eligible to serve as the propositions that constitute the contents of beliefs. What you believe is thus never exactly the same as what you perceive. These philosophers still accept the rationality constraint. They allow that perceptual experiences can warrant beliefs. They just deny that such warrant requires the importation of the very same content from perception to belief.

Another view that sits uneasily with the importation model maintains that perceptual experiences do not represent objective properties such as being red or being small, but rather appearance properties such as looking-red or looking-small (Glüer 2009; Hill 2014). A proponent of this view might allow that there is a phenomenon called 'completely trusting your experience', and that this phenomenon allows you to form warranted beliefs about objective properties on the basis of your experience, but in so doing she would need to reject the importation model. She might hold, for instance, that the fact that your perceptual experience represents an object as *looking-red* warrants you to believe that the object *is red*.

Proponents of nonconceptual content and appearance properties may be pressured to reject the importation model, but one can reject the importation model without endorsing either of these views. Thus, suppose that one thinks that perceptual contents are conceptual and represent objective properties. One might also think that the objective properties represented by perceptual experience are a subset of

---

[4] I borrow this helpful term from Heck (2007).

182

the properties that can feature in the contents of beliefs that are immediately formed on the basis of those experiences. Perhaps experience does not represent anything as expensive, but one can immediately form a belief that something is expensive on the basis of the properties that are represented in experience. Something like this might be going on in ISAAC. It might be that your perceptual experience only represents certain low-level properties of the approaching figure, such as the figure's gait and overall shape. As the figure approaches, you might represent further properties, such as the shape of the figure's jaw line or the color of the figure's hair. These new properties might increase your doxastic confidence that it is Isaac even though your perceptual experience never represents Isaac as such. As we have seen, Morrison takes this suggestion to be incompatible with his definition of "perceptual experience". But we have also seen reasons to be suspicious of that definition.

5. Richness and Diverging Evidence

Anyone who thinks that the properties represented in perception are a proper subset of the properties that we can immediately recognize on the basis of perception has reason to reject the importation model. There is, however, another reason to be skeptical of the importation model—a reason that cuts more directly to what I see as the crux of the problem with Morrison's argument.

It is often remarked that perceptual experience is rich, or as Dretske (1981, p. 73) memorably puts it, "pregnant with information." Perceptual experience carries a whole range of messages at once—messages about color, shape, orientation, direction, distance, and more. This opens up the possibility that these messages may not all run in the same evidential direction relative to a proposition that is a candidate for belief. Some messages carried by an experience might support the proposition, while other messages carried by the same experience might tell against the proposition. Under such conditions, to import the content of perception into belief would thus be to come to believe a series of propositions that are evidentially in tension. If we reject the importation model, however, then we can allow that the transition from perception to belief involves a resolution of the tension in which a proposition is accepted for belief that strikes a compromise among the evidentially diverging contents of perception. One way to do this is to endorse a belief that includes a confidence even when perceptual experience does not. For example, if your perceptual experience carries one message that supports the proposition p, and another message that undercuts p, the most rational thing to believe, depending on the details of the situation, might be *maybe p* or *probably p* or *p with a confidence of 55-percent*.

Let us now consider Morrison's examples in light of this point about the richness of perceptual experience and diverging evidence.

183

In CRIMSON, what is the nature of your experience when you completely trust your experience and come to believe that the tablecloth is more likely to be crimson than scarlet? If we presuppose the importation model, as Morrison appears to do, we will be led to conclude that your experience itself assigns greater confidence to the tablecloth's being crimson than to its being scarlet. But here is another possibility that abjures from assigning confidences in experience: your experience represents that the tablecloth is crimson, but also represents that the lighting is dim. The rational thing to believe, in light of all of your perceptual evidence, is not that the tablecloth is certainly crimson; that conclusion would fail to account for what your perception tells you about the dim lighting. Rather, the rational thing for you to believe, given all of your perceptual evidence, is that the tablecloth is more likely to be crimson than scarlet.[5]

Now consider ISAAC. When you completely trust your experience and come to believe that the approaching figure is Isaac with 55-percent confidence, what is the nature of your experience? Again, the importation model entails that your experience assigns 55-percent confidence to the approaching figure's being Isaac. Above we raised some concerns about whether Morrison is really entitled to suppose that perceptual experience represents individual people. But let us set those aside. Still, there is an alternative to the possibility suggested by the importation model: your experience represents that the figure is Isaac, but also represents that the figure is 50 m away, that the details of the figure's face are indiscernible, that the trees are casting long shadows over the figure, and much else besides. The rational thing for you to believe, when you completely trust the totality of this perceptual evidence, may just be that the approaching figure is Isaac with 55-percent confidence.[6]

One might object that if your perceptual experience tells you that p and that q, then insofar as you completely trust your experience you should not come to believe that r. Rather, you should come to believe that p and that q. Thus, if your perceptual experience tells you that the tablecloth is crimson and that the lighting is dim, and you completely trust your experience, you should come to believe that the

---

[5] This is an oversimplification. In CRIMSON, it is doubtful that your experience represents crimson *per se*. More plausibly, it represents a determinable property of which crimson is a determinate—what we might think of as a swath of color space in which crimson can be located. It also represents that the lighting is dim. On the basis of your overall experience, you form the belief that the tablecloth is more likely to be crimson than scarlet since scarlet is either not included in the area of color space represented by your experience, or else is less centrally located within that area. Having noted this complication, I'll set it aside since for my purposes the point about representing a determinable is secondary. It's the point about diverging evidence that I want to emphasize.

[6] Or if we reject the assumption that your perceptual experience represents individuals such as Isaac, we could say that your experience represents that the approaching figure has a particular gait, shape, etc., and is 50 m away, on the basis of which you assign 55-percent doxastic confidence to the figure's being Isaac.

184

tablecloth is crimson and that the lighting is dim. You should not come to believe that the tablecloth is probably crimson.

But this objection begs the question. Granted there is *a* sense of "completely trusting your experience" according to which this is true—namely, the sense given by the importation model. This sense is, moreover, perfectly coherent. We can conceive of a creature that simply imports the messages in its perceptual experiences into its beliefs. But the issue is whether that sense is the same sense that we are all familiar with from our own psychologies. Morrison is supposed to be describing a particular psychological phenomenon—a phenomenon that characterizes actual human transitions from perceptual experience to belief. But he provides no reason to think that this actual phenomenon is well captured by the importation model.

The richness of experience, moreover, provides reason to be skeptical of the importation model. Because perceptual experience is so rich, we do not typically come to believe everything that we experience. The importation model can allow for that, but it would require belief to act as a filter that selectively admits only some messages. Given that the messages in experience can diverge in their evidential support of further propositions, such filtering would be likely to lead to distortion. To take a simplified example, if the content of your experience contains two propositions, p and q, that diverge with respect to their support for r, it would be epistemically problematic to simply import either p or q but not both. Thus, if belief cannot import both p and q, it would be better off settling on a third proposition that takes account of both p and q (without being identical to either) in order to reach an epistemic compromise. But any such process of compromise is incompatible with the importation model.

I want to respond to a final worry. Morrison sometimes seems to suggest that a belief can only transcend the experience on which it is based with the assistance of background beliefs that bridge the experience and the belief. For example, if my experience represents the approaching figure as having such-and-such a shape, and I come to believe on that basis that the figure is Isaac, I must have a background belief that figures with such-and-such a shape are Isaac. Similarly, if I come to believe that the approaching figure is Isaac with 55-percent confidence on the basis of an experience that represents that the figure is Isaac and that he is 50 m away, I must have a background belief that when my experience represents a figure as Isaac and represents that the figure is 50 m away, then I should believe that the figure is Isaac with 55-percent confidence. But as we saw in Section 3, Morrison argues that there is no such background belief operative in such transitions (pp. 31–32). Thus, Morrison might conclude that beliefs that are immediately formed on the basis of perceptual experiences cannot transcend those experiences. The importation model has to be correct.

But Morrison never argues for the assumption that background beliefs are needed to causally mediate between perception and belief,

185

and there is no obvious reason to accept it. On the alternative view that I have been advocating, perceptual experiences immediately give rise to beliefs with different contents. That process is still governed by the rationality constraint, so insofar as one is "completely trusting one's experience", the resulting beliefs must be evidentially supported by the contents of the experiences that produce them. They cannot be flatly inconsistent with them (Gross 2018, p. 6). This view should be attractive to anyone who thinks that perception is restricted to representing relatively low-level properties. You perceive a particular shape and motion, and you immediately come to believe that the figure is Isaac. Transitions from perceptions to beliefs are not to be assimilated to transitions among beliefs. They are not full-fledged inferences, and they are not hostage to background beliefs.

A comparison may be helpful. Perception itself is often assumed to involve transitions. At the very least, there are transitions from sensory inputs (e.g. retinal stimulations) to percepts (e.g. of objects in the world). There may also be transitions involving intermediate stages, such as the representation of sudden luminance changes (zero-crossings) or oriented surfaces (the "2½-D sketch") (Marr 1982). Such transitions do not require mediation by background beliefs. For example, transitioning from a particular retinal stimulation to a visual representation of a red cube does not require a mediating belief that such-and-such retinal stimulations are indicative of red cubes. And while such transitions may conform to certain principles, the mind does not explicitly represent those principles (Burge 2010, pp. 404–407; Orlandi 2014, pp. 45–58). My suggestion is that the same thing is often true of transitions from perception to belief.[7]

---

[7] Focusing on perceptual experience's epistemic role, Munton (2016) advances an argument for Perceptual Confidence that differs from Morrison's. Her rich discussion deserves more attention than I can provide here, but I want to briefly indicate why I think it succumbs to a similar problem. According to Munton, there is a tension among four principles: (1) visual experience directly justifies beliefs about the external world; (2) that justification is in virtue of the experience's content; (3) that justification comes in degrees; and (4) visual experiences do not come in degrees. To bring out the alleged tension, Munton provides the example of Elmer, who views a tree through various amounts of fog. Elmer's direct justification for the belief that there is a tree comes in degrees; it is stronger when there is less fog and weaker when there is more. Munton worries that a commitment to (1)-(4) renders it impossible to explain the variation in Elmer's justification. Munton thus recommends assigning confidences to Elmer's visual experiences; that is, she recommends alleviating the alleged tension by rejecting (4) and embracing Perceptual Confidence. But it seems to me that there is no tension in the first place unless we presuppose an epistemic analog of the importation model according to which you are directly justified in believing exactly what your experience tells you, and no more. If we reject that model, we can explain the variations in the justification of Elmer's tree belief while endorsing (1)-(4): when Elmer's visual experience represents that there is a tree (or a patch of tree-like texture) and also that there is considerable fog obscuring his view, Elmer is *weakly* directly justified in believing that there is a tree; but when Elmer's visual experience represents that there is a tree and that his view is only slightly obscured by fog, Elmer is *strongly* directly justified in believing that there is a tree.

186

6. Conclusion

Morrison's argument for Perceptual Confidence presupposes the importation model. On the alternative model that I have been recommending, what we call 'completely trusting your experience' is a matter of transitioning from a rich perceptual experience to a belief or set of beliefs that do not simply recapitulate the experience. Rather, our beliefs transcend our experiences. This explains how it is possible to arrive at beliefs that assign confidences on the basis of perceptual experiences that do not assign confidences. It also explains how a person might immediately arrive at a belief with a high-level content (that the person approaching is Isaac; that the diamond is expensive) on the basis of a perceptual experience that lacks such a high-level content. Since the belief is immediately based on the perception, there is no need to infer it from other beliefs. The transition is automatic, fast, and non-inferential.

Once we reject the importation model, Morrison's argument loses its force. For if the transition from perceptual experience to belief is more like abduction than duplication, the messages carried by our perceptual experiences cannot be expected to be identical to the messages carried by the beliefs they generate.

Acknowledgments

References

Bayne, Tim. "Perception and the Reach of Phenomenal Content," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 59(236) (2009): 385–404.

Beck, Jacob. "Marking the Perception–Cognition Boundary: The Criterion of Stimulus-Dependence," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 96 (2018): 319–334.

Begby, Endre. "Perceptual Expansion Under Cognitive Guidance: Lessons from Language Processing," *Mind and Language* 32 (2018): 564–578.

Beran, Michael J., Johannes L. Brandl, Josef Perner, and Joëlle Proust (eds.) *The Foundations of Metacognition.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Block, Ned. "Seeing-as in the Light of Vision Science," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 89(3) (2014): 560–572.

Block, Ned. "If Perception Is Probabilistic, Why Does it Not Seem Probabilstic?," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 373 (2018): 20170341.

Block, Ned. (forthcoming). *The Border between Seeing and Thinking.*

Brogaard, Berit. "Do we Perceive Natural Kind Properties?," *Philosophical Studies* 162(1) (2013): 35–42.

Burge, Tyler. *Origins of Objectivity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Burge, Tyler. "Reply to Block: Adaptation and the Upper Border of Perception," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 89(3) (2014): 573–583.

Denison, Rachel. "Precision, Not Confidence, Describes the Uncertainty of Perceptual Experience: Comment on John Morrison's "Perceptual Confidence," *Analytic Philosophy* 58 (2017): 58–70.

Dretske, Fred I. *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981.

Evans, Gareth. *The Varieties of Reference*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Fish, William. "High-level Properties and Visual Experience," *Philosophical Studies* 162 (2013): 43–55.

Glüer, Kathrin. "In Defence of a Doxastic Account of Experience," *Mind and Language* 24(3) (2009): 297–327.

Gross, Steven. "Perceptual Consciousness and Cognitive Access from the Perspective of Capacity-Unlimited Working Memory," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 373 (2018): 20170343.

Heck, Richard Kimberly. "Nonconceptual Content and the 'Space of Reasons'," *Philosophical Review* 109(4) (2000): 483–523 (originally published under the name "Richard G. Heck, Jr").

Heck, Richard Kimberly. "Are There Different Kinds of Content?." *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind*, eds. J. Cohen and B. McLaughlin. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, (117–138) (originally published under the name "Richard G. Heck, Jr").

Helton, Grace. "Recent Issues in High-level Perception," *Philosophy Compass* 11(12) (2016): 851–862.

Hill, Christopher S. "The Content of Visual Experience." *In His Meaning, Mind, and Knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press, (2014), 218–236.

Macpherson, Fiona. "Introduction: The Admissible Contents of Experience," *The Admissible Contents of Experience*, eds. K. Hawley and F. Macpherson. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, (1–15).

Marr, David *Vision: A Computational Investigation into the Human Representation and Processing of Visual Information*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1982.

Morrison, John. "Perceptual Confidence," *Analytic Philosophy* 57 (2016): 15–48.

Morrison, John. "Perceptual Confidence and Categorization," *Analytic Philosophy* 58 (2017): 71–85.

Munton, Jessie. "Visual Confidences and Direct Perceptual Justification, "*Philosophical Topics* 44 (2016): 301–326.

Nanay, Bence. "Do We See Apples as Edible?," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 92(3) (2011): 305–322.

Nanay, Bence. "Perceptual Phenomenology," *Philosophical Perspectives* 26(1) (2012): 235–246.

O'Callaghan, Casey. "Object Perception: Vision and Audition," *Philosophy Compass* 3(4) (2008): 803–829.

Orlandi, Nicoletta. *The Innocent Eye: Why Vision Is Not a Cognitive Process*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Peacocke, Christopher. *A Study of Concepts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.

Prinz, Jesse. "Siegel's Get Rich Quick Scheme," *Philosophical Studies* 163 (2013): 827–835.

Proust, Joëlle. *The Philosophy of Metacognition: Mental Agency and Self-Awareness*. New York: Oxford University Press, (2013).

Siegel, Susanna. Which Properties Are Represented in Perception?." *Perceptual Experience*, eds. T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, (481–503).

Siegel, Susanna. *The Contents of Visual Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Siegel, Susanna., and A. Byrne "Rich or Thin?." *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Perception*, ed. B. Nanay. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Weiskopf, Daniel A. "Observational Concepts." *The Conceptual Mind*, eds. E. Margolis and S. Laurence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015, (223–248).