

PRACTICES, PERCEPTION, AND NORMATIVE STATES

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To Jakob and August for love and distraction

And many thanks for helpful and inspiring discussions to my co-directors

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Theories of practice are widespread within the humanities and the social sciences. They reflect the view that the study of, and theorizing about, social practices hold the key to a proper understanding of social life or aspects thereof. An important subset of theories of practice is ability theories of practice. These theories focus on the manner in which individuals draw on their abilities, skills, know-how, or practical knowledge when participating in social practices.

In this dissertation, I concentrate on ability theories of practice as advanced within the social sciences and the philosophy of the social sciences. Ability theorists within these two fields stress individuals' ability to act appropriately in situations of social interaction. But how, more precisely, is this ability to be understood? The thesis I develop and defend provides a partial answer to this important question: *In situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states specified as the appropriateness of actions.*

In the first part of the dissertation, I introduce and motivate this thesis. I provide an overview of ability theories of practice and, against that background, I present my thesis. Though generally unexplored, influential ability theorists have toyed with the thesis. Or, their theories invite an extension in this direction. For this reason, I argue, the thesis constitutes a natural way in which further to develop their approach.

In the second part of the dissertation, I develop and defend my thesis. First, I present a plausible way in which to make ontological sense of the claim that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible. Next, I offer an account of perception and argue that, by its lights, individuals sometimes have the ability directly to perceive normative states. Finally, I briefly show that individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of this ability directly to perceive normative states. From both a practical and a theoretical perspective, the development and defense of this thesis constitutes a valuable elaboration of the basic approach associated with ability theories of practice.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In her article “Theory of Anthropology since the Sixties,” Sherry Ortner points to an emerging trend within various social and human sciences: The focus upon social practices (Ortner 1984:145). Ortner detected this tendency in the beginning of the 1980s. Today, more than twenty years later, the focus on social practices is still widespread. In the introduction to an anthology called *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* from 2001, Theodore Schatzki observes that “[t]hinkers once spoke of ‘structures,’ ‘systems,’ ‘meaning,’ ‘life world,’ ‘events,’ and ‘actions’ when naming the primary generic social thing. Today, many theorists would accord ‘practices’ a comparable honor. Varied references to practices await the contemporary academician in diverse disciplines, from philosophy, cultural theory, and history to sociology, anthropology, and science and technology studies” (Schatzki 2001:1). In a similar spirit, David Stern notices that “talk of practices has become prevalent, not only in the philosophy of the social sciences, but throughout philosophy, the humanities, and the social sciences” (Stern 2003:186).

Theories of practice take as their starting point, or focus, social practices. They reflect the view that the study of, and theorizing about, social practices hold the key to a proper understanding of social life or aspects thereof. Beyond this minimal specification, there are no additional characteristics that *all* theories of practice share. In this sense there is no single theory of practice. Still, there are features that some, many, or even most, theories of practice have in common. By appeal to these, it is possible to single out different, and often overlapping,

groupings within the field of practice approaches. One subset is constituted by theories of practice that stress how individuals draw on their abilities, skills, know-how, or practical knowledge when participating in social practices. Another is formed by theories that are specifically concerned with scientific practices. Yet another is distinguished by its focus on the power relations among participants in social practices. And, needless to say, even further groupings may be generated by the use of further criteria of selection.¹

Many, if not the majority, of theories of practice, share the emphasis upon individuals as drawing on their abilities, skills, know-how, or practical knowledge when participating in social practices. Often these theories draw, directly or indirectly, on the later Wittgenstein's rule following considerations. Yet, there are also other important sources of inspiration. These include the early Heidegger's discussion of background understanding, Ryle's account of knowing-how versus knowing-that, and Polanyi's notion of tacit knowledge.²

Ability theories of practice, as these theories may be called, have been advanced within various fields. Within the social sciences and the philosophy of the social sciences, these theories are characterized by placing emphasis on individuals' ability to act appropriately in situations of social interaction: When two people meet each other at a party, they correctly greet each other by way of shaking hands; when an elderly person enters the crowded bus, a young and healthy person correctly offers her bus seat to the elderly person; when a person arrives at the beach and realizes that there are other people there, she correctly refrains from taking off all her clothes; and so on.

¹ Examples of theorists who emphasize the role of individuals' abilities or know-how will be provided in chapter 2. Theorists who are specifically concerned with scientific practices include Callon, Knorr Cetina, Latour, Law, and Pickering. See, e.g. Callon & Latour (1992), Knorr Cetina (2001), Latour (1994, Law and Hassard eds. (1999), and Pickering (1995, 2001). Finally, theorists who stress the role of power relations among participants in practices are exemplified by Bourdieu, Giddens, Ortner, and Rouse. See, e.g., Bourdieu (1990a, 1993), Giddens (1979, 1984), Ortner (1984), and Rouse (1996).

² See Heidegger (1962), Polanyi (1966), Ryle (1983), and Wittgenstein (1997).

The fact that individuals have the ability to act appropriately raises the issue of how to understand this ability on their part. The question is of central importance to ability theorists. One way in which to approach an answer to it is by carefully examining how the ability relates to, or is a function of, other abilities that individuals exercise when participating in social practices. Surprisingly, ability theorists of practice have not in any depth pursued this promising strategy. In the present work, I shall develop and defend the following thesis:

In situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states specified as the appropriateness of actions.

That is, in situations of social interaction, individuals sometimes possess, and exercise, the ability directly to perceive normative states. When this is the case, their seeing of normative states causes their actions being appropriate. In this manner, the ability directly to perceive normative states sometimes underwrites individuals' ability to act appropriately. The above examples may be used to illustrate the basic thought informing this proposal: The two people at the party see that they should greet each other by way of shaking hands and their seeing this causes their subsequent action being appropriate: They greet each other by way of shaking hands. The young and healthy person on the bus sees that she should offer her seat to the elderly person and her seeing this causes her subsequent action being appropriate: She gets up so that the old person may sit down. The person arriving at the beach sees that she should not strip naked and her seeing this causes her subsequent action being appropriate: She does not take off all her clothes. And so on.

In order to work out and establish the thesis, I shall proceed as follows. In chapter 2, I begin by pointing out that I shall concentrate exclusively on ability theories of practice within the social sciences and the philosophy of the social sciences. It is only ability theories offered within these two fields that I have in mind when I talk about ability theories of practice. Moreover, I provide an overview of the basic ability approach to practices, that is, the main claims and arguments associated with ability theories of practice. Against this background I present my thesis, viz. that, in situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states. Ability theorists of practice have not explored this idea in any detail. Nonetheless, working out a view along these lines should be regarded as a *natural* way to elaborate their basic approach. Or, so I claim toward the end of chapter 2.

In chapter 3, I pick up this thread. I examine three prominent ability theories of practice: Harold Garfinkel's, Pierre Bourdieu's, and Anthony Giddens' theories. I show that they toy with the idea that individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states. Or, they invite an extension of their theories in this direction insofar as they work with a very broad notion of the scope of perception. It is for this reason that the account I shall present constitutes a natural supplement to, or extension of, the basic ability approach to practices.

This being clarified, I turn to the task of actually developing and defending the thesis. It involves the claim that, in situations of social interaction, individuals sometimes exercise the ability directly to perceive normative states. As a first reaction, it may be wondered how to make ontological sense of this contention. In chapter 4, I examine the ontological status of normative states. Taking off from an analysis of James Gibson's notion of affordances, I propose to

construe normative states as response-dependent properties. Moreover, I explain how a specification along these lines is compatible with normative states being directly perceptible: Given this ontological construal of normative states, there is nothing, ontologically speaking, that stands in the way of holding that they are sometimes directly perceptible.

Of course, this is not the same as saying that, sometimes, individuals do indeed possess the ability directly to perceive normative states. In chapter 5, I pave the way for an argument to this effect. I begin by making it clear that I shall present an account of perception which allows that everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe, are directly perceptible. Keeping this requirement in mind, I examine perception considered from the perspective of its being a state and a process respectively. On that basis, I end by offering a characterization of the ability directly to perceive something to be the case.

In chapter 6, I put this account of perception to work. More specifically, I argue that insofar as the analysis is granted, it follows that individuals do not only have the ability directly to perceive everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe. Also, in situations of social interaction, they sometimes have the ability directly to perceive normative states. In other words, the conditions according to which everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe, qualify as directly perceptible, are sometimes met by normative states as well. Once this is realized, it is only a small step to establish the last part to the thesis: Insofar as individuals exercise their ability directly to perceive normative states as well as their ability to act appropriately, it is only reasonable to hold that it is their direct seeing of normative states that causes their actions being appropriate. Accordingly, I conclude that, in situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states. Finally, I show that the manner in which I have

worked out this thesis is compatible with the basic ability approach. This means that my account may serve as a supplement to ability theories of practice: Ability theorists of practice may appropriate the account and use it when understanding and explaining social practices that involve social interaction.

In his widely influential and highly critical book on theories of practice in general, Stephen Turner states that the notion of practice “is deeply elusive” (Turner 1994:2). Moreover, he thinks that any attempt to turn it into a clear and useful concept is doomed to fail. He writes: “The idea of ‘practice’ and its cognates has this odd kind of promissory utility. They promise that they can be turned into something more precise. But the value of the concepts is destroyed when they are pushed in the direction of meeting their promise” (ibid.:116).³ Focusing exclusively on ability theories of practice, I think that though Turner exaggerates, he is right that these theories may benefit from further clarification and elaboration. For instance, ability theorists of practice rarely map out the various abilities that individuals draw on when participating in practices. Moreover, and related to this point, they hardly ever examine and characterize these various abilities and their interrelations in any detail. The account I shall present addresses exactly this lacuna in ability theories of practice. It provides a detailed characterization of the ability directly to perceive something to be the case while examining how the exercise of this ability relates to the ability to act appropriately. In my view, the analysis demonstrates that further spelling out the ability approach to practices enhances, rather than destroys, its value. If this is granted, Turner is wrong when he states that the admittedly elusive

³ In passing, it may be noticed that Turner raises a number of more specific objections to theories of practice too. Roughly speaking, these aim to show the untenability of the following two assumptions: 1) That practices are caused by mental entities that are representation-like or that are representations distinct from beliefs; and 2) that the same practices, i.e. ways of acting, within a group are caused by the same kinds of representation-like mental entities or by the same kinds of representations that are distinct from beliefs. Since the thesis I am going to develop and defend does not require that any of these assumptions are made, I shall not return to Turner’s more specific criticisms of theories of practice below.

notion of practice loses its value as soon as an effort is made to turn it into something more precise. In light of these considerations, my discussion should not only be seen as providing ability theorists of practice with an account that allows them better to understand individuals' ability to act appropriately in practices that involve social interaction. Also, it should be taken to show that the basic ability approach is a viable approach. It is far from being an unpromising research program within social theorizing.

2.0 ABILITY THEORIES OF PRACTICE

Theories of practice take as their starting point, or focus, social practices. They reflect the view that the study of, and theorizing about, social practices hold the key to a proper understanding of social life or aspects thereof. Many, if not the majority of, theories of practice are united by their emphasis upon individuals as drawing on their abilities, skills, know-how, or practical knowledge when participating in social practices. These theories of practice may be referred to as ability theories of practice. Often, they draw, directly or indirectly, on the later Wittgenstein's rule following considerations. Yet, there are also other important sources of inspiration. These include the early Heidegger's discussion of background understanding, Ryle's account of knowing-how versus knowing-that, and Polanyi's notion of tacit knowledge.⁴

Ability theories of practice have been advanced in various disciplines. I shall be exclusively concerned with ability theories of practice as offered within the social sciences and the philosophy of the social sciences. Accordingly, I shall only have these theories in mind when talking about ability theories of practice. And, I shall simply refer to theorists who advance ability theories within these two fields as ability theorists of practice.

The present chapter has two aims. One is to provide an introduction to the basic ability approach to practices, that is, the main claims and arguments associated with ability theories of

⁴ As already noticed in the introduction, see Heidegger (1962), Polanyi (1966), Ryle (1983), and Wittgenstein (1997).

practice.⁵ This will involve a discussion of how to conceive of practices, of individuals' abilities, of the explanation of these abilities, and of the explanatory focus of ability theories. The other aim is to present my project: To develop and defend the thesis that, in situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states.

2.1 PRACTICES – THE VERY IDEA

A good place to begin the characterization of ability theories of practice is by looking at how they conceive of practices. Ability theorists of practice take practices to be ways of acting or doing. These ways of acting may be nonverbal or verbal. Examples of non-verbal practices are eating with fork and knife and biking. Instead, instances of verbal practices are saying “good night” before going to sleep or “hello” when greeting somebody. All these cases illustrate, what may be called, single ways of acting or interacting. Sometimes practices are also specified as multiple and interrelated ways of acting. In this broader sense, practices are exemplified by scientific practices, farming practices, cooking practices, medical practices, and educational practices. As Schatzki usefully suggests, single ways of acting or interacting may be labeled dispersed practices, whereas multiple and interrelated ways of acting may be referred to as integrative practices (Schatzki 1996:91 & *ibid.*:98).

⁵ For alternative overviews of theories of practice, see Rouse (2007), Schatzki (2001), and Stern (2003).

Ability theorists of practice continue by further characterizing practices as ways of acting that are “capable of being done well or badly, correctly or incorrectly” (Barnes 2001:19). Or, as I prefer to put it, practices are ways of doing that are assessable in terms of their appropriateness, and/or in terms of their effectiveness to bring about a certain effect or end.⁶ Ability theorists of practice emphasize in particular two ways in which practices may be evaluated as to their appropriateness and/or effectiveness.

First of all, practices are assessable in terms of their appropriateness and/or effectiveness in the sense that individuals’ “choice” of a given way of acting may be thus appraised.⁷ For instance, the “decision” to greet another individual by saying “hello” may be evaluated as to its appropriateness, just as the “choice” to invest in the stock market may be assessed in terms of its being an effective way to earn a lot of money. Or, to mention one last example, the player’s “decision” to throw the ball to a team mate may be assessed in terms of both its appropriateness and effectiveness: The action may or may not constitute playing according to the rules and it may or may not be effective towards the end of scoring as many goals as possible.

Second, practices are assessable in terms of their appropriateness and/or effectiveness in the sense that individuals’ bodily execution of a given way of acting may be thus evaluated. For example, the movements made as part of dancing tango may be assessed as to their appropriateness whereas the movements associated with hammering may be appraised as to their effectiveness towards driving the nail into the wall. And, it is sometimes possible to assess the execution of actions from both these perspectives. This is for instance the case with respect to ski

⁶ In passing, it may be noticed that a prevalent alternative to the view that practices are assessable actions is defended outside the ranks of ability theorists. According to this alternative position, practices should instead be specified as regular ways of acting. A position along these lines has most notably been propounded by Turner, see, e.g. his (1994, 2001, 2002). It is criticized by Rouse in his (2001) and (2006).

⁷ Here and in the following, I use quotation marks to indicate that no conscious choosing necessarily takes places.

jumping: Whether the skis are kept parallel determines both the appropriateness and effectiveness of the execution of a ski jump. In passing, it may be noticed that some theorists of practice tend to underline this feature of practices, viz. that the bodily execution of actions is assessable in terms of its appropriateness and/or effectiveness. They do so as part of their attempt to rehabilitate the role of the body in practices – an aspect they believe has been given too little attention.

Returning now to the general characterization of practices, ability theorists of practice do not only stress that practices are assessable ways of acting. Also, they make it clear that practices are always social in the sense of involving multiple individuals. There are various ways in which this idea may be spelled out. A practice may be regarded as social in the sense of being a way of *interacting*: It involves at the very least two individuals whose interaction is assessable in terms of its appropriateness and/or effectiveness. A game of football, say, is a social practice in this sense: Playing football is an activity that requires the participation of several interacting individuals. Next, a practice may be considered social in the sense of involving multiple individuals who act in a similar way that is assessable in terms of its appropriateness and/or effectiveness. For instance, it may be considered appropriate to make your bed every morning and hence this is what multiple individuals tend to do. Lastly, a practice may be specified as social in the sense of involving at least one individual who produces an action and one who is in a position to assess its appropriateness. Roughly speaking, the rationale behind this last way of spelling out practices as social is the view that it makes no sense to talk about a certain way of acting being appropriate or inappropriate if it is always the same individual who both performs the action and determines its appropriateness. This idea goes back to Wittgenstein's discussion of

the impossibility of following a rule alone.⁸ When ability theorists of practices discuss practices, they think of them as social in one or several of these senses.

Summarizing then, ability theorists of practice regard practices as assessable ways of acting that, in one way or another, involve the participation of multiple individuals.

2.2 ACTING AND EXECUTING ACTIONS APPROPRIATELY AND/OR EFFECTIVELY

Ability theorists of practice continue by drawing attention to competent participants in practices. They describe these individuals as having the *abilities* to act and execute actions appropriately and/or effectively. Alternatively, they talk about them as having the *skills, know-how, or practical knowledge* to act and execute actions in ways that are appropriate and/or effective.

Typically, ability theorists of practice do not specify when individuals qualify as having the ability to do something. To provide a rough account to this effect poses no major difficulties, however. A natural way to spell out the idea is by reference to the extent to which an individual makes mistakes when engaging in an activity. On the one hand, if an individual constantly fails, say, to greet other individuals appropriately by shaking their hands, it is clear that she does not

⁸ For the present purposes, there is no need to go into the complicated issue of the extent to which, or sense in which, other individuals are necessary for the institution of norms or rules of appropriateness. The issue has particularly been discussed within philosophy of language and, not surprisingly, the focus has here been on the norms or rules relating to the application of concepts and/or words. Important contributions to this debate include Brandom (2001), Hale (1999), Haugeland (1998), Kripke (2000), McDowell (1998c, 1998d), Pettit (1996), Sellars (1991b), and Wright (1981). For an overview of the discussion, see, e.g. Kusch (2002) and Boghossian (1989).

possess the ability to act appropriately in these situations. Likewise, if an individual constantly falls on her roller skates, then she does obviously not know how to roller skate. On the other hand, it is setting the bars too high to hold that having some ability requires being infallible: Few, if any, individuals would then qualify as having much practical knowledge of any kind. Even an individual who is known for always holding the door for the person immediately behind her may one day forget to do so, just as the seasoned driver may one day be so unfortunate to miss a stop sign. A less demanding alternative to the requirement of infallibility is to hold that individuals have the ability to do something insofar as they are reliable when performing the activity in question. This proposal is advanced by Robert Brandom, a theorist of practice working outside the field of social theorizing. He specifies that to consider somebody reliable in some regard “is to say that he usually turns out to be right” (Brandom 2002a:355). Explicating this proposal a little further, it may be added that a reliable individual is one who usually get things right when being in a standard state and when in standard conditions. The fact that it is not always easy to spell out what a standard state and standard conditions are does not matter for the present purposes. It suffices to notice that when ability theorists of practice maintain that individuals have some ability, skill, practical knowledge, or know-how, this may simply be taken to mean that the individuals are reliable when it comes to carrying out the activity in question.

Be that as it may, it may be registered that many ability theorists of practice make a point of stressing individuals’ bodily abilities to execute actions appropriately and/or effectively. Again, this should be seen as part of their efforts, noticed above, to emphasize the role of the body in action – an aspect of practices they think has been neglected. In any case, ability theorists of practice make it clear that individuals’ abilities are acquired. In this spirit, Barry Barnes, for instance, notices that practices are “done on the basis of what members learn from

others” (Barnes 2001:19). Sometimes ability theorists of practice supplement this observation with a rough account of how individuals acquire their practical knowledge. In this connection, it is often stressed how the acquisition of a given know-how depends on watching how skilled individuals behave while trying, under their supervision and guidance, to perform in the same way. In general, ability theorists of practice are deeply impressed by the extent to which individuals develop the ability to participate appropriately and/or effectively in the ways of acting that are part of their everyday life.

2.3 THE LIMITED APPLICABILITY OF RULE EXPLANATIONS

Insofar as individuals have the ability to act and execute actions appropriately and/or effectively, the following question may be raised: What explains this ability on their part? That is, what causes their actions being appropriate and/or effective? Here is one possible answer to this query: Individuals are able to act and execute actions appropriately and/or effectively because they follow rules. Mental representations of rules cause individuals’ ways of acting being appropriate and/or effective. Ability theorists of practice strongly oppose this proposal. Before looking into their reasons for this, however, the suggestion, as they understand it, needs to be presented in more detail.

To this end, it is useful to begin by briefly distinguishing four kinds of rules that may be invoked to explain individuals’ ways of acting as appropriate and/or effective:

- *Rules of action.* They state that a nonverbal or verbal action is appropriate or inappropriate in some circumstance. An example is: “if you receive a gift, say “thank you.”
- *Instrumental rules of action.* They state that a nonverbal or verbal action is effective or ineffective in bringing about a certain end in some circumstance. An example is: “if you want your dough to rise, you need to knead it.”
- *Rules of execution.* They state how it is appropriate or inappropriate to execute an action in some circumstance. An example is: “when you eat, do not champ your food.”
- *Instrumental rules of execution.* They state how it is effective or ineffective to execute an action in order to bring about a certain end in some circumstance. An example is: “in order to turn to the right when doing cross-country skiing, put weight on the right leg, and vice versa.”

Ability theorists of practice take it that individuals may follow these rules either consciously or nonconsciously. In the former case, individuals actively consult or contemplate the rules; in the latter case, they do not notice their reliance upon rules even though they might as well, effortlessly, have done so. Further, ability theorists of practice make it clear that whether individuals follow rules consciously or nonconsciously, they are always able, effortlessly, to give verbal expression to these rules if they pay attention to the matter. The background for this claim is their view that rules are conceptually represented. This means that individuals’ knowledge of the rules they follow exemplify conceptually represented knowledge and knowledge of this variety, ability theorists hold, is always such that individuals are able effortlessly to state it.⁹

Ability theorists of practice place much emphasis on this idea of conceptually represented knowledge. They variously refer to it as representational knowledge, propositional knowledge, knowledge that, and theoretical knowledge. Or, since individuals are always able to articulate

⁹ A practice theorist like Giddens refines this claim by holding that individuals are always able to put their conceptually represented knowledge into words unless they repress this knowledge in the Freudian sense (Giddens 1984:4ff). In the following exposition, I shall disregard this possible refinement of the notion of conceptually represented knowledge.

their conceptually represented knowledge, they label it discursive, articulated, or non-tacit knowledge. I prefer the more precise formulation of conceptually represented knowledge.¹⁰

Now, as already indicated, ability theorists of practice oppose rule explanations. More precisely, they insist that individuals' ways of acting being appropriate and/or effective should typically not be explained by appeal to their being consciously or nonconsciously guided by rules. In support of this contention, ability theorists offer a number of arguments.

One aims to show that individuals do not follow rules consciously. It proceeds by making the phenomenological observation that individuals typically determine how to act and execute actions unreflectively and without thinking about it. As Ann Swidler puts it, practices are “notable for their unconscious, automatic, un-thought character” (Swidler 2001:74). On this basis, it is concluded that since this feature of practice is incompatible with the active contemplation of rules, individuals typically do not consciously follow rules when acting and executing actions appropriately and/or effectively.¹¹

Another argument is directed against both conscious and nonconscious rule following. As noticed above, individuals who follow rules and who, by implication, have conceptually represented knowledge of these rules are always able, effortlessly, to articulate them. Conversely, ability theorists of practice elaborate, individuals who are unable to point to any rules guiding their ways of acting do not have conceptually represented knowledge of, and hence cannot possibly be following, any rules. This clarified, ability theorists of practice advance the empirical claim that individuals are typically unable to state any rules that would account for

¹⁰ Within the social sciences and the philosophy of the social sciences, ability theorists of practice typically do not even consider the idea of nonconceptual representational content. Accordingly, when they talk about mental representations or representational knowledge, they have in mind mental representations with conceptual content or conceptually represented knowledge respectively. To bring this out, I shall add the qualification “conceptual” or “conceptually” whenever necessary.

¹¹ Here, and in the following, I am adapting all arguments to the present discussion of rules that state how it is appropriate and/or effective to act and execute actions in some circumstance.

their ways of acting being appropriate and/or effective. Often ability theorists of practice phrase, and emphasize, this point by saying that individuals' knowledge of how to act and execute actions is largely nondiscursive, unarticulated, or tacit where this should be taken "to cover those things that we know how to do but are unable to explain to someone else" (Collins 2001:108). Insofar as individuals' knowledge of how to act and execute actions appropriately and/or effectively is largely tacit, it follows that their ways of acting are typically not, consciously or nonconsciously, a function of their being guided by rules.

Finally, ability theorists of practice also support their position by noting that even when individuals are able to point to rules, these rules should not necessarily be seen as causing their ways of acting being appropriate and/or effective. In fact, ability theorists of practice contend, individuals' rules rarely play such a causal role. For instance, Garfinkel makes this point in relation to individuals' "choices" of action. In cases, he states, where individuals have conceptually represented knowledge of relevant rules, they typically do not base their decisions on these rules. Instead, they only appeal to them when trying to justify their choices of action (Garfinkel 1967:114). Garfinkel bases this proposal on his research on how jurors reach their verdict. The jurors he studied were able to quote all the official rules they are supposed to follow when arriving at a decision. Yet, Garfinkel maintains, it was possible to determine that they did not consult these rules until after they had reached their verdict – and then only to defend their decision (ibid.).

Another and widely mentioned way in which to support the claim that individuals' rules are often not causally effective in bringing about their ways of acting should also briefly be mentioned. It has been advanced by Hubert Dreyfus, a practice theorist working outside the field of social theorizing. According to Dreyfus, it is sometimes the case that individuals rely on

conceptually represented rules when being in the first stages of acquiring some ability: The rules are actively consulted when deciding how to act or execute an action. In later stages, however, the rules gradually recede into the background to the point where they end up playing no role at all. Expert performers, that is, individuals who are reliable when it comes to the exercise of some ability, do not follow rules.¹² This point, Dreyfus implies, should not only be understood to mean that no conscious adherence to rules takes place. Also, it should be taken to mean that no nonconscious rule following takes place. He justifies this latter claim by noticing that there is no basis for holding that any nonconscious reliance on rules occurs: “That we once followed a rule in learning to tie our shoelaces does not show [...] that we must still be following the same rule unconsciously whenever we tie a lace. That would be like claiming that since we needed training wheels when learning how to ride a bicycle, we must now be using invisible training wheels whenever we ride. There is no reason to think that the rules that play a role in the *acquisition* of a skill play a role in its later *application*” (Dreyfus 1999:xiii). In this fashion, unless individuals are in the first stages of acquiring an ability, they typically do not follow the rules they are able to cite. Or, so Dreyfus argues.

The discussion so far has brought out how ability theorists of practice insist that, typically, individuals do not, consciously or nonconsciously, follow rules: Rules are rarely causally effective in bringing about individuals’ ways of acting as appropriate and/or effective. This stance is obviously compatible with holding that individuals’ ways of acting are occasionally guided by rules. Ability theorists of practice are happy to acknowledge that individuals now and then follow rules. They observe that these rules may assume a variety of forms ranging from proverbs and sayings to codified laws and user manuals. As Michael Lynch

¹² For further discussion of the acquisition of skills, see also Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1986).

comments, rules “come in an immense variety of ‘vulgar’ forms, including instructions for cooking, gardening, child care, sex, courtship, driving, auto repair, and in the case of etiquette manuals, conversation” (Lynch 2001:138). Yet, ability theorists of practice also emphasize that rules are only limited guides to action. Even in the relatively rare cases where rules are followed, appeal to these does not suffice to explain individuals’ ways of acting as appropriate and/or effective. Two arguments are commonly advanced in support of this contention.

One is the regress argument. It comes in different versions that are all, directly or indirectly, inspired by the later Wittgenstein’s rule following considerations. The basic idea is that a rule may be interpreted in multiple and even conflicting ways. As a result, a rule cannot, by itself, determine how it is appropriate and/or effective to act or how to execute an action appropriately and/or effectively. To solve this problem, it may be suggested that a specification of the proper interpretation should be attached to the rule. Unfortunately, this will not do: The specification itself may be regarded as a rule in need of interpretation. However, once this new specification is provided, it too will be in need of interpretation, and so on (Rouse 2007:642). In this sense, there is, as it is often put, a gap between a rule and its application. It is the existence of this gap that is responsible for rules being insufficient guides to action.

The other argument may be labeled the exception argument. It draws attention to another feature of rules, namely their being riddled with exceptions. There are situations in which a conceptually represented rule should not be followed since this would result in actions or executions of actions that were inappropriate and/or ineffective. Moreover, the argument goes, these exceptions cannot be captured in an exception clause: Their number is infinite, and even if that were not the case there would still be no way in which to foresee all the possible exceptions to a rule. For these reasons, individuals’ reliance upon conceptually represented rules is not

sufficient to ensure that they act appropriately and/or effectively. In addition to their knowledge of rules, individuals must be able to determine when to take exception to them.

The upshot of all these considerations is that rule explanations of individuals' ways of acting being appropriate and/or effective have limited applicability only. For the most part, rule explanations are not usable for the simple reason that individuals' "choices" and executions of actions are typically not guided by rules. Furthermore, on the few occasions where individuals do follow rules, explanations by reference to these rules are insufficient: The rules do not fully account for individuals' ability to act and execute actions appropriately and/or effectively.

Ability theorists of practice think that the standard position within the social sciences and the philosophy of the social sciences is that explanations by appeal to rules are generally applicable. It is exactly this widespread conception that they wish to oppose and undermine with their arguments. As part of this, some ability theorists of practice even offer a diagnosis as to why so many social theorists succumb to the illusion that rule explanations are generally applicable. For instance, Bourdieu offers two ways in which to account for this alleged phenomenon. The first begins by noticing that it is relatively easy for the social scientist to find out about rules (Bourdieu 1990b:77). The social scientist may simply ask individuals to tell her about them. Consequently, Bourdieu implies, it is tempting to focus on these rules alone while assuming that they account for individuals' practices in general. The second explanation is the one mainly stressed by Bourdieu. It consists in pointing to the fact that the social scientist is typically a stranger to the practices she studies. Accordingly, she will try to find her way around by describing observed behavioral regularities. The problem is now that she is likely to start to project these descriptions onto the individuals she studies and hence to see their ways of acting as being oriented by corresponding rules. As such, she commits the mistake of "sliding from the

model of reality to the reality of the model” (Bourdieu 1990a:39). It is this erroneous move that first and foremost lies at the root of the exaggerated use of rule explanations within social theorizing. As these points also illustrate, theorists of practice spend considerable energy stressing and demonstrating the limited applicability of rule explanations.

2.4 AN ALTERNATIVE TO RULE EXPLANATIONS

Ability theorists of practice insist that, typically, individuals’ abilities to act and execute actions appropriately and/or effectively are not caused by their mental representations of rules. So how then do they propose to explain these abilities?

Some ability theorists of practice do not consider this question. They confine themselves to noticing individuals’ ability to act and execute actions in appropriate and/or effective ways while stressing that this is not a result of their following rules. Others do address the issue. For instance, Giddens states that individuals who act appropriately do so in virtue of applying nonrepresented generalizable procedures (Giddens 1984:21). As such, the application of these procedures is not identical to the following of rules. In somewhat the same spirit, Bourdieu maintains that individuals act and execute actions appropriately and/or effectively insofar as they employ their schemes, structures, or dispositions. These schemes, Bourdieu suggests, may be conceived of as unrepresented generalities (Bourdieu 1990a:89). As these responses bring out, ability theorists of practice do not want to replace the appeal to conceptually represented knowledge in the form of rules with conceptually represented knowledge of some other sort. Accordingly, individuals’ actions being appropriate and/or effective should not necessarily be

seen as a function of their having suitable conceptually represented knowledge: Every piece of know-how or practical knowledge is not underwritten by a piece of knowledge-that or theoretical knowledge. In fact, this is only occasionally the case. It is because ability theorists of practice adopt and defend this stance that they should be seen as inspired by – and as part of – the tradition represented by the later Wittgenstein and kindred spirits.

2.5 THE EXPLANATORY FOCUS OF ABILITY THEORIES

So far the core claims and arguments advanced by ability theorists of practice have been presented. The resultant approach may be seen as inviting two basic explanatory foci in connection with the study of particular practices. It is these two basic explanatory projects that ability theorists typically pursue when examining actual practices.

The first, and most common, project aims at the articulation of individuals' purely practical knowledge. As emphasized by ability theorists of practice, individuals are rarely able to state any rules that would account for their ways of acting being appropriate and/or effective. As such, individuals' knowledge of appropriate and/or effective ways of acting is purely practical; it is not accompanied by conceptually represented knowledge to this effect. Obviously, this feature of practices does not mean that social theorists should not make an effort in the direction of stating in what circumstances acting or executing an action in some manner is appropriate and/or effective. And in fact, most ability theorists of practice see it as their principal task to articulate individuals' purely practical knowledge. Needless to say, when they adopt this explanatory focus, they regard their findings as constructs or models. They do not commit the mistake of

thinking that the accounts they come up with correspond to rules followed by the individuals they study. This would be to commit the mistake, pointed out by Bourdieu, of “sliding from the model of reality to the reality of the model” (Bourdieu 1990a:39).¹³

The second explanatory project concentrates on the specification of the manner in which individuals handle rules. As argued by ability theorists of practice, the rules that individuals occasionally follow are insufficient guides to action. One reason for this is that there is always a gap between rules and their application. Accordingly, Lynch comments, “we can see that an opportunity for a distinctive kind of analysis can be found [...] in the gap *between* literary accounts of practice and members’ actual practices” (Lynch 2001:138- italics in original). In other words, ability theorists of practice may, and do, focus on specifying how individuals deal with, and typically close, the gap between rules and their application. Another reason why rules are limited guides to action is that they are riddled with exceptions. Again, ability theorists of practice may, and do, take on the task of specifying how individuals cope with this feature of rules, that is, take exception to a rule or refrain from doing so.

Of course, ability theorists of practice engage in various other explanatory projects too. For instance, they may concern themselves with the manner in which individuals acquire their abilities; with the changes that occur with respect to what ways of acting are “considered” appropriate and/or effective; with the social status that accompany the possession of a certain know-how; and so on. Still, these explanatory projects typically presuppose, and go together with, capturing individuals’ purely practical knowledge in words and with detailing how

¹³ In passing, it may be noticed that different methods may be employed to find out about individuals’ purely practical knowledge. One is Garfinkel’s famous method of breaching experiments (see Garfinkel 1963:217ff & 1967:53ff). Another one that Bourdieu also uses is the method of participant observation. In my “Practical Knowledge and Participant Observation” I discuss in more detail how this latter method may serve as basis for the articulation of individuals’ purely practical knowledge, see Zahle (unpublished).

individuals deal with rules. For this reason, these two tasks, viz. of articulating individuals' purely practical knowledge and of specifying how they deal with rules, may be regarded as the basic explanatory foci of ability theories of practice.

2.6 THE ABILITY DIRECTLY TO PERCEIVE THE APPROPRIATENESS OF ACTIONS

Against the background of this introduction to ability theories of practice, I shall now turn to the presentation of my project. More specifically, I shall begin by specifying the aspect of practices with which I shall be concerned.

Ability theorists of practice are concerned with individuals' abilities to act and execute actions appropriately and/or effectively. Among these abilities, I shall concentrate exclusively on the ability to act appropriately, that is, to act in permissible or required ways, while refraining from impermissible doings. Further narrowing down the focus, I shall only look at the exercise of this ability in situations of social interaction specified as contexts of face-to-face interaction.

Examples of appropriate ways of acting in the kinds of situation I have in mind are:

- To offer your seat to an elderly person in a bus where there are no empty seats.
- To stand in line in order to pay in the supermarket.
- To say "thank you" upon receiving a gift.
- To hold the door for the person immediately behind you.
- To refrain from talking loudly and interrupting the speaker during a lecture.
- To refrain from stripping naked on a beach where there are other people present.
- To offer to help your friend to clear the table after dinner.
- To return a greeting from a friend.
- To stay to the right when approaching somebody on the sidewalk.
- To crack a joke when in the company of cheerful friends.

- To refrain from kissing a new colleague goodbye on the mouth when meeting her for the first time.¹⁴

As these examples also bring out, I am concerned with dispersed practices of social interaction, that is, with single ways of interacting. Typically, these single ways of interacting are part of integrative practices, i.e. webs of multiple and interrelated ways of acting. This is not something I shall go into. For the present purposes, it may simply be noticed that different kinds of face-to-face interaction form a fundamental and, in many cases, dominant, component of integrative practices. Dispersed practices of social interaction are all over the place in social life, so to speak.

In relation to situations of social interaction where individuals exercise their ability to act appropriately, I want to examine the central question of how to understand this ability on their part. One important way in which to approach an answer to this question is by carefully examining how the ability relates to, or is a function of, other abilities that individuals exercise when participating in social practices. Surprisingly, ability theorists of practice have not in any depth pursued this promising strategy. Here is the thesis I shall advocate:

In situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states specified as the appropriateness of actions.

¹⁴ It goes without saying that what is considered appropriate ways of acting in situations of social interaction is often culturally variable. For the present purposes of exemplification, this point may be disregarded. In fact, I shall ignore this point in connection with all the examples I shall provide in the following.

That is, in situations of social interaction, individuals sometimes possess, and exercise, the ability directly to perceive normative states. When this is the case, their seeing of normative states causes their actions being appropriate. In this manner, their ability directly to perceive normative states sometimes underwrites their ability to act appropriately.

I shall develop and defend this thesis in a manner that is compatible with the basic ability approach, that is, the main arguments and claims advanced by ability theorists and presented above. Ability theorists of practice have not in any detail pursued the idea that individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on, or is a function of, their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states. Still, and as I shall show in the next chapter, main proponents of the approach toy with the suggestion. Or, they invite an extension of their theories in this direction. For this reason, my development and defense of the above thesis should be regarded as a natural or obvious extension of the basic position defended by ability theorists of practice.

2.7 SUMMARY

In the first and longest part of the present chapter, the basic claims and arguments advanced by ability theorists were introduced. The following were the main points made: Ability theorists of practice conceive of practices as assessable ways of acting among multiple individuals. In this connection, they draw attention to participants in practices who have acquired the ability, skill, know-how, or practical knowledge to act and execute actions appropriately and/or effectively. Ability theorists of practice insist that individuals' abilities to this effect should typically not be

explained by appeal to rules. More specifically, they argue that individuals rarely follow rules and that, if they do, the rules are insufficient guides to action. Moreover, if ability theorists of practice offer any alternative explanation at all, they suggest that nonrepresented generalizable procedures, schemes, structures, or dispositions, account for individuals' ways of acting being appropriate and/or effective. Finally, ability theorists of practice tend to adopt two basic explanatory foci: The articulation of individuals' purely practical knowledge and the specification of their handling of rules.

In light of this characterization of the basic ability approach, I moved on, in the second part of the chapter, to present my project. I made it clear that I shall concentrate on individuals' ability to act appropriately in situations of social interaction specified as contexts of face-to-face interaction. And I stated the thesis I shall develop and defend, viz. that in situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states. Finally, I ventured that the account I shall present is best characterized as a *natural* elaboration of the ability approach to practices. The main aim of the next chapter is to make good this last point.

3.0 GARFINKEL'S, BOURDIEU'S, AND GIDDENS' ABILITY THEORIES OF PRACTICE

In the last chapter, I provided an introduction to the core claims and arguments advanced by ability theorists. On that basis, I presented the thesis to be developed and defended in this work, viz. that, in situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states. Working out this thesis constitutes a natural or obvious way to extend the basic ability approach to practices. Or so I claimed. The main aim of the present chapter is to substantiate this contention. At the same time, the chapter adds some more content to the rather schematic characterization of ability theories already provided. Its subsidiary purpose is to give a better sense of what a specific ability theory may look like and of the different ways in which ability theorists of practice employ and take off from the basic ability approach.

I proceed by examining three examples of ability theories of practice: Garfinkel's, Bourdieu's, and Giddens'. All three theorists are, to say the least, extremely influential proponents of the ability approach to practice. In connection with each theorist, I outline their main points about practices as characterized from an ability perspective. Moreover, I focus on their comments on the nature and role of individuals' perceptual abilities.¹⁵ In connection with

¹⁵ I shall be concerned with their positive contribution to an understanding of practices. As such, I shall not go into their grounds for rejecting explanations by appeal to rules. This issue was discussed at length in chapter 2. It is also

their views on perception, the discussion will bring out that they all toy with, or invite, the suggestion that individuals sometimes perceive normative states that cause their actions being appropriate. It is this feature of their accounts that makes it reasonable to maintain that it is a natural elaboration of the basic ability approach to maintain that, in situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states.

3.1 GARFINKEL'S ABILITY THEORY OF PRACTICE

Garfinkel is the founder of the school of social theorizing called ethnomethodology. His theory of practice is part and parcel of this program of research. His main presentation of the approach is *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, a collection of papers from 1967. All subsequent debates have mainly revolved around this work the reason probably being that he has published relatively little since then.¹⁶ Ethnomethodology is first and foremost associated with Garfinkel's name. Still, a host of other theorists have also contributed to its development. Today, ethnomethodology is still an important movement within the social sciences.¹⁷

worth emphasizing that insofar as I focus on their accounts of practices from an ability perspective, there are aspects of their theories that I shall not cover. In this sense, my discussion of their views will be rather selective.

¹⁶ Between 1967 where *Studies in Ethnomethodology* appeared and 2002, Garfinkel published only five articles: Garfinkel, Lynch, & Livingston (1981), Garfinkel & Sachs (1986), Garfinkel (1991), Garfinkel & Weider (1992), and Garfinkel (1996). Then, in 2002, the collection of papers *Ethnomethodology's Program* came out.

¹⁷ The secondary literature on both Garfinkel's position and ethnomethodology more generally is vast. See in particular Heritage (1995) and Sharrock & Anderson (1986), but also, e.g., Benson & Hughes (1983), Coulon (1995), Francis & Hester (2004), Hilbert (1992), Livingston (1987), Lynch (2001), Pollner & Emerson (2001); Rawls (2000, 2002). For an overview of the different directions in which ethnomethodological research has developed, see Atkinson (1988), but also Lynch & Peyrot (1992a). The latter is an introduction to two issues of

In the following outline of his theory, I shall mainly rely on *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967) and on an earlier article “A Conception of, and Experiment with, ‘Trust’ as a Condition of Stable Concerted Actions” from 1963.¹⁸ Garfinkel’s papers do not add up to a systematic statement of his position. Also, he uses a slightly varying terminology.¹⁹ The presentation of his theory below is a terminologically streamlined reconstruction of his position.

3.1.1 The Familiar World of Everyday Practices

The focus of Garfinkel’s theory of practice is the world of daily life, that is, social life as constituted by, among other things, individuals’ routine actions in everyday settings.

According to Garfinkel, individuals are deeply familiar with the world of daily life. Most notably, they know what constitutes “normal courses of action” (Garfinkel 1967:35). For instance, they are aware that certain ways of acting are normal when at home together with their family, when among colleagues at work, when in the theatre, when at the beach, and so on. Individuals expect each other to possess this knowledge of daily life: They regard it as common sense knowledge, as “what anyone like us knows” (Garfinkel 1963:212). Moreover, they think that the world of daily life is just as it should be. Garfinkel expresses this point by saying that individuals regard the natural facts of daily life as moral facts too (Garfinkel 1967:35). In

Qualitative Sociology that feature papers exemplifying newer ethnomethodological research (Peyrot & Lynch 1992b).

¹⁸ The article is a forerunner to “Studies in the routine grounds of everyday activity” printed in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967).

¹⁹ In addition to these difficulties, it is standard to point out that the ethnomethodological style of writing is rather inaccessible. For example, John Heritage comments that Garfinkel’s studies “are discussed in a difficult prose style in which dense thickets of words seem to resist the reader’s best endeavours” (Heritage 1995:1). Likewise Michael Lynch and Mark Peyrot, proponents of the ethnomethodological approach, acknowledge that a “common complaint about ethnomethodology is that the writing is unnecessarily hard to read” (Lynch and Peyrot 1992a:119).

connection with actions, this means that they regard normal courses of action as appropriate courses of action. Accordingly, even though Garfinkel does not put it in these terms, individuals' knowledge of *normal* courses of action may also be described as their knowledge of *appropriate* courses of action. By linking the normal with the appropriate in this manner, Garfinkel is not committed to holding that individuals cannot adopt a critical stance towards the world of daily life and make an effort to change it. All he claims is that individuals *are prone* morally to endorse and leave things as they are.

Be that as it may, Garfinkel specifies that individuals' knowledge of normal/appropriate courses of acting assumes two forms. First of all, it expresses itself in expectancies as to how other individuals are likely to act. These expectancies serve as schemes of interpretation and as such they enable individuals to perceive others' actions as being of a familiar kind, as being normal, as being appropriate, or the like. Second, individuals' knowledge of normal/appropriate courses of action expresses itself in their being typically able to act in normal/appropriate ways. Garfinkel's discussion of these two abilities may now be examined in turn.

3.1.2 Individuals' Ability to Perceive Others' Actions as Being of a Familiar Type, as Being Normal, or the Like.

In order to understand Garfinkel's characterization of individuals' ability to see others' actions as being of a familiar type, as being normal, or the like, it is useful first to outline his view of perception in general.

Garfinkel holds that individuals have expectancies, assumptions, and the like, relating to their surroundings. Occasionally, Garfinkel points out, individuals are able to articulate their

expectancies, assumptions, etc., but mostly they are unable to do so. An individual, he writes, “is typically at a loss to tell us specifically of what the expectancies consist. When we ask him he has little or nothing to say” (Garfinkel 1967:37). Individuals employ these expectancies, assumptions, etc. as schemes of interpretation. Insofar as certain expectancies, say, are used as schemes of interpretation, individuals ascribe numerous perceptible features to the environment that correspond to, or reflect, their expectancies. As a result, they see the situation as having the ascribed features though without necessarily being consciously aware of these features (Garfinkel 1963:216). Moreover, Garfinkel implies, the features are ascribed to the world of daily life as specified in purely physical terms. Since the attributions specify the world in much richer everyday terms, they should be seen as conferring meaning upon, or as attaching a sense to, the world of daily life. When individuals see the world as having the ascribed features, they see the world as meaningful.

But what exactly is it for individuals to see the world as meaningful? First and foremost, Garfinkel stresses, it is for them to perceive appearances and events in their environment as being of a familiar type (Garfinkel 1967:36). In addition, it is for them to see appearances and events as being, say, normal, as having occurred with a certain likelihood, as comparable with past and future appearances or events, as having been caused in a certain way, as either a means or an end, and as appropriate in the sense of being required by “the moral authority of the familiar society” (ibid.:54, but see also Garfinkel 1963:188). This being Garfinkel’s position, it appears that he works with a very broad notion of the scope of perception – one that even allows individuals to perceive appearances and events as being appropriate.

Against this background, it is possible to specify individuals’ ability to perceive ways of acting as being of a familiar type, as being normal, as being appropriate, or the like: Individuals’

knowledge of normal/appropriate actions assume the form of mostly unarticulated expectancies that are employed as schemes of interpretation. In light of these schemes, individuals attribute certain features to others' behavior and as such they see their behavior as meaningful. Finally, insofar as they see others' behavior as meaningful, they perceive it as being of a familiar type, as being normal, as being appropriate, as either a means or an end, or the like.²⁰

Garfinkel illustrates many of these considerations in relation to the bridge player who has conceptually represented knowledge of the rules of bridge. The player uses this knowledge as a scheme of interpretation. In light of the rules, he does not see his opponent as having moved a card board. Instead, he makes certain attributions that enable him to see his opponent's way of acting as being of a familiar type: He sees him as playing "the ace of spades as the first card of the trick" (ibid.:195). Accordingly, Garfinkel elaborates, "[a] behavior signifies an action in terms of an assumed order [...] The basic rules provide a behavior's *sense* as an action. They are the terms in which a player decides whether or not he has correctly identified 'What happened.' 'Subjective meaning' is 'attached' to a behavior in terms of these rules" (ibid.).

The example of the bridge player concerns an individual who successfully applies her scheme of interpretation. Most of the time, however, Garfinkel is concerned with showing what happens when individuals are prevented from making their attributions. For instance, he relates the following experiment that he made his students perform: He asked them to think of themselves as boarders and to spend some time observing their everyday family life from this imagined position (Garfinkel 1967:45). By adopting this perspective, the students forced themselves to put aside their expectancies relating to social interaction in the bosom of their

²⁰ I am simplifying here. Garfinkel makes it clear that a piece of behavior does not only appear as being of a familiar kind or the like in virtue of individuals' expectancies as to how others will act. A host of other, typically unarticulated, assumptions serve as schemes of interpretation too. If these assumptions are disappointed, a piece of behavior or the situation in general will also fail to appear as being of a familiar type, as being normal, or the like.

families. They made sure they did not use these expectancies as schemes of interpretation. As a consequence, they experienced themselves as being totally unable to perceive their family life in normal terms. They resorted to “behaviorized” descriptions of their family members when conveying how they perceived the situation (ibid.:45). For example, a student described how she observed a man enter the house, kiss her, and then proceed to the kitchen. In this fashion, Garfinkel holds, the experiment shows how individuals’ expectancies play a crucial role in relation to their perceptual “recognition of stable courses of interpersonal transactions” (ibid.:44).

In this experiment, individuals prevent *themselves* from employing their expectancies as schemes of interpretation. The more common situation is that individuals are prevented by *others* from doing so. Most notably, this is the case when others act in ways that are not appropriate. Typically, individuals react with anger or anxiety when others act inappropriately. A common explanation of this fact, Garfinkel states, is the following: Individuals get upset because they are emotionally or otherwise committed to some way of acting being appropriate in a given situation. The more committed they are, the stronger they will react with disapproval when inappropriate behavior occurs. Garfinkel rejects this suggestion. What matters is “the perceived normality of the environmental events” (Garfinkel 1963:198). That is, individuals get upset when others act inappropriately because this undermines their attempt to see the situation as normal in light of their schemes of interpretation. Garfinkel supports this contention by appeal to two experiments.²¹ In the first, the experimenter approached her conversational partner such that

²¹ These two experiments exemplify the method of breaching experiments – mentioned briefly in a footnote in chapter 2. Garfinkel is famous for this method. It proceeds by preventing individuals from understanding a situation in terms of their expectancies, assumptions, or knowledge. Individuals tend to respond with anger, embarrassment, and the like to situations of this kind. Their reactions make it possible for the social scientist to get an idea of the

their noses were nearly touching while pretending that nothing unusual was going on. In the second experiment, the experimenter said “hello” instead of “goodbye” at the end of a conversation (ibid.). In both situations, the experimental subjects reacted by getting equally upset. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to expect them to consider it to be more inappropriate to stand up very closely to somebody than to say “hello” at the end of a conversation. Consequently, Garfinkel implies, if their reactions had been due to their attachment to a given way of acting being appropriate, then the reaction in the first experiment should have been stronger than in the second one. The fact that it is not suggests that it was the inability to perceive the situation as normal that made the experimental subjects angry.

In this fashion, Garfinkel’s relates a host of empirical studies that illustrate and support his specification of individuals’ ability to perceive actions as being of a familiar type, as being normal, as being appropriate, and the like. More generally, it is worth noticing that he provides a rather detailed account of how perception works. It involves a very broad notion of the scope of perception.

3.1.3 Individuals’ Ability to Act in Normal/Appropriate Ways

Individuals’ knowledge of normal/appropriate ways does not only express itself in expectancies that individuals employ as schemes of interpretation when perceiving others’ ways of acting. Also, this knowledge expresses itself in their being typically able to act in normal/appropriate ways. Garfinkel makes it clear that acting appropriately causes no difficulties for individuals and

content of their disappointed expectancies, assumptions, etc. For a description of the method, see Garfinkel (1963:217ff) and (1967:53ff).

that they are capable of doing so “without having to think about it” (Garfinkel 1967:10). Moreover, he points out, individuals are typically unable to articulate their knowledge of how it is appropriate to act in various settings. These are roughly the ideas conveyed by the following, more elaborate, passage in Garfinkel: for individuals, the “hows” of acting “are unproblematic, are known vaguely, and are known only in the doing which is done skillfully, reliably, uniformly, with enormous standardization and as an unaccountable matter” (Garfinkel 1967:10).

The characterization implies that individuals rarely follow conceptually represented rules that they can state. Still, Garfinkel is happy to admit that individuals occasionally follow rules. In these cases, however, the rules are only limited guides to action in the sense explained in chapter 2. This point is one that he argues at great length. Moreover, notice that the above description suggests that individuals do typically not step back and reflect on how to act. To avoid any misunderstanding, Garfinkel stresses that this is perfectly compatible with individuals sometimes thinking about their ways of acting. Individuals are capable of acting rationally in the sense of being able to act deliberately, to think about what to do and how to do it, to try to predict the consequences of an action, and so on (ibid.:172-173). Unless they had this ability to reflect on their manners of acting, individuals would be judgmental dopes, as Garfinkel famously puts it.

This being clarified, it may still be asked how, more specifically, to understand individuals’ ability to act appropriately in most daily life situations. Garfinkel does not really address this question. This is somewhat surprising in view of his rather detailed account of how perception works when it enables individuals to perceive others’ ways of acting as being of a familiar type, as being normal, as being appropriate, or the like. Still, in a footnote, Garfinkel makes a comment that may be taken to indicate in what direction he would want such an account to go. He indicates that an individual engaged in market transactions acts in light of “the

perceived environment of actual and *possible* transactional events” (Garfinkel 1963:209 – my italics). Since transactional events may reasonably be taken to include actions in the form of transactions, the passage suggests that the individual perceives the environment as containing not only actual but also possible actions in the form of transactions. Further, though it cannot be determined from the quote, it may well be that possible actions in the form of transactions should be understood to include both instrumentally possible actions and actions that are possible in the sense of being appropriate. On a more general note, this makes it likely to hold that individuals should be seen as capable of perceiving an environment as making actions instrumentally possible or impossible and/or appropriate or inappropriate. Assume that this is what Garfinkel has in mind in the quote. In that case, the way is paved for ascribing to him the view that individuals’ ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability to perceive normative states.

In any event, this proposal seems only natural in view of Garfinkel’s broad notion of the scope of perception. If it is really possible, as Garfinkel thinks, to perceive that other individuals’ actions are appropriate, it seems only a small step to make the following addition: Sometimes individuals may equally well see whether it would be appropriate or inappropriate for them to perform some action. Moreover, their perceiving this is the reason why they act – or refrain from acting – in that manner. The upshot of these considerations is that perhaps Garfinkel toys with this idea. Or at the very least, given his broad notion of the scope of perception, the idea is an obvious way to elaborate his account of individuals as being typically able to act appropriately in everyday situations.

3.1.4 Summary

The presentation of Garfinkel's ability theory of practice began by noticing his emphasis upon the point that individuals know what constitutes normal/appropriate ways of action. Then I explained how Garfinkel stresses that individuals' knowledge to this effect assumes two forms. First, it expresses itself in their mostly unarticulated expectancies as to how others are likely to act. These expectancies serve as schemes of interpretation and enable individuals to perceive others' ways of acting as being of a familiar kind, as being normal, appropriate, or the like. Second, this knowledge expresses itself in individuals being typically able to act appropriately. The examination brought out that whereas Garfinkel's discussion of the first point is rather elaborate, his analysis of individuals' ability to act appropriately is poorly developed. Accordingly, I proposed that a natural way to advance his views on the matter is to maintain that individuals' ability to act appropriately is sometimes a function of their exercise of the ability to perceive normative states. Garfinkel hints at this idea or, at the very least, his broad notion of the scope of perception invites a proposal along these lines.

3.2 BOURDIEU'S ABILITY THEORY OF PRACTICE

Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology* appeared in 1967 and as such it precedes the focus on social practices that emerged as a trend around the beginning of the 1980s (see Ortner 1984). Bourdieu is an important contributor to this development. His theory of practice was first presented at length in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* from 1972 and then further worked out

in his *The Logic of Practice* from 1980.²² These two works are his most concentrated and comprehensive statements of his ability theory of practice. They are certainly not his only works on practice. In numerous other publications, he has commented upon, and further developed, his theory while also applying it to different areas of study such as the fields of education, art and literature.²³ The significance of Bourdieu's theory of practice and his analyses is hard to exaggerate. Lila Abu-Lughod testifies to this when she comments that "[p]ractice is associated, in anthropology, with Bourdieu" (Abu-Lughod 1991:147). And so does Craig Calhoun's description of Bourdieu as "the most influential and original French sociologist since Durkheim" (Calhoun 2000:696).²⁴

In the following presentation of Bourdieu's theory of practice, I shall mainly rely on *The Logic of Practice* (1990a). Occasionally, I shall also make reference to *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1993) and the later collection of essays *In Other Words* (1990b). It may be noticed that in his (1990a) and (1993), Bourdieu directly refers to Garfinkel's work though only in order to criticize it (see e.g. Bourdieu 1990a:26 and Bourdieu 1993:21). Bourdieu never openly acknowledges that they are both concerned with developing what I have called an ability approach to practices.

²² *Outline of a Theory of Practice* was translated into English in 1977. I am using a reprint from 1993. *The Logic of Practice* was translated from French into English in 1990.

²³ For further comments on, and elaborations of, his views, see e.g. Bourdieu (1990b), Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), Bourdieu (1994), and Bourdieu (1997). For examples of Bourdieu's application of his theory of practice, see, e.g., Bourdieu (1979), Bourdieu (1992), Bourdieu (1996), and Bourdieu & Passeron (2000). For a bibliography of Bourdieu's writings, see Grenfell (2004).

²⁴ Not surprisingly, the secondary literature on Bourdieu's work is huge and steadily growing. For introductions to his work, see in particular Calhoun (2000) and Webb et al. (2002), but also Evens (1999), Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes (1990), Lane (2000), Robbins (1991), and Swartz (1997). For a discussion of Bourdieu's work from a philosophical perspective, see the collection of papers edited by Shusterman (1999). In this connection, see in particular the papers by Bohman (1999), Bouveresse (1999), Dreyfus and Rabinow (1999), and Taylor (1999).

3.2.1 Practices and Habitus

Bourdieu thinks of practices as ways of acting that are assessable in terms of their effectiveness and/or appropriateness. Still, he mainly places emphasis on the point that practices are characterized by being regular and regulated (Bourdieu 1990a:53). They are regular in the sense of being types of action regularly performed within given circumstances. They are regulated in that their production is mainly a function of individuals' habitus.

The concept of habitus is the key notion in Bourdieu's ability theory of practice. He variously specifies habitus as schemes, as a system of dispositions or models, as principles, as structures, and as capacities. Moreover, he makes it clear that an individual's habitus is constituted by different types of schemes. He mentions schemes of action, motor schemes, schemes of perception and evaluation, and schemes of expression. Schemes of action refer to individuals' dispositions to perform certain kinds of actions in given circumstances. Motor schemes denote their dispositions to execute bodily actions, i.e. actions which involve bodily movements, in a given manner. Schemes of perception refer to their dispositions to perceive events and situations in a certain way, while their schemes of evaluation denote their dispositions to evaluate these events and situations in certain manners. Finally, schemes of expression refer to their dispositions to use certain words in certain situations. Bourdieu never comments on the differences between these various schemes nor does he discuss how they relate to each other.

Be that as it may, schemes may be further characterized as generalities that are not conceptually represented.²⁵ This is, for instance, brought out by Bourdieu's brief discussion of the genesis of schemes of action: "the enacted unrepresented generality [...] arises from acting in

²⁵ Bourdieu, it may be noticed, does not operate with the category of representations that lack conceptual content. As he uses the term, representations are, by definition, conceptual.

a similar way in similar circumstances but without ‘thinking the similarity independently of the similar’, as Piaget puts it” (ibid.:89). The point that these generalities are not conceptually represented is one that he stresses again and again. For example, he has this in mind when he states that the “body does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it *enacts* the past, bringing it back to life. What is ‘learned by body’ is not something one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is” (ibid.:73). Likewise, he gives voice to this view when commenting that schemes of perception and evaluation “operate in the practical state” (Bourdieu 1990b:79).

Insofar as schemes are generalities that are not conceptually represented, they lack two features possessed by mental representations with conceptual content: Individuals have the ability conceptually to represent both what is present and what is absent. The occurrence of a mental representation is not tied to the presence of what it represents. Schemes differ in this respect. As Bourdieu comments in connection with schemes of action, these appear to individuals “only in action, in the relationship with a situation” (1990a:90). Moreover, individuals are typically able verbally to give expression to their mental representations with conceptual content. Instead, their schemes “function in the practical state, below the level of explicit statement” (ibid.:94).

In light of these considerations, it is possible to understand Bourdieu’s specification of the production of practices as being mainly a function of individuals’ habitus. It implies that practices are typically not caused by individuals’ mental representations of rules. And in fact, Bourdieu offers a number of arguments in support of this point. Instead, practices should be seen as being, for the most part, caused by individuals’ schemes or unrepresented generalities. These cause how individuals act, execute actions, etc. As Bourdieu puts it: “habitus is the

universalizing mediation which causes an agent's practices" (Bourdieu 1993:79). He summarizes this point by saying that schemes are generative.

3.2.2 Some Further Aspects of Habitus

In addition to schemes being generative, Bourdieu stresses that they are acquired and durable.

Individuals acquire their habitus as a result of the conditions they have had to deal with. These conditions are objective in the sense that they are there independently of whether individuals are aware of their existence or wish them to exist. As Bourdieu explains it, there are "possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions" (Bourdieu 1990a:54). Due to their repeated encounters with these possibilities, impossibilities, etc., individuals will develop certain dispositions. More specifically, they will be conditioned to produce actions, ways of executing actions, etc. that are compatible with the objective conditions, so to speak. In this fashion, individuals' habitus may be seen as the internalization of all their past confrontations with the objective conditions. Bourdieu is stressing exactly this point when he comments that "*habitus* – embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product" (ibid.:56).

The grounding of habitus mainly takes place in childhood. Without noticing it, Bourdieu explains, a child will acquire its schemes in different contexts and in various ways. For example, the boys in Kabylia in Algeria acquire their habitus as a result of, among other things, their participation in ritual contests and standard games; their involvement in adult activities such as the exchange of gifts; and their observations of the discussions in the men's assembly. Children

who grow up in roughly the same circumstances will tend to develop a very similar habitus. Further, Bourdieu states, once an individual's habitus has been established in childhood, it remains more or less stable throughout life. Typically, it is only fine-tuning which occurs in adult life. For this reason, the capacities constituting an individual's habitus should not only be seen as generative and acquired, but also as durable.

Insofar as the objective conditions in which an individual acts are sufficiently similar to those that shaped her habitus, her schemes guarantees "the 'correctness' of practices" (ibid.:54). Her schemes of action enable her to act appropriately and/or effectively; her motor schemes ensure that she executes bodily actions appropriately and/or effectively, and so on. In this case, an individual's habitus may be described as properly attuned to a given field, i.e. social context. In light of this account, it might be thought that individuals' habitus automatically and mechanically reproduce the objective conditions. This is not how Bourdieu thinks about it. He makes it clear that though it is the product of the objective conditions, individuals' habitus is free to improvise and capable of infinite improvisation within the limits set by its constitution, so to speak (ibid.:55). It provides the basis for "regulated improvisation" (Bourdieu 1993:79). Consequently, the products of habitus are neither characterized by mechanical reproduction nor by coming unpredictably out of the blue. In other words, individuals are neither completely free vis-à-vis the objective conditions, nor completely constrained by them. Instead, Bourdieu maintains, their habitus should be seen as endowing them with a "conditioned and conditional freedom" (Bourdieu 1990a.:55).

3.2.3 Practical Sense

Another key notion in Bourdieu's theory of practice is the concept of practical sense. The purpose of introducing this notion is to capture what happens when an individual acts in light of her habitus within a field to which her habitus is attuned. Bourdieu's proposal is that in such situations, individuals have "a feel for the game in the sense of a practical anticipation of the 'upcoming' future contained in the present" (Bourdieu 1990a:66.). To stay with the metaphor of the game, they have a sense of the immediate future of the game yet without mentally representing this future. In this fashion, practical sense refers to the unrepresented anticipation of what is going to take place in the very near future within a field.

In order to spell out the idea further, it is useful to consider in more detail what happens when an individual draws on her feel for the game in a situation of social interaction.²⁶ To begin with, an individual perceptually takes stock of the situation. According to Bourdieu, perception is characterized by being highly selective: An individual only picks up on those aspects of a situation which are somehow relevant, or of importance, to her (Bourdieu 1990b:79). In a situation of social interaction, this means that an individual, with a feel for the game, registers its pertinent aspects: "by fixing on those with which there is something to be done or those that determine what is to be done in a given situation, or by treating different objects or situations as equivalent, it [i.e. practical sense] distinguishes properties that are pertinent from those that are not" (Bourdieu 1990a:89-90). Moreover, Bourdieu explains, an individual decodes these aspects without noticing it (Bourdieu 1993:10). It all happens in a split second and as a result she perceptually represents the meaning of the situation: Practical sense is "what makes possible to

²⁶ Presumably, individuals do not only draw on their practical sense in a situation of social interaction. Bourdieu does not go much into this issue.

appreciate the meaning of the situation, at a glance, in the heat of the action” (Bourdieu 1990a:104). Thus, it is in virtue of her practical sense, i.e. her unrepresented anticipation of the future, that an individual is able to perceive the meaning of a situation.

But what exactly is it then to perceive the meaning of a situation? To begin with, Bourdieu stresses that it includes seeing how the situation is likely to develop. He provides two very illustrative examples of this idea taken from the world of sport. In the first, he points to the boxer for whom “every stance of the body becomes a sign pregnant with meaning that the opponent has to grasp while it is still incipient, reading in the beginning of a stroke or a sidestep the imminent future, i.e. the blow or the dummy” (Bourdieu 1993:11). In the second example, he describes how the “player who is involved and caught up in the game adjusts not to what he sees but to what he fore-sees, sees in advance in the directly perceived present; he passes the ball not to the spot where his team-mate is but to the spot he will reach – before his opponent – a moment later, anticipating the anticipations of the others and, as when ‘selling a dummy’, seeking to confound them” (Bourdieu 1990a:81).

In addition, Bourdieu indicates that to perceive the meaning of a situation may involve seeing how to act. The social world, he observes, may be seen as containing “potentialities, immediately inscribed in the present, things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say, in relation to a probable ‘upcoming’ future (*un à venir*) which [...] puts itself forward with an urgency and a claim to existence that excludes all deliberation” (ibid.:53). Further elaborating on this idea, he notices that the social world appears as “a world of already realized ends – procedures to follow, paths to take – and of objects endowed with a ‘permanent teleological character’, in Husserl’s phrase, tools or institutions” (ibid.). Though Bourdieu does not put it in these terms, these two passages suggest that perceiving the meaning of a situation should be

taken to include seeing how it is appropriate/inappropriate and/or effective/ineffective to act in a given situation. Moreover, in light of Bourdieu's concern with explaining action, it is reasonable to ascribe to him the view that individuals' seeing the appropriateness and/or effectiveness of an action may cause, or partly cause, them to act correspondingly. The above example of the player might be used to illustrate this proposal. The player should be regarded as perceiving not only where his team mate will shortly be standing, but also how he should act himself given the way the situation is likely to develop. More specifically, he sees that a certain way of acting is both appropriate given the rules and effective towards the goal of winning. The fact that he sees this causes, or partly causes, him to act in that way.

It should be noted that it is only in one passage that Bourdieu takes up the idea that individuals' practical sense sometimes enables them to perceive the appropriateness of actions and in this manner enables them to act appropriately. The proposal does not constitute a well-developed aspect of Bourdieu's ability theory of practice.

3.2.4 Summary

In the discussion of Bourdieu's theory of practice, it was first explained how he holds that it is typically individuals' habitus or schemes, rather than their conceptual representations of rules, that causally generate practices. Then, his view that schemes are acquired as well as durable was laid out. Finally, his notion of practical sense was examined. The basic idea is that individuals who act in a field to which their schemes is attuned, practically or non-representationally anticipate how a situation of social interaction is likely to develop within the immediate future. As a result, they are not only able to perceive what is going to happen. Also, Bourdieu indicates

at one point, they are able to perceive the appropriateness and/or effectiveness of actions and to act accordingly.

3.3 GIDDENS' ABILITY THEORY OF PRACTICE

Like Bourdieu, Giddens is an important contributor to the trend that appeared within various social and human sciences within the 1980s: The focus on social practices. Giddens' theory of practice is identical to, what he calls, his theory of structuration. The theory was first presented in *New Rules of Sociological Method* from 1976, then further worked out in *Central Problems of Social Theory* from 1979, while finally receiving its most systematic and comprehensive exposition in *The Constitution of Society* from 1984. Giddens' interest in his theory of practice subsequently began to fade and he has since then focused on others topics.²⁷ He has been described as "Britain's best known social scientist since Keynes" and as among "the top ten sociologists in the world today" (Bryant & Jary 2000:671).

In the following examination of his theory of practice, I shall rely on *The Constitution of Society* (1984) and its forerunner *Central Problems in Social Theory* (1979). In both these works Giddens makes several references to the writings of both Garfinkel and Bourdieu. More specifically, he points to observations made by both theorists that he considers important and

²⁷ Most notably, Giddens has since then focused on the topic of modernity and, when he was associated with Tony Blair's government, on third-way politics. Examples of his later work include his (1990), his (1991), and his (1994). It may be noticed that prior to his work on practice, he had published a number of studies of important sociological thinkers; see, e.g. his (1971) and his (1973). In general, Giddens is an extremely productive social theorist. For discussions of his theory of structuration or aspects of it, see in particular Bryant & Jary (2000) and Stones (2005), but also, e.g., Archer (1995, chapter 4), Bryant (1992), Bryant & Jary (2001), Cohen (1989), King (2000), Loyal (2003), Tucker, Jr. (1998), and Willmott (1986).

relevant to his own theoretical project, the development of, what I have labeled, an ability approach to practices.²⁸

3.3.1 Practices and Individuals' Ability to Act Appropriately

Giddens' focus is everyday or routine practices which he considers from the perspective of individuals being able to act, nonverbally and verbally, in appropriate ways. His proposal is that individuals are able to act appropriately because they rely on rules. Yet, as he immediately makes clear, he does not mean this to imply that mental representations of rules cause individuals' actions being appropriate. Rather, he uses "rules", quite untraditionally, to refer to nonrepresented generalizable procedures. A procedure is generalizable, he explains, insofar as it applies in a wide range of circumstances. Moreover, it is a procedure because it, in a methodical way, makes it possible to go on, that is, to "choose" appropriate ways of acting (Giddens 1984:20-21). In order not to conflate Giddens' notion of rules with the standard one introduced in chapter 2, I shall henceforth refer to rules in his sense as rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures.

In connection with his discussion of these, Giddens introduces the distinction between discursive/nontacit and nondiscursive/tacit knowledge. Discursive knowledge, he explains, is knowledge which individuals are able to express verbally. Instead, nondiscursive knowledge is knowledge which individuals cannot express discursively yet without this inability being due to

²⁸ For references to Garfinkel, see e.g. his (1979:57, *ibid.*:68, 1984:18, *ibid.*:23). In passing, it may also be noticed that Giddens discusses Garfinkel's theory at length in his *New Rules of Sociological Method* (Giddens 1993:39-49). As to Giddens' comments on Bourdieu's theory, see, e.g. (Giddens 1979:40, 1979:217, 1984:133).

repression in the Freudian sense (ibid.:375). By saying that individuals cannot express their knowledge discursively, Giddens does not mean to imply that individuals may never do so. It is possible indeed to transform nondiscursive into discursive knowledge: The dividing line between the two is subject to change (ibid.:7). Instead, the point is that the transformation of nondiscursive into discursive knowledge cannot be effected on the spot; it requires an effort involving both socialization and learning experiences. Giddens makes this clear when he comments that “the division between the two [i.e. nondiscursive and discursive knowledge] can be altered by many aspects of the agent’s socialization and learning experiences” (ibid.). He does not further elaborate on this proposal. As a result, it is left open why socialization as such should put individuals in a position to articulate their nondiscursive knowledge just as it is unclear what kinds of learning experiences are relevant in order to effect such articulation.

Be that as it may, Giddens puts the distinction between nondiscursive and discursive knowledge to use when making it clear that individuals’ knowledge of rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures is typically non-discursive. Moreover, since they mainly apply these procedures when participating in practices, this means that most of individuals’ knowledge of how to act in a practice context is “only tacitly grasped by actors; they know how to ‘go on’” (ibid.:22-23). Still, and compatible with this point, individuals sometimes have discursive knowledge of how it is appropriate to act. When this is the case, Giddens’ stresses, individuals’ formulations should be regarded as “interpretations of rules” specified as nonrepresented generalizable procedures (ibid.:21). Moreover, he notices, these interpretations of rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures never state the necessary and sufficient conditions for a given nonverbal or verbal action being appropriate. Following Wittgenstein, and stating this

point in relation to concepts, Giddens contends that this is because “there is no real definition to them” (Giddens 1979:68).

Giddens’ notion of rules as nonrepresented generalizable procedures that are typically tacitly known is his alternative to rules in the sense of conceptual representations that individuals are always able to state. As indicated already, the reason why individuals manage to act appropriately is first and foremost because they apply rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures. How further to understand this proposal, viz. that the employment of these procedures enables individuals to act in appropriate ways, is not a question that Giddens goes into.

3.3.2 Some Further Aspects to Practices as Guided by Rules/Nonrepresented Generalizable Procedures

Giddens continues by adding two further specifications as to the functioning of rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures in practices. Rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures, he explains, should be seen as both enabling and constraining. They are enabling in the sense that they allow individuals to participate in social life. An example of this might be that insofar as an individual is aware of how it is appropriate to behave in the class room, she is able to take full advantage of the situation: She can take part in, and learn a great deal from, the lectures and discussions in class. At the same time, rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures are also constraining in that they restrict the options available to an individual: In light of individuals’ rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures, only certain ways of behaving or using a word are regarded as appropriate. To return to the student, her behavior is

constrained in the sense that she cannot just interrupt whenever she feels like voicing her opinion during class, nor can she come and go as she pleases. This feature, Giddens observes in relation to actions, is easy to overlook because individuals are typically very much “at home” with the rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures they draw upon. As a result, they fail to notice how their actions are constrained by them (Giddens 1984:23). They fail to notice, that is, that their nonrepresented generalizable procedures only “suggest” certain actions and uses of words as appropriate to them. Individuals are made to respect such constraints insofar as their ways of acting, non-verbally and verbally, are sanctioned. Such sanctioning may be carried out in the open as when the teacher asks the student to stop talking so much. Or, they may operate more “under cover” as when the teacher starts ignoring the talkative student.

The fact that rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures are both enabling and constraining is a point about the manner in which these are applied by individuals. To this story, Giddens emphasizes, it needs to be added that insofar as individuals apply the rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures for going on, they do at the same time reproduce them and ensure their continued existence. By instantiating the rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures, individuals “keep them alive” or “affirm” that their application result in appropriate ways of acting. Giddens thinks that rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures are typically reproduced: Everyday practices are highly repetitive and routine is “the predominant form of day-to-day social activity” (ibid.:282). Still, Giddens acknowledges that rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures may change. This happens in their instantiation too. Giddens explains and illustrates this point in relation to the development of natural languages (Giddens 1979:114). The change of what is “regarded” as appropriate verbal actions is brought about by the gradual change in the use of an expression. That is, when a sufficient

number of individuals begin to use a certain expression in a manner different from how it was used before, the different manner assumes the status of being the appropriate way to use the expression. At this point, the rule/nonrepresented generalizable procedure relating to the use of the expression may be said to have changed. Giddens summarizes these considerations, viz. that individuals both draw on and reproduce (or sometimes change) the rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures when they participate in practices, by saying that rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures are “both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize” (Giddens 1984:25).

3.3.3 Resources

The notion of rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures is not the only one needed in order to provide an adequate analysis of practices. Also, Giddens claims, the notion of resources must be brought into play. Giddens distinguishes between two kinds of resources: Authorization and allocation. Authorization refers to the “capabilities which generate command over *persons*.” Allocation refers to the “capabilities which generate command over *objects* or other material phenomena” (Giddens 1979:100). Individuals’ command over human and/or material resources enables them to act in certain ways while also restricting the actions within their reach. Further, individuals do not only draw on the resources they have at their disposal, but also reproduce – or change them. In other words, like rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures, resources are both the medium and outcome of practices. Giddens regards this last point, as stated in

connection with both rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures and resources, as a key insight brought out by his theory of practice.²⁹

3.3.4 Practices and Perception

So far the question of the role of perception in practices has not been touched upon. Giddens does not have much to say on this account. Still, what he has to say is interesting. In a brief excursus, he makes it clear that he agrees with Gibson, the originator of the ecological approach to perception, in holding that affordances are perceptible (Giddens 1984:47). The notion of an affordance refers to a possible action, and hence the proposal amounts to the view that it is possible for individuals to perceive, say, that a chair makes sitting possible or that a postbox makes letter mailing possible.

Gibson's account is amenable to extension (as I shall also discuss in the next chapter). It may be seen as paving the way for the suggestion that it is within the reach of individuals to perceive actions not only as possible or impossible, but also as appropriate or inappropriate. Giddens does not consider this idea. Nor does he go into any detailed discussion of Gibson's views. Still, insofar as he indicates that he favors a broad Gibsonian notion of the scope of perception, he opens up for the elaboration of his own account in the direction of holding that individuals are sometimes able to perceive that a situation makes some action appropriate or inappropriate. In fact, a development of his position in this direction could be a way to add some

²⁹ In Giddens' view, the point amounts to a solution to the long-standing debate within the social sciences as to the relationship between structures and agents/individuals. By identifying structures with rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures and resources, Giddens claims that his analysis shows how individuals/agents both draw on, and reproduce (or change), structures. That is, it captures how structures and agents are mutually dependent. In virtue of this feature, Giddens thinks, his theory puts an end to the agent/structure debate.

more content to his idea that rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures enable individuals to act appropriately. As noticed, Giddens does not in any detail spell out how rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures enable individuals to do so. One partial clarification of this issue could be to maintain that the nonrepresented generalizable procedures should sometimes be spelled out as perceptual procedures, enabling individuals to perceive how it is appropriate to act. Consequently, their seeing this might be invoked to explain their ability to act appropriately.

3.3.5 Summary

Giddens' theory of practice has been examined as the third and final example of an ability approach to practices. As pointed out, Giddens considers practices as ways of acting that assessable in terms of their appropriateness. He stresses that individuals' ability to act appropriately is primarily a function of their application of rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures and that individuals' knowledge of these is typically nondiscursive. Moreover, it was noticed, he thinks that when individuals draw on their rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures, they do at the same time reproduce (or change) them. This is also the main point he emphasizes in relation to resources: Like rules/nonrepresented generalizable procedures, resources are both the medium and outcome of practices. Finally, I laid out how Giddens subscribes to a very broad notion of the scope of perception. This being the case, it was suggested that a natural way to elaborate his account of individuals' ability to act appropriately is to hold that this ability sometimes depends on individuals' exercise of their ability to perceive the appropriateness of actions.

3.4 SUMMARY

In the present chapter, Garfinkel's, Bourdieu's, and Giddens' ability theories of practice have been examined. The discussion has exemplified some of the main characteristics of the basic ability approach to practices. At the same time, Garfinkel's, Bourdieu's and Giddens' views of perception have been in focus. In connection with the outline of Garfinkel's theory, it was noticed how his account of individuals' ability to act appropriately is rather undeveloped. To further elaborate this aspect of his theory, his broad view of the scope of perception might easily be specified to include the possibility of individuals seeing how they should act. In fact, in one passage, Garfinkel even seems to be toying with this idea. Turning to Bourdieu, he toys with the idea that individuals are sometimes able to perceive normative states. This means that their perception of these states may be seen as causing their actions being appropriate. Still, he does not pursue this point. Finally, it was noticed that Giddens' subscribes to a broad notion of the scope of perception insofar as he agrees that individuals may perceive possible actions. This being the case, the way is paved for the further development of his claim that individuals' application of nonrepresented generalizable procedures explains their ability to act appropriately. It may be suggested that these procedures should sometimes be spelled out as perceptual procedures enabling individuals to perceive normative states. In this fashion, the analysis of Garfinkel's, Bourdieu's, and Giddens' theories bring out that it is only a natural way to extend the basic ability approach to hold that individuals' ability to act appropriately is sometimes a function of their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states.

This being clarified, I shall now proceed to the task of actually developing and defending this thesis. More specifically, I shall begin by presenting a way of thinking about the ontological

status of normative states that is compatible with their being directly perceptible. This is the aim of the next chapter.

4.0 NORMATIVE STATES AS RESPONSE-DEPENDENT PROPERTIES

In chapter 2, the main claims and arguments associated with an ability approach to practices were outlined. On that basis, the thesis of the present project was presented, viz. that, in situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states. Though generally unexplored, working out this thesis constitutes a natural extension of the basic ability approach to practices. Chapter 3 was devoted to making this point by showing how three influential ability theorists of practice, Garfinkel, Bourdieu, and Giddens, toy with, or invite, a view along these lines. I shall now turn to the task of developing and defending the thesis. It involves the claim that individuals sometimes exercise, and hence possess, the ability directly to perceive normative states. In the present and following two chapters, I shall mainly be concerned with spelling out, and showing the tenability of, this contention. Once it has been established, it will only be a small step, in chapter 6, to demonstrate the correctness of the last part of the thesis too, viz. that, in situations of social interaction, the exercise of this ability directly to perceive normative states sometimes underwrites individuals' ability to act appropriately.

As a first reaction, it may be wondered how to make ontological sense of the idea that individuals sometimes have the ability directly to perceive the appropriateness of actions. The aim of the present chapter is to provide an analysis of normative states as response-dependent properties and to show how this ontological stance is compatible with their being sometimes

directly perceptible. To develop this point, I draw heavily on Gibson's account of affordances understood as the actions that environments make possible. His discussion of how to conceive of affordances, on a realist model, as response-dependent properties paves the way for a parallel suggestion in relation to normative states: The actions made appropriate by environments may be specified as response-dependent properties too. In light of this analysis, I explain how this ontological position may be combined with the view that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible.

The proposal to construe normative states as response-dependent properties is best regarded as a working assumption. Accordingly, I shall not defend it against alternative ontological conceptions but simply show how a plausible analysis is available from this perspective. The stance is not a *sine qua non* for the defense of the claim that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible. The claim may equally well be endorsed by the realist who thinks that normative states exist independently of individuals' responses and by the irrealist who contends that normative states are projected, or added, onto environments. In this sense, the tenability of the contention that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible does not hinge on their construal as response-dependent properties.

To those familiar with Gibson's work, bringing in the notion of affordances should give a sense of where the present project is going. Gibson is not only known for his notion of affordances. Also, he is famous for further arguing that many, if not all, affordances are directly perceptible. Though I shall proceed in a rather different manner, my project is very similar to Gibson's in this respect: On the basis of my characterization of the ontological status of normative states, I shall move on, in chapter 5 and 6, to present an account of perception

according to which individuals sometimes qualify as having the ability directly to perceive normative states.

4.1 ENVIRONMENTS AS MAKING ACTIONS BOTH POSSIBLE AND APPROPRIATE

In his influential book, *The Ecological Approach to Perception*, Gibson advances a lengthy analysis of affordances (Gibson 1979). The basic idea is that environments may be considered from the perspective of what they offer or afford animals, human beings included. It is these offerings of environments that Gibson proposes to label affordances: “[t]he affordances of an environment,” he writes, “are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*” (ibid.:127). Gibson is particularly concerned with one kind of affordances: The behaviors or actions offered or made possible by environments. In the following, I shall concentrate on his account of, what I will call, human action affordances, that is, the actions that environments make possible or impossible relative to human beings. Gibson provides numerous examples of affordances thus circumscribed. For instance, he points out that:

- Water affords “bathing and washing” (ibid.:38).
- A chair affords sitting (ibid.:128).
- Fire “allows the cooking of food substances and the boiling of water in pots” (ibid.:39).
- A postbox“ affords letter-mailing” (ibid.:139).
- The brink of a cliff “affords walking along” (ibid.:137).
- A stairway “affords both descent and ascent” (ibid.:37)
- “A graspable object with a rigid sharp edge affords cutting and scraping (a knife, a hand axe, or a chopper)” (ibid.:40).

As these examples illustrate, Gibson mainly concentrates on the manner in which environments, irrespective of the presence of other individuals, make various actions possible or impossible. He does not consider environments which call for actions that take into account, or involve other individuals. That is, he does not discuss environments as involving individuals who greet each other, attend lectures, pass each other on the sidewalk, crack jokes, party together, have different rights to use objects, and so on. Once these situations of social interaction are examined, it comes into view that environments may not only be viewed in terms of the actions they make *possible* or *impossible*. Also, there is another, equally significant, perspective that individuals may adopt on environments: The latter may be regarded from the perspective of the actions they make *appropriate* or *inappropriate*.

To see the difference, consider the servant who stands next to the queen's throne. The throne is suited to sitting; if the servant so decided she could take a seat. Doing so, however, would be inappropriate: Only the queen is allowed to sit on the throne. Sitting is possible but not permissible relative to the servant. Or, contemplate the happy event of little Leonard throwing a birthday party. On an occasion of this kind, it is appropriate to sing "Happy Birthday." Unfortunately, however, it so happens that all Leonard's guests suffer from a nasty throat infection. As a result they have lost their voices. Thus, even though it is appropriate for them to sing "Happy Birthday," this is not possible.

Here are some more examples of environments, or situations of social interaction, considered from the perspective of the actions they make appropriate or inappropriate:

- Being greeted by a friend makes it appropriate to return the greeting.
- While attending a lecture, it is inappropriate to start talking loudly and interrupting the speaker.

- Approaching someone on the sidewalk makes it appropriate to stay to the right when passing them.
- Being in the company of cheerful friends makes it appropriate to crack a joke.
- An elderly person being unable to find a free bus seat makes it appropriate that someone offers her their seat.
- On a beach with other people, it is inappropriate for adults to strip naked.
- Being presented with a gift makes it appropriate to say “thank you.”
- Having just finished a meal at a friend’s house makes it appropriate to offer to help taking out the plates.
- Meeting a new colleague for the first time makes it inappropriate to kiss the colleague goodbye on the mouth.
- In the supermarket, it is appropriate to stand in line waiting for one’s turn to pay.

In this fashion, Gibson’s invitation to approach environments from an action perspective may be extended to normative states: Environments make actions possible and impossible *and* they make actions appropriate and inappropriate.

4.2 HUMAN ACTION AFFORDANCES AS RESPONSE-DEPENDENT PROPERTIES

Gibson does not confine himself to noticing that environments may be approached in terms of the actions they make possible or impossible. He continues by proposing that human action affordances are actual *properties* of environments. It should be seen as a property of water that it makes bathing and washing possible, a property of chairs that they make sitting possible, a property of postboxes that they make letter-mailing possible, and so on.³⁰

³⁰ For alternative discussions of the notion of affordances from a property perspective, see, e.g. Turvey (1992), Turvey, Shaw, Reed, and Mace (1981), Scarantino (2003), and Wells (2002).

By adopting the view that human action affordances are properties of environments, Gibson rejects an irrealist approach to them. In particular, he makes it clear that he opposes an irrealist projectivist construal of human action affordances to the effect that these are not properties of environments but projected on, or imposed upon, environments by individuals. He stresses that no such projection takes place in perception: “An affordance is not bestowed upon an object,” he writes, in the “act of perceiving it” (Gibson 1979:139). Consequently, he notices in another place, it would also be wrong to regard affordances as “properties of the *experiences of the observer*” (ibid.:137). The dismissal of irrealism does not mean that Gibson, unqualifiedly, embraces a realist position. He comments that affordances imply “the complementarity of the animals and the environment” (ibid.:127). And a little later, he further specifies that an “affordance is equally a fact about the environment and a fact of behavior [...] an affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the behavior” (ibid.:129). Especially the last quote points to the variety of realism that Gibson subscribes to: Human action affordances should be conceived of as environmental properties whose existence is behavior-dependent rather than behavior-independent. Accordingly, human action affordances may usefully be explicated as response-dependent properties.

There are different ways in which to spell out the notion of response-dependent properties.³¹ The basic schema of response-dependence, as I shall call it, states that:

x has property, p , if and only if x tends to elicit responses, R , by individuals, I , in circumstances, C .

³¹ For discussions of the notion of response-dependence, see, e.g. Blackburn (1993), de Clercq (2002), Johnson (1989), LeBar (2005), Lewis (1987), McGinn (1983), McDowell (1998b), McNaughton (1992), Miscevic (1998), Pettit (1998), Smith (1998), Thompson (2006), Wedgwood (1998), and Wiggins (1987).

That is, x has property, p , in virtue of eliciting certain responses, R , by individuals, I , in circumstances, C . By implication, the property, p , should be seen, indirectly, to depend for its existence on the manner in which individuals are constituted, as it may be put: It is because individuals have certain abilities, a certain affective system, a certain sensory apparatus, or the like, that x tends to elicit a certain type of response from them. Notice too that the schema leaves open the nature of the responses, the individuals, and the circumstances. The responses, R , may be variously identified with a behavior or action, a representation, a sentiment, an experience, a belief, a judgment, etc. The individuals, I , may be circumscribed as those, say, who are normal, experts, properly trained, or ideal observers. Finally, the circumstances may be explicated as standard conditions, as ideal conditions, as conditions of paying attention to x , and so on. Depending on how the slots represented by R , I , and C , are filled in, different species of response-dependent properties may be distinguished.

Now, Gibson's human action affordances exemplify response-dependent properties that do not fit the basic schema. As such, they point to another dimension along which response-dependent properties may vary: Different species of these may also be differentiated according to whether they are explicated in terms of the basic schema or some modified version of it. Here is how Gibson's human action affordances may be spelled out as response-dependent properties:

x has the property, p , of affording/making possible an action, a -ing, if and only if x might elicit responses of a -ing from individuals, in their current state, in standard circumstances.³²

In line with Gibson's view that affordances are behavior-dependent properties, the responses, R , are here explicated as behavioral responses or actions. The specification states that in order for x to have the property of making possible some action, it must be the case that x *might* elicit the performance of the action. Putting it this way conveys that the property of making possible a -ing does not depend for its existence on x 's actually tending to elicit a -ing. It suffices, to repeat, that x might elicit a -ing. It is this feature of the characterization in virtue of which it constitutes a modified version of the basic schema. The analysis further qualifies individuals, I , as individuals in their current state. Gibson's discussion suggests this restriction insofar as he makes it clear that an environment should only be seen as making some action possible relative to individuals who may *actually*, and not only *potentially*, perform the action. For instance, an action is not possible relative to individuals who would first need, say, to grow taller or acquire some new skills in order to perform the action. Finally, the circumstances, C , are explicated as standard circumstances. This constraint is implicit in Gibson's account. To illustrate the idea, consider chairs that are hanging upside down. These chairs may not elicit the response of sitting. Still, this is only because the circumstances are not standard. Barring other impediments, individuals may sit on the chairs when they stand on the ground. For this reason chairs should be seen as having the property of making sitting possible.

³² Here and in the following, I shall, for the sake of simplicity, mainly focus on x as having the property of making some action possible. The above schema may also be applied to the case of x having the property of making some action impossible. In that case, it reads: x has the property of making impossible an action, a -ing, if and only if x might not elicit the response of a -ing from individuals, in their current state, in standard circumstances.

For the present purposes, this analysis of human action affordances as response-dependent properties will do. It brings out that the property of making some action, *a*-ing, possible depends for its existence on individuals from whom *x* might elicit the response of *a*-ing, in their current state and in standard circumstances. By implication, human action affordances depend, indirectly, for their existence on individuals being so constituted that they may respond to *x* by *a*-ing.³³ Absent individuals who, in their current state and in standard circumstances, are capable of responding to *x* by *a*-ing, it is simply wrong – and makes no sense – to maintain that *x*, some environment, has the property of making *a*-ing possible.

4.3 NORMATIVE STATES AS RESPONSE-DEPENDENT PROPERTIES

Above Gibson's suggestion to consider environments in terms of the actions they make possible and impossible prompted the observation that environments may also be approached from the perspective of the actions they make appropriate and inappropriate. In a similar move, Gibson's elaboration of human action affordances as response-dependent properties may now serve as the basis for the further analysis of normative states: These too may be spelled out, on a realist model, as response-dependent properties. That is, it should be seen as a response-dependent

³³ In passing, it may be noticed that Gibson considers the issue of individuals' constitution, as I have called it. In this regard, he focuses on individuals' physique and bodily abilities. It is their constitution in these two senses that he mainly stresses as determining whether they are capable of responding to an environment by acting in a given manner.

property of a situation of social interaction that it makes it appropriate to stand in line, appropriate to return a greeting, inappropriate to strip naked, and so on.³⁴

To start off the analysis of normative states as response-dependent properties, the property of making an action appropriate may be inserted into the basic schema of response-dependence. Moreover, following Gibson in his emphasis upon behavioral responses or actions, the responses, R, may be explicated as actions. Thus:

x has the property, *p*, of making appropriate the action of *a*-ing if and only if *x* tends to elicit responses of *a*-ing by individuals, I, in circumstances, C.³⁵

Like above, this analysis should be read as saying that *x* has the property of making *a*-ing appropriate in virtue of *x* tending to elicit *a*-ing by individuals, I, in circumstances, C. As it stands, the characterization is false. It wrongly implies that whenever an environment tends to elicit actions by some individuals in some circumstances, then these actions are appropriate. For instance, it follows from the specification that since small children in Denmark tend to burp when they eat, then burping is appropriate. However, in Denmark, it is inappropriate to burp

³⁴ The analysis of what I am calling normative states should be considered as an instance of analyses of values as response-dependent properties. Various versions of the idea that values are response-dependent properties have been advanced. In this connection, it is often argued that values are analogous to what is considered a clear cut instance of response-dependent properties, namely secondary properties in the form of colors. For discussions of values as response-dependent properties and/or the comparison of values to secondary properties, see, e.g., Johnston (1989), LeBar (2005), Lewis (1989), McGinn (1983:145ff), McDowell (1998b), McNaughton (1992), Smith (1998), Thompson (2006), and Wiggins (1987).

³⁵ Again, I shall here, for the sake of simplicity, focus on the specification of *x* as having the property of making *a*-ing appropriate. Applied to the property of making an action inappropriate, the analysis reads as follows: *x* has the property of making the action of *a*-ing inappropriate if and only if *x* tends not to elicit the response of *a*-ing by individuals, I, in circumstances, C. Also, in the rest of the discussion of normative states as response-dependent properties I shall simplify in this way. It should be pretty straightforward to reformulate all the points I make so that they also apply to the property of making some action inappropriate.

when eating. In order to solve this problem of falseness, as it may be called, there are two ways to go.

The above account is non-circular: The notion of appropriate, or some equivalent notion, does not figure in the explication of what it takes for x to have the property of making appropriate a -ing. One option is to try to keep it that way. Consequently, the problem of falseness must be fixed by qualifying responses of a -ing, individuals, I , or circumstances, C , in such a way that the analysis does not entail that obviously inappropriate actions qualify as appropriate or that actions which are not even assessable in terms of their appropriateness qualify as appropriate. Adopting this strategy, it may be proposed to amend the initial characterization as follows:

x has the property, p , of making appropriate the action of a -ing if and only if x tends to elicit responses of a -ing by trained individuals in standard circumstances.

By circumscribing individuals, I , as trained individuals, this account takes care of the above example of the small burping children of Danish origin: Children do not fall within the category of trained individuals and as such their ways of acting do not have any bearing on whether a situation of social interaction has the property of making an action appropriate. Moreover, the analysis blocks another possible line of objection insofar as it requires that the circumstances must be standard ones. Individuals tend to act in all sorts of inappropriate ways when finding themselves in, say, emergency situations. Consequently, to avoid being false, a specification must prevent these ways of acting from qualifying as appropriate. The present account does so

by insisting that the circumstances must be standard – something they are not in emergency situations.

Unfortunately, though, there are other possible counterexamples that the analysis fails to forestall. For instance, think about psychopaths and other freaks. Often these are individuals who have received training in the ways of acting within their community. Nonetheless, in what may reasonably be considered standard circumstances, some of them tend to engage in the torture of other individuals. The ameliorated account wrongly implies that the torturing of other individuals is appropriate. One way in which to take care of this example is to add that the trained individuals must also be normal in a purely statistical sense. But even this will not do as a final solution to the problem of falseness. In standard circumstances, there are trained, statistically normal individuals who tend to act in inappropriate manners as when they evade paying taxes or drive with too high levels of alcohol in their blood. Or, to mention another type of counterexample, consider a rainy day in Copenhagen. In standard circumstances, this situation tends to elicit responses from trained and statistically normal individuals consisting in their putting up an umbrella. Consequently, according to the specification, a rainy Copenhagen environment has the property of making it appropriate to put up an umbrella. Yet, as a matter of fact, putting up an umbrella when it rains in Copenhagen is neither appropriate nor inappropriate. The amended analysis entails that actions which are not assessable in terms of their appropriateness count as appropriate.

Perhaps there is a way out of these difficulties too. Still, this would not necessarily mean the end of trouble: New counterexamples might show up their face. This being the case, it is unclear whether the specification may be worked into an account that avoids the problem of falseness. Moreover, notice that as an instance of non-circular response-dependent analyses of

values, the characterization is not alone in being haunted by this difficulty.³⁶ It is a standard obstacle that non-circular accounts run into. And, there is no consensus as to whether and how the obstacle may be overcome.³⁷

The examination of the possibility of providing a non-circular analysis of normative states was set off by the recognition that the initial characterization of normative states was clearly false. It states, remember, that *x* has the property, *p*, of making the action of *a*-ing appropriate if and only if *x* tends to elicit responses of *a*-ing from individuals, *I*, in circumstances, *C*. There is also another way to go in the attempt to fix this problem of falseness. It is to give up the ambition of providing a non-circular account. As a result, an alternative elaboration of the initial account comes into view. It involves a modification of the basic schema:

x has the property, *p*, of making appropriate the action of *a*-ing if and only if *x* tends to elicit, and makes appropriate, responses of *a*-ing by individuals, *I*, in circumstances, *C*.

On this analysis, the property of making appropriate *a*-ing does not only depend for its existence on *x* tending to elicit *a*-ing, but also, to borrow John McDowell's phrase, on *x* meriting responses in the form of *a*-ing (McDowell 1998b:143). It is this addition that makes the account a modified version of the basic schema. By its lights, the problem of falseness disappears: The specification

³⁶ Mark Johnston's discussion of David Lewis' account may serve to illustrate this point. Very briefly, Lewis' suggestion is that "[s]omething is a value iff we are disposed, under conditions of the fullest possible imaginative acquaintance, to value it" (Lewis 1989:121). This characterization is false: It has as result that obvious values sometimes disqualify as such (Johnston 1989:151-152). As one example to this effect, Johnston notices that while the release of other people's sufferings is evidently to be valued, imagining their sufferings may end up hardening one's heart to the point where the release is no longer regarded as a value: "[e]ven if one is initially benevolent, complete awareness of the suffering of the mass of sentient beings would be horrifically depressing, and hardness of heart rather than valuing their release might well be the causal upshot" (ibid.:152).

³⁷ Theorists who points to the problem of falseness and are pessimistic as to the prospects of overcoming it include Johnston (1989) and Blackburn (1993). Instead, Lewis (1989) defends a non-circular specification of values, and Thompson (2006) seems to do so too.

cannot possibly have as result that obviously inappropriate actions or actions that are not assessable in terms of their appropriateness qualify as appropriate because in order for x to have the property, p , of making a -ing appropriate, x must also make this response appropriate. This is, of course, a welcome consequence. Still, it may be wondered whether the price paid for getting rid of the problem of falseness is too high: Is a circular response-dependent analysis of normative states illuminating? The answer depends on the purpose of the analysis. If its aim is solely to clarify the ontological status of normative states, then it seems that a circular characterization is up to the task. It spells out that normative states are response-dependent properties insofar as it states that in order for x to have the property, p , of making a -ing appropriate, x must also elicit a -ing from individuals. David Wiggins makes a similar point when discussing how values, as response-dependent properties, both elicit and make appropriate responses specified as sentiments of approbation: “by tracing out such a circle,” he writes, the hope is “to elucidate the concept of value by displaying it in its actual involvement with the sentiments. One would not [...] have sufficiently elucidated what value is *without* that detour” (Wiggins 1987:189).³⁸

In light of these considerations, the circular specification of normative states appears to be, *prima facie*, preferable to the non-circular one. It has the advantage of evading the problem of falseness. Moreover, its circular character is unproblematic in the present context. The purpose of the present discussion is to provide an analysis of the ontological status of normative states and the characterization meets this demand: It clarifies that normative states exist response-dependently. In this way, the circular account constitutes a plausible analysis of the ontological status of normative states. Having made this point, however, it should be added that nothing in the following hinges upon this conclusion. The explanation of how the construal of

³⁸ Other theorists who make it clear that they do not consider a circular specification of response-dependent properties to be a problem include Johnson (1989), McDowell (1998b), Smith (1998), and Wedgwood (1998).

normative states as response-dependent properties is compatible with normative states being sometimes directly perceptible is the same whether the circular or non-circular analysis is adopted. Consequently, going along with the circular account rather than the non-circular one does not have any bearing on the development and defense of the thesis that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible.

In any event, it should be emphasized that the insistence on construing normative states as response-dependent properties amounts to the dismissal of two alternative ontological positions. It comes to a rejection of the irrealist stance that normative states do not exist as properties of environments. From a response-dependence perspective, this position subscribes to a too restrictive view of what exists as parts of environments. Moreover, it means the repudiation of the realist view that normative states exist response-*independently* as properties of environments. Again from a response-dependence point of view, this is to overlook that normative states exist response-dependently and hence that they, indirectly, depend for their existence on individuals being so constituted that they tend to respond to environments with the property of making *a*-ing appropriate by performing *a*-ing.³⁹ Absent individuals thus constituted it is wrong – and simply makes no sense – to maintain that situations of social interaction have the property of making *a*-ing appropriate.

³⁹ For the present purposes, there is no need to go into the issue of characterizing individuals' constitution from the perspective of how it explains that environments with the property of making *a*-ing appropriate tend to elicit *a*-ing from them.

4.4 NORMATIVE STATES AS RESPONSE-DEPENDENT *DIRECTLY* *PERCEPTIBLE* PROPERTIES

Consider again the circular analysis of normative states as response-dependent properties: x has the property, p , of making the action of a -ing appropriate if and only if x tends to elicit, and makes appropriate, responses of a -ing by individuals, I , in circumstances, C . There are two aspects to this characterization of what it takes for an environment to have the property of making a -ing appropriate: A causal and a normative.

The causal component is the claim that x tends to elicit, and hence cause, responses in the form of a -ing from individuals, I , in circumstances, C . It amounts to the requirement that in order for x to have the property of making appropriate a -ing, there must be a causal chain that is initiated by x and culminates in the performance of a -ing. This part of the analysis raises the question of how exactly to spell out the causal process. Merely stating that x tends to elicit a -ing leaves it open which of x 's properties actually trigger the causal process. Likewise, nothing whatsoever is said on the nature and different stages of the causal process.

Turning to the normative component, it consists in the contention that x makes appropriate responses in the form of a -ing by individuals, I , in circumstances, C . It means that in order for x to have the property of making appropriate a -ing, there must be a justificatory relation going from x to the performance of a -ing. This part of the analysis points to the issue of how exactly to explicate the justificatory relation. The account does not state what kinds of properties of x may justify a -ing and how, more generally, to determine whether x merits responses in the form of a -ing.

This clarified, it may be specified that to develop and defend the thesis that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible is to address the questions raised by the causal element

in the characterization of normative states as response-dependent properties. It is to suggest one possible way in which x may elicit responses of a -ing. Perception is a causal process too. Roughly speaking, in perception, an environment initiates a causal process that culminates in a perceptual state, viz. the perception of that environment. Consequently, it is possible to argue that x may sometimes cause, or partly cause, a -ing, via the direct perception of the performance of a -ing as being appropriate: Sometimes, a situation of social interaction with the property of making a -ing appropriate causes the direct perception of a -ing as being appropriate and seeing this, in turn, causes, or partly causes, individuals to perform a -ing.⁴⁰ In this manner, the ontological construal of normative states as response-dependent properties is perfectly compatible with their being directly perceptible.⁴¹

The suggestion that x may sometimes cause a -ing via the perception of a -ing as being appropriate may be accompanied by two different specifications of the last part of this causal chain: It may be held that the perception of an action being appropriate causes the performance of a -ing on its own or in combination with a suitable desire.⁴² For my purposes, there is no need to take a stance on this issue. Moreover, notice that the proposal is only that x may *sometimes* cause, or partly cause, a -ing via the perception of a -ing as being appropriate. Accordingly, the suggestion may be complemented by alternative accounts of ways in which x may elicit a -ing.

⁴⁰ To make the same point explicit in relation to the property of making some action inappropriate, it is possible to argue that x may sometimes cause, or partly cause, individuals to refrain from a -ing via their direct perception of the performance of a -ing as being inappropriate: Sometimes, a situation of social interaction with the property of making a -ing inappropriate causes the direct perception of a -ing as being inappropriate and seeing this, in turn, causes, or partly causes, individuals to refrain from performing a -ing.

⁴¹ Differently from the circular specification, the non-circular account of normative states as response-dependent properties has only a causal component. Since the defense of the thesis that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible is one way in which to further elaborate or spell out the causal element, it follows that a noncircular account is equally suitable as a basis for arguing that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible.

⁴² The question of whether the realization of the appropriateness of an action is itself sufficient to motivate an individual to perform the action or whether this realization must be supplemented by a suitable desire in order to result in action is a large debate within moral philosophy. Here, the two positions are referred to as internalism and externalism respectively. For an introduction and overview of the debate, see, e.g. McNaughton (1992:46ff & chapter 9).

For instance, it may perfectly well be supplemented by an account along the following lines: Sometimes x causes individuals to reflect on how it is appropriate to act. Their reflections lead them to conclude that x has the property of making a -ing appropriate. This realization, in turn, causes, or partly causes, their performance of a -ing. I shall not examine such alternative accounts either. Instead, I shall focus exclusively on showing that the ontological construal of normative states as response-dependent properties is not merely compatible with the thesis that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible. Sometimes individuals do in fact directly perceive that an action is appropriate or inappropriate.

4.5 SUMMARY

The present chapter has drawn heavily on Gibson's discussion of human action affordances. First, I presented Gibson's invitation to approach environments from the perspective of the actions they make possible or impossible. This prompted the observation that environments may also be considered in terms of the actions they make appropriate and inappropriate. Second, I outlined Gibson's further analysis of human action affordances as response-dependent properties. His suggestion to this effect served as basis for the development of a similar ontological construal of normative states: These, too, may plausibly be cashed out as response-dependent properties. Finally, I explained how the construal of normative states as response-dependent properties is congruent with, and fits in with, the thesis that they are sometimes directly perceptible. On the basis of this characterization of the ontological status of normative

states, I shall now move on to the task of showing that, in situations of social interaction, normative states *are* sometimes directly perceptible.

5.0 THE ABILITY DIRECTLY TO PERCEIVE SOMETHING TO BE THE CASE

In the last chapter, normative states were explicated as response-dependent properties. Moreover, it was shown how an ontological construal along these lines may be combined with the thesis that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible. The aim of the present chapter is to present an account of perception that is compatible with the assumption that everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe, are perceptible.

Further examples of perceptible everyday phenomena include postboxes, policemen, persons being old, and persons being in the midst of writing something. The assumption that these phenomena are within the scope of perception is in line with the common sense view on the matter. The view is reflected in everyday language use. For instance, individuals say things like: “I see the red light of the setting sun filtering through the black and thickly clustered branches of the elms; I see the dappled deer grazing in groups on the vivid green grass” (P.F. Strawson 2002:93).⁴³ That is, they report the seeing of everyday phenomena such as clustered branches, elms, and deer. The view that these phenomena are within the scope of perception is typically taken over by social scientists. Ability theorists of practice are no exception to this trend. They, too, tend to take it that everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe, are perceptible. This being the case, an assumption along these lines constitutes a suitable

⁴³ In this example, “seeing” is used in a literal rather than metaphorical sense. Examples of the use of “seeing” in a metaphorical sense are “do you see the point?” or “see, the conclusion does not follow from the premises!”

starting point for an account of perception that is meant to form part of an elaboration of ability approaches to practice.

The account I shall present is inspired by Brandom's conception of perception. I shall focus on the case of visual perception.⁴⁴ Moreover, I shall take off from the observation made toward the end of the last chapter that perception is a causal process: In perception, an environment causes the initiation of a process that culminates in a perceptual state, viz. the perception of the environment. Accordingly, the discussion falls in two parts. First, I consider perception as a state. I propose to identify perceptual states with true beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of one's eyes is a certain way. Then, I examine perception as a process. I stress that the process does not involve any inferential activity among conceptual representations. And I point out that this is compatible with the process being sometimes cognitively penetrable by background beliefs. Taken as a whole, I refer to this specification as the account of direct perception. It states, I suggest, the necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of direct perception. On its basis, I end by providing a characterization of the ability directly to perceive something to be the case.

In light of this discussion, it will be possible to take on the task, in chapter 6, of showing that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible. More specifically, I shall argue there that if it is granted that everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe, are directly perceptible then, in light of the account of direct perception, it follows that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible too: The conditions according to which everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe, qualify as directly perceptible are sometimes met by

⁴⁴ This is in line with most discussions of perception. I believe that many of the claims I shall make about visual perception carry over to auditory, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory perception. However, I shall not try to argue this point here. Since I am only dealing with visual perception, I shall simply refer to this as perception.

normative states as well. In this fashion, the account put forward in the present chapter constitutes an important step in the direction of showing that individuals sometimes have the ability directly to perceive normative states.

5.1 PERCEPTUAL STATES: CORRECT REPRESENTATIONAL STATES

A good place to begin the characterization of perceptual states is by noticing that in perception, individuals correctly represent the environment in front of their eyes as being a certain way. For instance, when an individual sees a tomato, she correctly represents the environment in front of her eyes as being a certain way, namely as including a tomato. Likewise, when an individual sees somebody sweeping, she correctly represents the environment as being a certain way, namely as including somebody sweeping. Insofar as individuals wrongly represent the environment in front of their eyes as being a certain way, they do not perceive what is there in front of their eyes.

5.2 PERCEPTUAL STATES: CONCEPTUAL REPRESENTATIONAL CONTENT

The point that perceptual states have representational content brings up the issue of the nature of this content: Is it conceptual or nonconceptual? The current debate on the topic originates with Evans' work, "The Varieties of Reference," from 1982. In the book, Evans defends, amongst other things, the idea that perception involves representational states with nonconceptual content.

Since its publication, the debate has developed in several directions.⁴⁵ It is one of its strands that addresses the question of whether the representational content of perceptual states is conceptual or nonconceptual.^{46 & 47}

In connection with this discussion, it is possible to distinguish between three positions. On the one side, there is the conceptualist position which states that the representational content of perceptual states is wholly conceptual. On the other side, there are the two nonconceptualist positions. According to the weak version, the representational content of perceptual states may be partly nonconceptual. Instead, the strong version has it that the representational content of perceptual states may be wholly nonconceptual.

In the following, I shall begin by specifying when representational states, including perceptual ones, should be seen as having conceptual content. I shall suggest that they do so if they meet the reason-based criterion of conceptual content. In light of this criterion, I shall then present three considerations in support of the conceptualist stance. First, I shall point out how the criterion has as result that there are a host of situations in which individuals' perceptual states obviously qualify as conceptual. Then I shall examine two important arguments against the conceptualist position. One is the argument from fineness of grain. It states that the

⁴⁵ For a brief overview of the debate, see, e.g. Bermudez (2003b) and Siegel (2005). Important defenses of some notion of nonconceptual content have been advanced by Bermudez, Brewer (after he changed his mind), Cussins, Crane, Dretske, Heck, Hurley, Kelly, Martin, Peacocke, Stalnaker, and Tye. See, e.g., Bermudez (2003a), Brewer (2006), Crane (1992, 2003), Cussins (2003), Dretske (1997), Heck (2000), Hurley (1998), Kelly (2001, 2003), Martin (2003), Peacocke (1992, 1998, 2001a, 2001b), Stalnaker (2003) and Tye (2006). The conceptualist position has most notably been propounded by McDowell and, following him, Brewer (before he changed his mind), but see also Hamlyn. See, e.g., McDowell (1998a, 2000, 2008), Brewer (2003, 2005), and Hamlyn (2003). It should be noticed that McDowell's definition of conceptualism has recently changed, as testified by his (2008).

⁴⁶ Within the debate, this question is often phrased as one concerning whether the representational content of perceptual *experiences* is conceptual or nonconceptual. Within philosophy, the notion of experience is used in a number of senses. Moreover, it is a matter of dispute whether to posit perceptual experiences at all. To avoid getting entangled in these discussions, I shall talk about perceptual states instead. In section 5.3., I shall return to the notion of perceptual experiences.

⁴⁷ Another important strand in the debate concerns the question of whether the states that are part of the process that culminates in a perceptual state should be regarded as nonconceptual representational states. For discussions of this issue, see, e.g., Bermudez (2003a), Hamlyn (2003), McDowell (1998e), and Stalnaker (2003).

representational content of perceptual states is often partly nonconceptual because individuals lack concepts that match what they perceive. The other is the argument from lack of focus. It asserts that the representational content of perceptual states is often partly or even wholly nonconceptual since individuals' concepts frequently fail to be operative in perception. I shall show that, in light of the reason-based criterion of conceptual content, both arguments may be rejected. These three considerations do not conclusively establish the conceptualist position. This would require the rebuttal of all possible arguments in favor of both the weak and the strong form of nonconceptualism. However, the points may reasonably be taken to show that perceptual states are significantly conceptual: Very often at least, perceptual states have a representational content that is, to an important degree at least, conceptual. Reaching this conclusion suffices for my purposes. It is enough to justify a focus on perceptual states in terms of their conceptual representational content. This being the case, I shall offer an account of perception that concentrates on perceptual states as these have a representational content that is conceptual.

5.2.1 Perceptual States as Conceptually Contentful

The extent to which the representational content of perceptual states is conceptual is largely dependent on what it takes for representational content to qualify as conceptual. I shall approach this issue by first making some general remarks about concept possession or, as it may also be put, about the ability to apply concepts.

Conceptual abilities are often constituted by several abilities: An individual must possess a number of distinct abilities in order to master a given concept. The exact abilities may vary depending on the kind of concept in question. Still, according to Sellars, there is one ability that

is constitutive – and distinctive – of the mastering of all concepts, namely the ability to draw inferences. Whenever individuals’ concepts are operative, they have the ability to let what they represent serve as, and be sustained by, reasons (see Sellars 1991a:169).⁴⁸ Or, as Brandom formulates it, they have the ability to let it “play the role both of premise and of conclusion in *inferences*” (Brandom 2002a:351 – italics in original).

Following Brandom, I shall take it that in order for an individual’s representational state to qualify as conceptually contentful, it is not only necessary but also sufficient that she has the ability to let what she represents serve as and be sustained by reasons (ibid.:352). Since conceptual abilities are typically constituted by other abilities as well and since fully developed concepts presuppose the possession of these abilities too, this means that representational states should be seen as composed of concepts even if these concepts are not fully developed. To adopt this stance is to put to the very fore Sellars’ point that the realm of the conceptual is co-extensive with the “space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify” (Sellars 1991a:169). I shall refer to the view that inferential abilities alone have to be in place in order for an individual’s representational state to qualify as conceptually contentful as the reason-based criterion of conceptual content.

Turning now to perceptual representational states, the points just made apply to them too. The representational content of an individual’s perceptual state qualifies as conceptual insofar as she has the ability to let what she perceptually represents serve as and be sustained by reasons. The possession of this inferential ability is a precondition for having perceptual states with conceptual representational content.

⁴⁸ As to this interpretation of Sellars, I am following Brandom (2002a & 1997), but see also McDowell (1998f).

5.2.2 Obvious Instances of Perceptual States with Conceptual Content

Consider a grown-up individual who is looking at a tomato in front of her. Typically, she has the ability to let her representation of the tomato serve as and be sustained by reasons. She has the ability to reason that if it is a tomato then it is round, then it is edible, then it is not an apple, and so on. Likewise, when she perceives something red, something round, postboxes, tomatoes being ripe, policemen, persons being old, persons being in the midst of writing something, and the like, she has this inferential ability relative to what she represents. Consequently, on the reason-based criterion, individuals should be seen as conceptually representing objects, events, and properties of this familiar and everyday sort. This observation is part of the reason for holding that perceptual states are significantly conceptual. As noticed, the contention is also supported by the fact that two important arguments against conceptualism may be dismissed.

5.2.3 The Argument from Fineness of Grain and McDowell's Reply

The first argument to be considered is the argument from fineness of grain. As also noticed by Jeff Speaks, it is “the central argument in recent discussions of nonconceptual content” (Speaks 2005:379). The argument aims to show that there are aspects of the world that individuals represent nonconceptually. More specifically, it is stated – and exemplified – that individuals are capable of making discriminations that are not matched by their concepts. That is, their conceptual representations of something as red, as ripe or as a tomato, say, does not exhaust what they see. Their perceptual states have a fineness of grain that is not captured by these more coarse grained concepts. Here is how Richard Heck presents the argument:

Before me now, for example, are arranged various objects with various shapes and colors, of which, it might seem, I have no concept. My desk exhibits a whole host of shades of brown, for which I have no names. The speakers to the sides of my computer are not quite flat, but have curved faces; I could not begin to describe their shape in anything like adequate terms [...] my experience of these things represents them far more precisely than that, far more distinctively, it would seem, than any characterization I could hope to formulate, for myself or for others, in terms of the concepts I presently possess. The problem is not lack of time, but lack of descriptive resources, that is, lack of the appropriate concepts. (Heck 2000:489-490)

In this fashion, the argument aims to establish the weak position that the representational content of perceptual states is often partly nonconceptual. Not surprisingly, it has not gone unchallenged. In *Mind and World*, McDowell offers what has become the standard reply to the argument from fineness of grain (McDowell 2000:56ff & 170ff).

Focusing on the case of color, McDowell readily admits that individuals' ability to discriminate different colors typically goes beyond their stock of general color concepts such as red, green and blue. An individual may be perfectly capable of discriminating the color of scarlet, yet lack the corresponding general color concept. Still, McDowell contends, it does not follow from here that the individual's seeing of scarlet is not conceptual. This would be to overlook the existence of demonstrative concepts. These are operative in perception whenever individuals discriminate colors for which they do not have a general color concept (ibid.:56-57).

The individual who discriminates the color of scarlet should be seen as deploying a demonstrative that may be expressed by “that shade”.⁴⁹

But why exactly is it that “that shade” expresses a concept? McDowell is careful to provide an answer to this question. He points out that a criterion of a use of “that shade” being the exercise of a conceptual ability is that it involves a recognitional capacity (ibid.:172). When an individual applies “that shade” the first time she sees something scarlet, this incidence must mark the institution of a recognitional capacity that she may exercise on some other occasion. For instance, she must be able to recognize another instance of the shade or be able to think back on the shade (ibid.:58). Of course, an individual may never have the chance to exercise her recognitional ability one reason being that recognitional abilities may be extremely short-lived. Nonetheless, the recognitional ability must be in place for the demonstrative to count as the expression of a concept. This specified, McDowell makes it clear that whenever individuals discriminate a color in relation to which they lack a general color concept, they actualize a demonstrative concept: The establishment of a recognitional ability always accompanies the discrimination of the color. The argument from fineness of grain may be rejected.

5.2.4 The Debate Continued: Kelly and Brewer on the Argument from Fineness of Grain

McDowell’s proposal has generated a lot of debate. Here I shall consider one important objection as it has been advanced by Sean Kelly (Kelly 2001).⁵⁰

⁴⁹ In response to Peacocke (1998), McDowell modifies, in his (1998a), his proposal as to the demonstrative being employed. He suggests that rather than “that shade,” the demonstrative being used is “...is colored thus” (ibid.:415). For further discussion of the exact shape of the demonstrative, see also Brewer (2005) and Peacocke (2001a, 2001b). It is not an issue I shall go into here.

Kelly begins by acknowledging that the possession of a demonstrative concept involves a recognitional ability. He formulates this point, though, in terms of his condition of re-identification:

in order to possess a demonstrative concept for x, a subject must be able consistently to re-identify a given object or property as falling under the concept if it does.

(ibid.:403 – italics in original)⁵¹

His next move is to argue that individuals may well fail to meet the condition of re-identification. He offers the following experiment: An individual is shown two chips of a different shade of green. Since the two shades look rather similar, it is first ensured that the individual is consistently able to tell them apart. Then, immediately after this exercise, the individual is presented with only one of the chips ten times in succession. Each time, she is asked whether she is being shown the chip that was to the left in the first exercise. In reply, she says “yes” half of the times, “no” the other half of the times. In other words, she is wrong five out of ten times. This scenario, Kelly contends, is not only conceivable, but also highly likely. It shows that individuals may be perfectly able to discriminate colors in relation to which they are unable to meet the criterion of re-identification: Individuals’ discrimination of a shade is not always accompanied by the institution of a recognitional capacity. Accordingly, McDowell is not right when he claims that the demonstrative “that shade” always qualifies as expressing a concept.

⁵⁰ Other important critical discussions of McDowell’s proposal include Heck (2000), Kelly (2003), Peacocke (1998, 2001a, 2001b), and Tye (2006). Less elaborate versions of Kelly’s objection, to be considered below, are also advanced by Peacocke (2001b:251) and Tye (2006:520).

⁵¹ Kelly takes this condition to be another way of bringing out McDowell’s emphasis upon recognition. It may be noticed that Kelly explicitly motivates his criterion differently than McDowell motivates the idea of recognitional abilities.

Brewer has presented two responses to Kelly's argument (Brewer 2005). In his first reply, he makes the case that the condition of re-identification should be rejected in favor of an alternative criterion of concept possession. To motivate the adoption of this alternative criterion, Brewer considers the case of demonstrative concepts of particulars. Any particular, he observes, may have a qualitatively identical twin. This means that an individual may think she is re-identifying a given particular while being in fact confronted with its twin. There is an ever-present possibility of not meeting the criterion of re-identification. Nonetheless, demonstrative reference is not impossible. Consequently, Brewer submits, it cannot be necessary to meet the condition of re-identification in order to possess demonstrative concepts of particulars. The way is paved for subscribing to an alternative criterion of concept possession in relation to these concepts. In light of these considerations, Brewer proposes that this alternative criterion is also fitting when it comes to demonstrative color concepts: In their case, too, it is not necessary to meet the condition of re-identification. Adapted to demonstrative color concepts, the substitute criterion requires that an individual must possess two abilities in order to master concepts of this type. These are:

first, to keep track of the same shade over various viewing conditions – such as the gradual brightening/dimming of light, the movement of shadows across the relevant colored object, and so on – during a single extended period of observation; second, to make sense at least of the possibility, under certain specific conditions, that things encountered in the future, after a break in experience, are genuinely identical in shade with the initial sample. (ibid.: 225-226)

Insofar as this criterion is substituted for the condition of re-identification, Kelly's experiment no longer establishes that perceptual states may have nonconceptual representational content. The

reason is simply that the experiment does not show that Brewer's alternative criterion cannot be met. In fact, Brewer makes it clear, individuals are always able to meet his criterion and hence concepts are always operative in color perception.

But is Brewer really right to hold that individuals are always able to meet his alternative criterion? Here is a new thought experiment: An individual is asked to watch a computer screen which may display different shades of green, though only one at a time. Moreover, there is a lamp behind her that projects light on the screen. The light may be turned up and down yet she is not allowed to turn around and check whether this is done. The light is now changed ten times. Each time, the individual is first asked whether she noticed a difference and if so, whether it was the shade displayed on the screen that was altered or the light. I think it is perfectly conceivable, and even likely, that five out of ten times, she will wrongly state that it was the shade on the screen that changed. This being the case, the individual fails to meet Brewer's requirement that an individual must be able to keep track of the same shade in different lightning conditions: Even though it is only the light that is brightened or brimmed, she is wrong half of the times when thinking that she is being presented with a different shade.⁵² As a result, replacing Kelly's condition with Brewer's criterion does not ensure that a demonstrative color concept is in play when an individual sees a shade for which she lacks a general color concept.

As already indicated, there is also another way in which Brewer tries to rebut Kelly's argument. Here, Brewer does not dispute the condition of re-identification. Instead, he questions the conclusion Kelly draws from his experiment. More specifically, Brewer suggests that when the individual is presented with the two color chips in the first part of the experiment, she applies two relational demonstrative concepts of the form "colored *thus-in-relation-to-that*" (ibid.:226).

⁵² It is not clear on what grounds Brewer thinks different shades may be distinguished. Fortunately, in order to make the above point, it is not necessary to get clear on this matter.

For this reason, it is not surprising that she has difficulties re-identifying each shade separately: She does not have a concept of each shade on its own but only, to repeat, concepts of each of the two shades in relation to the other. If the individual were allowed to re-identify one shade in the presence of the other, Brewer continues, she would be perfectly able to meet the criterion of re-identification: An individual “will be able consistently to re-identify both shades in relation to each other for some time at least after the initial encounter” (ibid.). In this fashion, Kelly is wrong to think that the experiment shows that individuals are sometimes unable to meet the condition of re-identification.

There is no doubt that Brewer is onto something. It is considerably easier to re-identify a shade of color in a relational context, as it may be put. Nonetheless, I shall argue, even if an individual sees each chip as colored thus-in-relation-to-that, she may still fail to meet the condition of re-identification. To establish this point, it may seem that it will simply do to modify Kelly’s experiment so that it applies to perceptual states said to be constituted by relational demonstrative concepts. In anticipation of an objection along the lines of Brewer’s, Kelly himself toys with an idea of this sort (Kelly 2001:416). Here is how the modified experiment would go: An individual is shown, not two shades, but two pairs of shades. First, it is ensured that she is able to distinguish both the shades composing each pair and the two pairs of shades. Then she is presented with one of the pairs of shades ten times in succession. Each time she is asked whether she is seeing the pair that was displayed to the left during the first presentation of the shades. Once more, it is not only conceivable, but also likely, it may be argued, that she answers “yes” five times, and “no” the other five times. As such, she fails to meet the condition of re-identification.

As Kelly also hints, however, a response of this kind won't do (ibid.). The reason is that just as Kelly's experiment may be repeated in a slightly modified form then so may Brewer's answer. That is, it may be maintained that the individual in the new experiment does not only represent one color in a pair in relation to the other color in that pair. Also, she represents each pair of colors in relation to the other: She actualizes four relational demonstrative concepts of the form "colored thus-in-relation-to-these." As a result, the individual has a difficult time identifying a single pair of shades on its own. She would be perfectly able consistently to meet the condition of re-identification, at least for some time after the initial encounter, if she was asked to re-identify both pairs of shades in relation to each other. The possibility of an answer along these lines brings out that a different kind of experiment must be devised to show that an individual may have difficulties meeting the condition of re-identification even when she is said to be equipped with relational demonstrative concepts.

Inspired by Brewer's own discussion, the following experiment may be proposed: An individual is shown twenty cards. Each card is a different shade of green. To begin with, it is made certain that the individual is able to discriminate all the shades of green. Also, she is invited to point to her favorite shade. Then all the cards are picked up and immediately again spread out in front of her. She is now asked to re-identify her favorite color. The process of showing her all the cards and asking her to single out her favorite shade is repeated ten times in a row. Again, it is conceivable, and even likely, that she will be wrong five out of ten times. The individual fails to meet the condition of re-identification even though she is not prevented from identifying her favorite color in relation to the other colors. Thus, the appeal to demonstrative relational concepts does not ensure that the condition of re-identification may always be met. Brewer's second objection to Kelly's argument fails too.

The upshot of these considerations is that Kelly's argument still stands. Brewer does not succeed in showing that Kelly is wrong to hold that sometimes when individuals discriminate a shade for which they lack a general color concept, no demonstrative concept is actualized. I shall now point to another way in which to reject Kelly's argument.

5.2.5 An Alternative Approach to Kelly's Argument

Kelly's argument may be summarized as follows: In order to possess a demonstrative concept, individuals must be able to meet the condition of re-identification. Individuals are sometimes unable to meet the condition of re-identification when they see a shade of color for which they lack a general color concept. Thus, no demonstrative concept is operative in their perception of a shade in these situations: Their representation of it is not conceptually contentful. In his first response, Brewer disputes the first premise that in order to possess a demonstrative concept individuals must meet the condition of re-identification. His second reply is an attempt to deny the second premise that individuals are sometimes unable to meet the condition of re-identification. I shall explore a third strategy. Instead of challenging the premises, I shall show that the conclusion Kelly draws from these premises does not follow. More specifically, this is so insofar as the reason-based criterion of conceptual content is endorsed. In light of this criterion, it is reasonable to hold, demonstrative concepts are always in play when individuals discriminate a shade for which they lack a general color concept.

Following the reason-based criterion of conceptual content, all it takes for the representational content of an individual's perceptual state to qualify as involving concepts is that she has the ability to let what she represents serve as and be sustained by reasons. Since the

mastery of a concept may require an individual to possess other abilities than this inferential ability, this means that it is possible to subscribe to the reason-based criterion while granting that further criteria must be in place in order to possess a fully developed concept. Accordingly, the adoption of the reason-based criterion is also compatible with granting Kelly the first premise in his argument if specified as the view that individuals do not possess a *fully developed* demonstrative concept unless they are able to meet the condition of re-identification. Moving on to the second premise, it may also be acknowledged, following Kelly, that individuals are sometimes unable to meet the condition of re-identification. Still, and this is the important point, in light of the reason-based criterion, these two premises do not entail that when an individual discriminates a shade for which she lacks a general color concept then no demonstrative concept is in play. The reason is that, given the criterion, whether a demonstrative concept is operative does not hinge on whether an individual is able to meet the condition of re-identification. All that matters is whether the individual is able to meet the reason-based criterion.

The point that the conclusion in Kelly's argument does not follow from the premises is still compatible with the conclusion being true. For all that has been said, it may still be the case that when an individual discriminates a shade for which she lacks a general color concept, her representation lacks conceptual content. It needs to be asked whether, in situations of this kind, the content does indeed qualify as conceptual according to the reason-based criterion. I think that if an individual is an able concept-user, then she does have the ability to let her representation of a shade of green, say, for which she lacks a general color concept serve as and be sustained by reasons. She has the ability to reason that the shade is a color, that its being that shade is incompatible with its being olive green, with its being red, and so on. Thus, Kelly's conclusion is false. When an individual sees a shade for which she lacks a general color concept, a

demonstrative concept is operative. By the lights of the reason-based criterion of conceptual content, her representation of the shade is conceptually contentful.

In this fashion, Kelly's argument and, by implication, the argument from fineness grain may be dismissed. The fact that individuals are capable of making a host of perceptual discriminations does not mean that their representations to this effect lack conceptual content. This is another part of the reason for holding that perceptual states are significantly conceptual.

5.2.6 The Argument from Lack of Focus

The second argument against conceptualism to be considered is the argument from lack of focus. Differently from the argument from fineness of grain, it is not a main argument in recent debates on whether perceptual states have nonconceptual representational content. Still, it is important to reject it. It states that in the context of everyday practices, the representational content of perceptual states is often nonconceptual. If this is correct, it does not only cast doubt on the contention that the representational content of individuals' perceptual states is significantly conceptual. Also, it means that for my purposes, it would be misguided to focus on perception as conceptually contentful. Given the argument, an account along these lines would not cover perception as it takes place in the context of everyday practices. And this is exactly my focus. In the following, I shall examine the argument from lack of focus as it has been advanced by Charles Taylor (2002). I shall conclude that it is not convincing.

The starting point of Taylor's argument is the observation that just as individuals may focus on what they see, they may also fail to do so. That is, they may be conscious of what they see, or they may be nonconscious of it in which case they do not actively notice what they see

even though they might as well effortlessly have done so. As an illustration of the latter, Taylor offers the following example: “As I navigate my way along the path up the hill, my mind totally absorbed anticipating the difficult conversation I’m going to have at my destination, I treat the different features of the terrain as obstacles, supports, openings, invitations to tread more warily, run freely, etc. Even when I am not thinking of them these things have those relevances for me; I know my way among them” (ibid.:111). In other words, Taylor perceives, but does not pay attention to, the obstacles, supports, etc. on the way to his destination.

In light of the distinction between focused/conscious and nonfocused/nonconscious perception, Taylor proposes that when an individual focuses on what she sees, her perceptual representation of it is conceptually contentful. Instead, when she does not pay attention to what she sees, she represents it nonconceptually. Insofar as an individual may fail to focus on anything she sees, the representational content of her perceptual state may be wholly nonconceptual. Accordingly, Taylor should be seen as defending the strong nonconceptualist position.

It is not clear that Taylor provides any reason in support of his claim that the distinction between conscious and nonconscious perception maps onto the distinction between what is conceptually and nonconceptually represented in perception. If he does, it is tied in with his view of language. He states that when concepts are not operative, “language isn’t playing any direct role” (ibid.:111). Conversely, when concepts are in play, language plays a direct role. More precisely, he seems to take this to mean that the application of a concept is identical with the employment of a word: To conceptualize and to describe amount to one and the same thing. To these points, Taylor adds that it is through the application of a word to something that an individual is able to focus on it. This may be understood as saying that to apply a word/concept to something that is seen always and only goes together with focusing on that something. From

these considerations it follows that what is consciously perceived is conceptualized, whereas what is nonconsciously perceived is not conceptualized. It is only insofar as Taylor's view on language is specified as suggested that he may be seen as motivating his proposal that there is a mapping relation between conscious and nonconscious perception, on the one hand, and what is conceptually and nonconceptually represented, on the other.

Be that as it may, the last step in Taylor's argument is his claim that when individuals carry out their everyday practices, they typically fail to focus both on their surroundings (or aspects thereof) and on the tasks they carry out. Taylor describes the carrying out of everyday practices in this unfocused manner as coping. He emphasizes that individuals are constantly coping and that this is how it must be. It allows individuals to concentrate on other things while still carrying out their everyday activities (ibid.:112). In light of these reflections, the following picture emerges: Individuals typically cope when participating in everyday practices and as such they perceive, but do not consciously notice, their surroundings (or aspects thereof). Consequently, in the context of everyday practices, the representational content of their perceptual states is wholly, or at least partly, nonconceptual.

In the assessment of Taylor's argument, I shall take up two issues. The first is whether he is right to claim that individuals who engage in everyday practices tend to perceive their surroundings even though they do not pay attention to these. Recent experiments on inattention blindness seem relevant when pondering this question. Consider the following famous experiment: Individuals were asked to watch a videotaped basketball game while keeping track of how many times one of the teams passes the ball. During the game, a person dressed as a gorilla walks across the scene. Surprisingly, approximately half of the time, individuals fail to

notice the gorilla (Simons & Chabris 1999:1068)!⁵³ This as well as other experiments suggest that it is only sometimes that individuals perceive that which they do not focus on. Accordingly, Taylor may be accused of exaggerating the extent to which nonconscious perception occurs.

To draw this conclusion, however, would be too quick. The Gorilla experiment shows that individuals often fail to perceive something, i.e. the gorilla, that is of no significance relative to the task they are performing, viz. that of keeping track of the passes made by one of the teams. Accordingly, the experiment is also compatible with individuals not focusing on, but still being perceptually aware of, their surroundings insofar as these surroundings are somehow relevant to the task they are carrying out. It may be suggested that it is situations of this kind Taylor has in mind when holding that individuals typically perceive (aspects of) their surroundings without being conscious of these. In the context of everyday practices, they should be taken to see, but not pay attention to, those aspects of their surroundings that are somehow pertinent to the practice they are engaged in. Taylor's example of his walk illustrates this point. Here he nonconsciously perceives what is relevant to his getting safe to his destination, viz. the obstacles on the paths, invitations to tread more wearily, and so on. Thus, experiments on inattentional blindness do not undermine Taylor's claim when specified as the view that individuals typically see, but do not pay attention to, those aspects of their surroundings that are of significance relative to the everyday practices they carry out. Taylor may be granted this point.

The second issue to be discussed concerns his key point that the distinction between conscious and nonconscious perception maps onto the distinction between what is conceptually and nonconceptually represented in perception. To begin with, it may be asked how exactly to

⁵³ Noë, too, discusses this experiment in his (2004:52). For a discussion of different ways in which to interpret the phenomenon of inattentional blindness as well as the related phenomenon of change blindness, see Clark (2002:187ff.).

spell out this proposal. It is possible to focus more or less on something: Paying attention to what one sees comes in degrees. Given the mapping relation, this suggests that conceptualization should be seen as coming in degrees too: There are different extents to which an individual's concept of something may be operative in her perception. But is that really the case? Consider an individual whose concept of television is said, to some degree only, to be operative in her seeing of the television: She is said only to some extent to see her television as a television. This cannot mean that she only views her television as something black and box-formed because in that case it seems more correct to say that this is exactly what she sees: She sees the television as black and box-formed rather than as a television. Nor can it mean that the individual only perceives the television in gross outline, being unaware of its details such as its color, size, and the dust on top of it. Here, it seems more correct to maintain that she does not conceptualize any of its details while nonetheless seeing the television as a television. These considerations bring out that it is hard to make sense of the idea that conceptualization comes in degrees. Consequently, the mapping relation does not make much sense either insofar as it relies on this idea.

Taylor does not himself comment on the issue. On his behalf, however, it is possible to point to another way of understanding the mapping relation. It may be suggested that above a certain threshold of focusing, what is perceived is conceptually represented. Instead, below this threshold, it is nonconceptually represented. Once a certain point is reached, the conceptual representation is replaced by a nonconceptual one and vice versa. Clearly, some further specification of this idea would be welcome. For instance, it may be wondered how little an individual needs to pay attention to what she sees in order for the change to occur. Also, it may be speculated how quickly the change forth and back between a conceptual and a nonconceptual

representation takes place. Still, in the absence of answers to these queries, the suggestion is not untenable.

This clarified, it may next be asked whether Taylor's possible reason for holding that there is this mapping relation is convincing. Part of the reason is the claim that to conceptualize and to describe amount to one and the same thing. Of course, there are other ways to think about the relation between concepts and words, but let that be. For the present purposes, it suffices to point to the result of joining this claim with the view that the application of a word/concept to something seen, always and only, goes together with being conscious of that something. Their combination seems to imply that when an individual focuses on what she sees, she silently conceptualizes/describes it to herself. To focus on something as a tomato, say, is silently to apply the word "tomato" to it. This consequence is unacceptable. It is perfectly possible to pay attention to something without somehow silently describing it to oneself. For instance, when an individual watches her small son on the playground, being ready to run over to him in case he is about to fall and hurt himself, she does not engage in some sort of silent descriptive activity. Accordingly, Taylor's possible reason is better disregarded. It does not lend support to the idea that there is a mapping relation.

In the absence of any justification for holding that there is mapping relation, the view may simply be rejected by appeal to the reason-based criterion of conceptual content. More specifically, it may be denied that what is nonconsciously perceived is nonconceptually represented. To this end, it may first be noticed, with Donald Davidson, that when an individual acts with a certain intention, she has reasons for her action (Davidson 1980b:83). She may pay

attention to these reasons, but more often than not she will not attend to them.⁵⁴ Bearing these points in mind, think back to Taylor's example of his walk. Taylor may reasonably be said to walk with the intention of getting to his destination. Consequently, he should also be seen as having reasons for the manner in which he proceeds. A complete analysis of these reasons is not necessary for the present purposes. It is enough to recognize that what he nonconsciously perceives forms part of the reasons for his actions: His seeing, without actively noticing, that there is an obstacle immediately in front of him is a reason why he turns slightly to the right; his perceiving, without focusing on, an opening straight ahead is a reason why he continues straight on, etc.

Insofar as Taylor's walk is approached from this perspective, it appears that his nonconscious representations of the obstacle, the opening, and so on, qualify as conceptually contentful according to the reason-based criterion: Taylor should be seen as exercising his ability to let them serve as reasons.⁵⁵ Generalizing from this example, it shows that individuals have the ability to let what they nonconsciously represent serve as and be sustained by reasons. Thus, Taylor's mapping relation may be rejected and so may, by implication, his argument from lack of focus. He is wrong to hold that when individuals do not focus on what they perceive, they fail to represent it conceptually. This is the last part of the reason for holding that perceptual states are significantly conceptual.

To summarize, then, three considerations have been advanced. First, it was noticed that, on the reason-based criterion of conceptual content, individuals' representations of something as

⁵⁴ Davidson further refines this analysis. However, for the present purposes there is no need to go into this. In the same spirit, I shall also disregard a number of issues that arise in connection with the analysis of intentional actions as carried out for reasons. For Davidson's slightly earlier and classic analysis of actions as carried out for reasons, see his (1980a). For an overview of the debate on action, see, e.g., Mele (1997) and Wilson (2007).

⁵⁵ The line of argument just presented was suggested to me by Brandom. Needless to say, he should not be held responsible for the manner in which I present and spell out the idea.

red, as a tomato, as a postbox, etc. are obviously conceptual. Then, it was shown, again by appeal to the reason-based criterion, that individuals' very fine-grained perceptual discriminations have conceptual content too. Finally, it was made clear, once more by reference to the reason-based criterion, that there is no basis for holding that the representational content of individuals' nonconscious perceptual states is any less conceptual than that of their conscious perceptual states. In view of these considerations, the representational content of perceptual states may be seen as being significantly conceptual. This is enough to justify a focus on them from this perspective. Accordingly, I shall henceforth concentrate on perceptual states as these have a conceptual representational content.

5.3 PERCEPTUAL STATES: PERCEPTUAL BELIEFS

Building on the discussion in the last section, it may now be noticed that what individuals conceptually represent to be the case in perception, they typically believe to be the case too. An individual who perceptually represents something in front of her as a tomato usually believes that there is a tomato in front of her. Likewise, an individual who perceptually represents a tomato in front of her as ripe normally believes that it is ripe. And so on. It is only in extremely rare cases that individuals who conceptually represent something to be the case in perception, do not believe this to be the case.

It is sometimes held that prior to individuals' believing or not believing what they perceive to be the case, they conceptually experience the environment in front of them as being a certain way. A notable representative of this position is McDowell (McDowell 2000, see in

particular lecture 1). Basically, his idea is that an individual first conceptually experiences that there is a tomato, say, in front of her. At this point, she does not take a stance on whether this is actually the case. Then, she moves on to believe – or not believe – that a tomato is present indeed.⁵⁶ For my purposes, it does not matter whether perceptual experiences with conceptual content are posited. This makes no difference from the perspective of showing that it is sometimes possible directly to perceive normative states. However, differently from the view that there are such experiences, it is quite uncontroversial to hold that individuals typically believe that what they perceptually represent to be the case is the case indeed. For this reason, and for the sake of simplicity, I shall assume that there are no perceptual experiences with conceptual content. Moreover, insofar as it is extremely rare that individuals do not believe that what they perceptually represent to be the case is the case, I shall once more simplify and hence ignore these rare situations. Accordingly, I shall say that the conceptual content of perceptual states may be identified with perceptual beliefs.

This last point concludes the discussion of perception as a state. To recapitulate, it was first noticed that, in perception, individuals correctly represent what is in front of their eyes. Next, it was argued that the representational content of perceptual states is significantly conceptual. Finally, it was proposed to identify the conceptual content of perceptual states with beliefs. Putting these points together, perceptual states may be characterized as true beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of one's eyes is a certain way. In light of this specification of perception as a state, I shall now move on to examine perception from the point of view of its being a process.

⁵⁶ It should be noticed that perceptual experiences are not always regarded as representational states. Perceptual experiences, sense impressions, or sensations, as they are sometimes interchangeable called, may also be identified with nonrepresentational states that are part of the causal process that culminates in, what I have labeled, perceptual states. Sellars, for instance, subscribes to this view (Sellars 1991a).

5.4 PERCEPTION AS PROCESS: THE ABSENCE OF INFERENTIAL ACTIVITY

When perception is approached from the perspective of its being a process, attention is directed at the manner in which individuals' perceptual beliefs are caused by the environment in front of their eyes. The process may usefully be divided into two stages. In the first stage, the environment causes, via the light it reflects and emits, the activation of the retinal cells. In the following, I shall not further characterize this first stage of the process. Instead, I shall concentrate on the second stage. It begins when the retinal cells are stimulated and ends with the formation of a perceptual belief. I shall refer to this second stage as the perceptual process. In connection with its specification, I shall focus on the much debated question of whether the perceptual process involves inferential activity.

The claim that perception is mediated by inferential activity should not be taken to mean that the process is inferential through and through. As Jerry Fodor and Zenon Pylyshyn comment, "even theories that hold that the perception of many properties is inferentially mediated must assume that the detection of *some* properties is [...] *not* inferentially mediated [...] Unless some beliefs are fixed in some way other than by inference, it is hard to see how the inferential process get started. Inferences need premises" (Fodor & Pylyshyn 2002:183). Among theorists who hold that perception involves inferential activity, there are different views on where exactly to locate the point at which inferences begin to take place. Insofar as it is said to be very early on in the process, it is typically maintained that all perceptual beliefs are the upshot of inferential activity. Instead, insofar as it is said to be later on in the process, it is common to

sort perceptual beliefs into two groups: Those that are, and those that are not, inferentially acquired. In any case, these theorists are opposed by those who insist that no inferential activity occurs at any point in the perceptual process.

This clarified, it should be asked what more specifically to understand by the contention that the perceptual process involves – or fails to involve – inferential activity. Inferences are, to borrow Gary Hatfield's formulation, couched in representations (Hatfield 2002:138). Representations may be specified as having a representational content that is conceptual, nonconceptual, or both. Moreover, different conceptions of what it takes for a state to qualify as having either conceptual or nonconceptual representational content may be adopted. Finally, it is possible to subscribe to diverse views as to what is required for transitions among representations to count as inferences. For these reasons, there are numerous ways in which to explicate the contention that inferential activity occurs as part of the perceptual process. As Robert Schwartz somewhat despairingly observes, when "people argue for or against the notion of perceptual inference, there is no idea or claim that they can each be counted on as talking about" (Schwartz 1994:90).

Following Brandom, I shall take it that the perceptual process is mediated by inferential activity if inferences among representational states with conceptual content take place (see Brandom 2001:213ff; 2002a; & 2002b). And not surprisingly, I shall regard representational states as having conceptual content insofar as they meet the reason-based criterion of conceptual content. As to the notion of inference, Brandom's view may be adopted too. He contends that two conditions must be met in order for inferential activity to occur. First, the moves between the conceptual states must be warranted. Formally valid inferences meet this requirement. Moreover, so do the following kinds of transitions: Today is Wednesday, so tomorrow will be Thursday;

lightning is now seen so thunder will soon be heard; and the streets are wet so it has rained (Brandom 2001:98 & *ibid.*:101). Second, the individual who performs the warranted moves must take the premise/premises to support the conclusion and as such it must be possible to hold her responsible for the correctness of the moves. I shall defend the position, also endorsed by Brandom, that the perceptual process does not involve any inferential activity among conceptual states.⁵⁷

The question of whether inferences take place as part of the perceptual process is sometimes expressed as the issue of whether perception is direct. Perception is said to be direct if no inferential activity occurs and indirect if such activity takes place.⁵⁸ On various occasions already, I have made it clear that I am concerned with perception as direct. It may now be specified that what I have had in mind all along – and what I shall henceforth have in mind – is that perception is direct in the sense of not involving any inferential activity among conceptual states. There are also other ways of explicating the direct/indirect distinction. For instance, it is sometimes held that to perceive something directly is to see it with the naked eyes as opposed to seeing it indirectly by use of instruments. As such, this distinction sets apart “cases in which mirrors, Geiger counters, or light meters are employed from those in which the naked eye comes into play” (Heil 1983:42). Or, direct perception is specified as perception that is infallible, certain, or to use C.I. Lewis’ words, “incorrigible and indubitable” (C.I. Lewis 1973:370). Direct perception is then contrasted to indirect perception characterized as fallible, uncertain, corrigible,

⁵⁷ It is possible to render the above notion of inference less demanding. The result is a weaker version of inference according to which inferential activity takes place simply if the moves between conceptual representations are warranted. I shall not explicitly discuss this position. The arguments I shall present below against the more demanding notion of inference apply to this weaker notion of inference too.

⁵⁸ The identification of direct perception with perception that does not involve any inferential activity is mentioned by, e.g., Armstrong (1961:21), Fodor and Pylyshyn (2002:184), Heil (1983:42), Jackson (1977:7ff), and Schwartz (1994, chapter 3).

or dubitable.⁵⁹ It is important to be clear that I do not understand the claim that perception is direct in any of these alternative senses. All I mean to suggest is, to repeat, that the perceptual process does not involve any inferential activity among conceptual representations. I shall now turn to the defense of this claim.

5.4.1 A Defense of the View that Perception is Direct

There is a long tradition for holding, on some understanding of this idea, that the perception of everyday phenomena is the result of inferential activity. Perceptual beliefs about everyday phenomena are regarded as the conclusions of inferences from representations of sensory properties, that is, properties such as shape, color, size, texture, and motion. Berkeley may be seen as giving expression to this view when he notices that “when we are said to see a red-hot bar of iron; the solidity and heat of the iron are not the objects of sight, but suggested to the imagination by the colour and figure, which are properly perceived by that sense” (Berkeley 1988:153).⁶⁰ Or, to mention a more recent representative, Jerome Bruner suggests that when an orange is seen, it is the result of drawing an inference roughly along the lines of “[t]hat thing is round and nubby in texture and orange in color and of such-and-such size – therefore an orange”

⁵⁹ As to the specification of direct perception as perception with the naked eye, it is brought up by, e.g., Achinstein (1968:172), Gibson (1979:10), and Suppe (1974:83ff). The explication of direct perception as perception that is infallible, incorrigible, etc. is discussed by, e.g., Dretske (1973:62ff) and Malcolm (1963:89). For an examination of how the various formulations of this latter distinction relate to each other (viz. infallible versus certain versus incorrigible versus indubitable perception), see Alston (1973). This brief list of alternative ways in which to understand the notion of direct perception is not meant to be exhaustive.

⁶⁰ Berkeley may be ascribed this view insofar as “inference” is taken to mean no more than “the association of ideas.” On this point, see Armstrong (1961:19ff).

(Bruner 1957:123). In accordance with my understanding of the claim that perception involves inferential activity, I shall begin by showing that the perception of everyday phenomena is direct.

So, consider the proposal that perceptual beliefs about everyday phenomena are inferentially acquired: When individuals perceive an everyday phenomenon of some kind, they first form a conceptual representation of the sensory properties in front of their eyes.⁶¹ On this basis, they infer, perhaps by appeal to a rule, that they are being presented with an everyday phenomenon of the kind in question. As it stands, there are four ways in which to understand a view along these lines. It may be taken to mean that individuals engage in inferential activity that is either conscious, nonconscious, weakly unconscious, or strongly unconscious. These latter notions are used in various senses. I shall rely on a particular understanding of them when examining each option in turn. I shall argue that, however qualified, perception does not involve inferential activity.

According to the view that conscious inferential activity occurs, individuals actively notice their conceptual representations of sensory properties and their moves from these to perceptual beliefs about everyday phenomena. This claim is easily shown to be wrong. As often observed, perception is characterized by being phenomenologically immediate. This feature of perception is obviously incompatible with individuals actively noticing any inferential activity of any sort taking place. Thus, perception of everyday phenomena is direct in the sense of not involving any conscious inferential activity.

Alternatively, perceptual beliefs about everyday phenomena may be viewed as the upshot of nonconscious inferential activity. Here, individuals do not actively notice their conceptual representations of sensory properties and their moves from these to perceptual beliefs about

⁶¹ Notice that both general concepts, such as red and round, and demonstrative concepts, like “that shade” and “that shape” may be taken to be operative in these representations of sensory properties.

everyday phenomena. Still, they might as well *effortlessly* have done so: They would have actively noticed the inferential activity going on if only they had paid attention to the matter. In this sense, their nonconscious inferential activity is always potentially conscious.⁶² This proposal, viz. that perceptual beliefs about everyday phenomena are the result of nonconscious inferential activity, is consistent with the point that perception is phenomenologically immediate insofar as it is added that the inferences are drawn at a high speed. So, on this account at least, the view seems plausible. Nevertheless, it must be rejected. As just noticed, if it is correct that individuals engage in nonconscious inferential activity when perceiving everyday phenomena, then they may, when paying attention to the matter, notice the inferential activity taking place. For instance, if an individual is asked to register what happens when she puts her eyes on a tomato, say, she will be able to notice how she first represents something as red, round, and of such-and-such a size, and then moves on to the conclusion that she is being presented with a tomato. It is quite clear, I think, that no inferences of this sort may be detected when carrying out this or similar experiments.⁶³ This being the case, individuals do not perform any nonconscious inferences when they perceive everyday phenomena.

So perhaps perceptual beliefs about everyday phenomena should instead be regarded as the upshot of weakly unconscious inferential activity: Individuals do not actively notice their conceptual representations of sensory properties and their moves from these to perceptual beliefs about everyday phenomena. Still, they might as well have done so if they had made a *sustained* effort in this direction. Individuals make such an effort insofar as they, say, make multiple attempts to notice the inferential activity possibly going on, train their ability to concentrate on

⁶² This understanding of nonconscious inferential activity is in line with Taylor's point, in his argument from lack of focus discussed in subsection 5.2.6 above, that individuals may or may not pay attention to what they perceive.

⁶³ The reader may verify this for herself by carrying out an experiment of the sort just considered. The same point applies to the next experiment to be presented.

the task of noticing inferential activity before making a new attempt in this direction, or consult a psychoanalyst to make sure that repression does not prevent them from noticing the inferential activity possibly going on. In short, the effort in question is a sustained introspective effort. The idea is, to repeat, that if individuals make such an effort, they will be able actively to notice the inferential activity going on. In this sense, weakly unconscious inferential activity is always potentially conscious.⁶⁴

A suggestion along these lines is not touched by the objections raised against the views that conscious or nonconscious inferential activity occurs as part of the perceptual process. It faces its own difficulty, however. To show this, it is enough slightly to modify the argument just offered. Consider again the individual who is asked to register whether any inferential activity takes place when she puts her eyes on the tomato. If weakly unconscious inferential activity goes on when she perceives that something is a tomato she will not, as a result of simply attending to the matter, be able to notice any such activity. She must make a sustained effort in this direction. For instance, she must repeat the experiment several times or come back to do the experiment after having trained her ability to concentrate on the task of noticing inferential activity. On that basis, she will be able to notice that she first represents something as red, round, and of such-and-such a size, and then moves on to the conclusion that she is being presented with a tomato. Despite making such an effort, I submit, it will still be impossible to detect any inferences of this sort when carrying out this or similar experiments. This means that individuals do not perform any weakly unconscious inferences when they perceive everyday phenomena.

⁶⁴ The notion of weakly unconscious inferential activity corresponds roughly to Searle's Freudian based discussion of processes that involve shallow unconscious mental states. Likewise, the notion of strongly unconscious inferential activity that I shall introduce below is in line with his notion of deeply unconscious mental processes. See Searle (1995).

This leaves one last option, namely that the perception of everyday phenomena is the result of strongly unconscious inferential activity: Individuals do not actively notice their conceptual representations of sensory properties and their moves from these to perceptual beliefs about everyday phenomena. And they may never do so: Individuals strongly unconscious inferential activity is not potentially conscious. This suggestion is not undermined by any of the arguments offered against the views that perception involves conscious, nonconscious, or weakly unconscious inferential activity. Yet, as I shall now argue, it may be dismissed on the grounds that there are no such things as strongly unconscious representations that are conceptual.

To begin with, recall that in order to engage in inferential activity, an individual must take the premise/premises to support the conclusion and as such it must be possible to hold her responsible for the correctness of the moves. It may now be added that there are two closely related preconditions for regarding an individual as meeting this specification. One is that it must be within her reach critically to examine whether the premise/premises do indeed warrant the move to the conclusion. The other is that it must be sufficiently up to her whether to make the move from the premise/premises to the conclusion: It must equally be possible for her not to make the move in case she recognizes that the premise/premises do not justify the move to the conclusion. The problem is that both these points are incompatible with moves to and from strongly unconscious representations qualifying as inferential. The first precondition is violated because an individual can only critically examine whether a premise/premises warrant the move to a conclusion insofar as these, viz. the premise/premises and the conclusion, are actively noticed or conscious. Consequently, since an individual may never notice, or be conscious of, her strongly unconscious representations, it is not within her reach critically to examine these representations. Turning to the second precondition, consider the fact that even when an

individual makes a sustained effort in this direction, it is not within her power to notice any strongly unconscious representations and any moves to and from these. This suggests that what is strongly unconscious is outside an individual's sphere of control. Or, perhaps better, it makes it reasonable to hold that an individual is generally unable to decide whether and how to affect such representations. In this sense, strongly unconscious conceptual representations live their own lives, so to speak. This being the case, the second precondition cannot be satisfied either: It is not sufficiently up to an individual whether to make moves to and from her unconscious representations. That is, it is not sufficiently up to her to make the moves that she takes to be warranted and to refrain from making the moves that she realizes are unwarranted. In this fashion, neither of the preconditions for regarding an individual as engaging in inferential activity can be met. Accordingly, moves to and from strongly unconscious conceptual representations disqualify as inferential: Inferential activity cannot be strongly unconscious.

Once this is realized, it is only a small step to see that, in fact, it is not even possible to hold that there are such things as strongly unconscious conceptual representations. By the lights of the reason based criterion, a representation qualifies as conceptual insofar as an individual has the ability to let what she represents serve as and be sustained by reasons. However, insofar as moves to and from unconscious representations fail to count as inferential, an individual cannot be seen as having the ability to let these representations serve the role of premise and of conclusion in inferences. Thus, strongly unconscious representations fail to qualify as conceptual: Strongly unconscious representations cannot be conceptual.

These considerations apply to the suggestion that the perception of everyday phenomena is the upshot of strongly unconscious inferential activity. The points do not only imply that it cannot be held that *inferential* moves from strongly unconscious conceptual representations of

sensory properties to perceptual beliefs about everyday phenomena take place. Also, they bring out that the very idea of strongly unconscious *conceptual* representations of sensory properties makes no sense. In sum, they show that the perception of everyday phenomena is direct in the sense of not involving any strongly unconscious inferential activity. This being the case, the upshot of the present discussion may be summarized as follows: The perception of everyday phenomena is not the result of either conscious, nonconscious, weakly unconscious, or strongly unconscious, inferential activity.

In view of this finding, there is only one more way, it seems, in which to argue that the perceptual process is mediated by inferential activity. It may be insisted that perceptual representations of sensory properties are the result of inferences from yet other conceptual representations. As it stands, this position is clearly in need of support. Most notably, it is not clear how to explain the fact that while conceptual representations of everyday phenomena are noninferentially acquired, conceptual representations of sensory properties fail to be so. But let that be. Another and much more serious problem faces the suggestion. Whenever conceptual representations of sensory properties are said to be the result of inferences from yet other representations, these other representations are always – and for good reason – taken to be strongly unconscious. Yet, as discussed a moment ago, there is no such thing as strongly unconscious conceptual representations. In this sense, it is not even an option to hold that conceptual representations of sensory properties are the upshot of inferences from yet other conceptual representations. The perception of sensory properties is direct in the sense of not involving any inferential activity.

On this basis, it is possible to draw the more general conclusion that no inferential activity among conceptual representations occurs as part of the perceptual process. When setting

out to defend this view, I made it clear that I am relying on a particular understanding of the idea that perception involves – or fails to involve – inferential activity. And, I made a similar point when qualifying this activity as conscious, nonconscious, weakly unconscious or strongly unconscious. There are different ways in which to spell out these notions. By way of ending this section, it is worth stressing that my discussion does not rule out that, on some alternative conception, inferences are drawn as part of the perceptual process. For instance, it does not preclude that perception involves inferential activity, in the minimal sense of warranted moves, among representations that disqualify as conceptual according to the reason-based criterion of conceptual content.⁶⁵ All I am claiming is, to repeat, that in light of my take on the issue, perceptual beliefs are not the result of either conscious, nonconscious, weakly unconscious, or strongly unconscious inferential activity. It is my take on the issue that I shall henceforth have in mind when returning to this point.

5.5 PERCEPTION AS PROCESS: COGNITIVE PENETRATION

So far it has been argued that the perceptual process does not involve any inferential activity among representations with conceptual content. It is important to stress that this does not imply that conceptual representations in the form of background beliefs never play any role in relation

⁶⁵ Fodor is a notable representative of this view, see e.g. his (2000) and his (2002) co-authored with Pylyshyn. His account belongs to the long and influential tradition of theories which state that perception involves unconscious inferential activity in the strong sense specified above. Other theorists working within this tradition include Helmholtz, Marr, Rock, Ullman, and Pylyshyn. See e.g. Helmholtz (1971), Marr (1982), Rock (1995, 2004), Ullman (1980a, 1980b, 2004), Fodor (2000), Pylyshyn (1985, 2006), and Fodor and Pylyshyn (2002). See also P.S. Churchland (2004) for a discussion of Rock and Marr's views. Below, in 5.6., I shall return to the point that the representations which Fodor posits as part of the perceptual process disqualify as conceptual on the reason-based criterion.

to the perceptual process.⁶⁶ In effect, it is possible to distinguish between two different ways in which background beliefs may, as it is often put, penetrate the perceptual process.

Conceptual representations may penetrate the perceptual process in the sense of lastingly changing the perceptual process such that it somehow reflects the content of the conceptual representations: Perceptual learning takes place. This form of cognitive penetration is exemplified by the following situation: An individual is told that plum tomatoes have a characteristic oblong shape. In the beginning, she responds to the presence of a plum tomato by drawing an inference along the lines of “this is an oblong tomato, since plum tomatoes are oblong, this must be a plum tomato.” After a period of training, however, she ceases to draw any conscious inference. Moreover, she does not draw any nonconscious or weakly unconscious inference either: Even if she were to pay attention to the matter, she would not, effortlessly or after making a sustained effort, notice any inference taking place.⁶⁷ At this point, she sees, rather than infers, that there is a plum tomato in front of her. Her background belief that plum tomatoes have a characteristic oblong shape has penetrated the perceptual process: She has learned to perceive that something is a plum tomato. In this example, perceptual learning is the result of training. However, there is no reason to rule out the possibility that perceptual learning may also happen without first going through such a period of training. Keeping this last point in mind, I shall nonetheless follow Fodor and refer to this form of penetration as diachronic cognitive penetration (Fodor 1984:39).

⁶⁶ In addition to beliefs, conceptual representations in the form of knowledge, expectations, and the like, are also said to affect the perceptual process. For the sake of terminological simplicity, I shall talk about background beliefs only.

⁶⁷ Since there is no such thing as strongly unconscious inferential activity, there is no need to show that the individual does not engage in inferential activity thus specified.

The other kind of penetration may, to borrow Fodor's terminology once more, be labeled synchronic cognitive penetration (ibid.). It denotes the situation in which background beliefs have an immediate impact upon the perceptual process yet without lastingly changing it. To illustrate this kind of cognitive penetration, consider an individual who visits her friend in her newly rented apartment. Just before they enter the living room, her friend comments that there is nothing in there but a few tomatoes on the windowsill. As they walk into the living room, the individual looks in the direction of the windowsill and sees the tomatoes. Given the lightning conditions, however, she might as well have taken the tomatoes for red balls. The reason she doesn't is her belief, induced by her friend's remark, that there are only some tomatoes in there. The background belief affects her perceptual process with the result that she perceives the tomatoes as tomatoes.⁶⁸ This example of synchronic cognitive penetration is quite uncontroversial since the upshot of the process is a perceptual belief about everyday phenomena. It is widely agreed that not all perception is penetrable in this manner.⁶⁹ The standard way in which to show this is by reference to perceptual illusions such as the Müller-Lyer illusion. An individual who is presented with this illusion will see two parallel lines that she represents as being of unequal length. Moreover, she will continue to do so even when she is told that the two

⁶⁸ The point that an individual's background beliefs may in this manner have an impact on the perceptual process should be distinguished from the claim that her beliefs have an impact on where she fixes her gaze. The famous duck-rabbit drawing is often viewed as a case in which an individual's background beliefs penetrate the perceptual process and determines whether she sees a duck or a rabbit. Yet, as argued by Fodor, this is not the case: "One doesn't get the duck-rabbit by 'changing one's assumptions': one does it by (for example) changing one's fixation point" (Fodor 1988:190). The above case does not fall in the duck-rabbit category. How an individual fixes her gaze is irrelevant when it comes to seeing something as either a tomato or a ball. For a discussion of the point that an individual's beliefs may have an impact on where she fixes her gaze, see, e.g., Pylyshyn (2006, chapter 2).

⁶⁹ Fodor forcefully makes this point in his classic "Perception Reconsidered" from 1984. He takes his view to conflict with the "new look" position within psychology as represented, most notably, by Bruner as well as with the stance taken by philosophers of science such as Hanson, Kuhn, and P.M. Churchland. See, e.g., Bruner (1957), Hanson (1961), Kuhn (1996), and P.M. Churchland (1979, chapter 2). P.M. Churchland responds to Fodor in his (1988), and, in turn, Fodor replies to this response in his (1988). Following this debate, theorists have mainly defended Fodor's view described as the contention that at least some perception resists synchronic cognitive penetration. See, e.g. Brewer and Lambert (2001), Estany (2001), Gilman (1992), and Raftapoulus (2001).

lines actually have the same length. In this fashion, her realization that the two lines are of equal length fails synchronically to penetrate her perception of them.⁷⁰ For the present purposes, there is no need to go further into the issue as to when perception is and is not synchronically penetrable by background beliefs. It suffices to notice that penetration of this type may occur when the upshot of the perceptual process is perceptual beliefs about everyday phenomena.

These considerations conclude the discussion of perception as process. To recapitulate, it was first briefly noticed that, in virtue of the light an environment emits and reflects, it causes the stimulation of the retinal cells. This marks the beginning of the perceptual process. Then, it was argued that the perceptual process does not involve any inferential activity among conceptual representations. Lastly, it was briefly pointed out that the perceptual process is sometimes diachronically and synchronically penetrable by background beliefs.

5.6 THE ACCOUNT OF DIRECT PERCEPTION

Perception has now been examined as both state and process. The account of perception that has emerged from this discussion may be summed up as follows: In terms of the light an environment emits and reflects, it causes the activation of an individual's retinal cells. This marks the beginning of the perceptual process. The latter is characterized by the absence of inferential activity among conceptually contentful representations while being sometimes penetrable by background beliefs. It culminates in a true belief to the effect that the environment

⁷⁰ An argument along these lines is presented by, e.g., Fodor (1984:33) and Pylyshyn (2006:64-65).

in front of the individual's eyes is a certain way. I shall refer to this specification of perception as the account of direct perception.

I shall take it that insofar as no scientist is messing with an individual's brain; insofar as no machine is present that absorbs the light and sends it around the world before allowing it to stimulate her retinas; and so on, then she directly perceives what is in front of her eyes if she meets the conditions stated in this account. In other words, when in a normal state and in normal circumstances, meeting these conditions is both necessary and sufficient for direct perception to occur.⁷¹ I shall henceforth express this point by simply saying that the account of direct perception states the necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of direct perception.

It is important to be clear that making this point is not the same as holding that the account of direct perception states all there is to say on the topic of perception. Depending on context and purpose, it may be deemed useful – or even necessary – to supplement its use with further specifications as to how perception works. More specifically, it is possible to distinguish between two kinds of possible elaborations: Case general and case specific supplements, as they may be called.

Case general supplements are concerned with further explicating perception as it works in general. Accordingly, they address such questions as: What are the properties of an environment

⁷¹ Examples of states and circumstances that are not normal have particularly been discussed in connection with the debate on conceptualist causal theories of perception, as they may be called. According to these theories, it is part of the everyday notion of perception that perception only takes place if the environment in front of an individual's eyes is causally responsible for her seeing it. Proponents of the view quickly realized that it is not enough that the environment causes an individual's representation of it. Also, the environment must cause it in the right way: The causal chain must not be deviant like it is in the above examples of being in a state and in circumstances that are not normal. It is worth noticing that the problem of providing a formulation that prevents cases of causal deviance from qualifying as instances of perception has still not been successfully solved (Martin 1998:29). The conceptualist causal theory of perception is defended by Grice in his seminal article "The Causal Theory of Perception" (1965). Following his lead, versions of the view have also been advocated by, among others, Child (1992, 1994), Coates (2000), Davies (1983), D. Lewis (2002), Price (1998), Strawson (2002), Tye (1982), and Vision (1993, 1997). The stance has been criticized by, e.g. Hyman (1992, 1993, 1994), McLaughlin (1984, 1996), Snowdon (2002), and Wilkie (1996).

that may initiate a causal chain that culminates in a perceptual belief? What more precisely is the role and nature of reflected and emitted light? How should the perceptual process be characterized in more detail? And exactly how do background beliefs influence the perceptual process? The account of direct perception may be combined with various – and even competing – answers to these questions. As an illustration of this point, consider the issue of how to characterize the perceptual process in more depth. The account of direct perception only states that the process does not involve any inferential activity among representations with conceptual content. Accordingly, it is consistent not only with the position that the process involves representational states with nonconceptual content but also with the rival standpoint that nonrepresentational states alone occur as part of this process. The two contending stances are advocated by Fodor and Gibson respectively. Fodor provides a rather detailed specification of the perceptual process as involving representational states (see, e.g. Fodor 2000). In view of the reason-based criterion of conceptual content, these states do not qualify as conceptual: They are strongly unconscious and hence individuals do not have the ability to let them serve as and be sustained by reasons.⁷² Gibson, on his side, vehemently opposes the research tradition that Fodor's account forms part of (Gibson 1979). Against it, he insists that nonrepresentational states alone are implicated in the perceptual process.⁷³ For the present purposes, there is no need to take side in this debate. The point to retain is simply that the account of direct perception may be

⁷² For Fodor's claim that the perceptual process is unconscious, see his (2000:55-56 & *ibid.*:104). It should be stressed that Fodor does not subscribe to the reason-based criterion of conceptual content and that his theory of the perceptual process is only compatible with the account of direct perception insofar as his view of the scope of perception is disregarded. For an outline of his theory, see in particular his (2000) and his (2002) co-authored with Pylyshyn.

⁷³ For an outline of Gibson's theory of perception, see in particular his (1979). His approach gave rise to a whole research tradition. For discussions of it, see, e.g., Bruce, Green, & Georgeson (2000, in particular chapter 11 & 17), Glotzback (1992), Machamer (1977), Machamer & Osbeck (2002), Schwartz (1994, chapter 4), and Turvey, Shaw, Reed, and Mace (1981).

further elaborated in terms of different - and even contending – explications of how perception works in general.

Differently from case general supplements, case specific ones focus on how perception works in some specific context or in relation to a specific type of object, event, property, and the like. Here, additions to the account of direct perception take the form of answers to questions such as: What role does perception play in this specific context? What significance do individuals assign to perception within this specific context? Under what conditions are individuals able directly to perceive a certain type of object, even, property, and the like? And when are conditions optimal for the perception of a certain type of object, event, property, or the like? The account of direct perception may be combined with different – and even conflicting – responses to these queries. In the next chapter, I shall provide an example of a case specific supplement when I examine the question of when, in situations of social interaction, individuals are likely to be able directly to perceive normative states.

The discussion of case general and case specific supplements bring out that the account of direct perception may be regarded as a framework that may be filled in, and further elaborated in various ways. The account states the necessary and sufficient conditions for direct perception to occur, but it does not exhaust the topic of perception.

5.7 THE ABILITY DIRECTLY TO PERCEIVE SOMETHING TO BE THE CASE

In view of the account of direct perception, the following characterization of the ability directly to perceive something to be the case may be provided.

First, based on the discussion of perception as a state, the ability directly to perceive something to be the case may be specified as the ability to form a true belief to the effect that the environment in front of one's eyes is a certain way. In line with the discussion in chapter 2, individuals' having this ability is the same as saying that when in a standard state and when in standard circumstances, they are reliably able to form perceptual beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of their eyes is a certain way.^{74 & 75}

Second, relying on the examination of perception as a process, individuals should only be seen as exercising this ability if, under normal circumstances, their true beliefs about the environment in front of their eyes are caused by this environment in a characteristic way. It must be the case that, in virtue of the light the environment emits and reflects, it causes the stimulation of their retinal cells. And, as it was particularly stressed, it must be case that the perceptual process does not involve any inferential activity among conceptual representations. When these two specifications are met, then individuals should be seen as exercising their ability to form perceptual beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of their eyes is a certain way.

⁷⁴ More precisely, see chapter 2, section 2.2.

⁷⁵ Notice that individuals may directly perceive that the world is a certain way without having the *ability* directly to perceive this. For instance, an individual may directly perceive that the walls in a room have that shade of red without having the ability to perceive things to have that shade: She does not recognize the shade as that shade of red when presented with it on other occasions and as such she is not reliably able, when being in a standard state and in standard circumstances, to form perceptual beliefs to the effect that things have that shade.

5.8 SUMMARY

The main part of the present chapter has been devoted to the development and defense of what I have labeled the account of direct perception. The main points of this account may be summarized as follows: In virtue of emitting and reflecting light, the environment causes the activation of the retinal cells. This marks the initiation of the perceptual process that may be characterized by the absence of any inferential activity among conceptual representations. The process culminates in a perceptual state in the form of a true belief to the effect that the environment in front of an individual's eyes is a certain way. Following the presentation of this analysis, I proposed that meeting these conditions is both necessary and sufficient for direct perception to take place. Finally, in light of this account, I advanced a characterization of the ability to perceive something to be the case. The ability was specified as the ability directly to form a true belief to the effect that the environment in front of one's eyes is a certain way. Moreover, I pointed out that individuals only exercise this ability insofar as the environment, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, causes them to acquire this belief about the environment without having engaged in inferential activity.

Throughout the discussion, I have repeatedly emphasized and exemplified how the account of direct perception is compatible with the assumption that everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe, are directly perceptible. I shall now proceed to show that in light of the account of direct perception, it follows that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible too. Individuals do not only have the ability directly to perceive everyday phenomena such as tomatoes and their being ripe. Also, in situations of social interaction, they sometimes have the ability directly to perceive normative states.

6.0 THE ABILITY DIRECTLY TO PERCEIVE NORMATIVE STATES

In chapter 4, it was proposed to regard normative states as response-dependent properties. Moreover, it was explained how an ontological construal along these lines is consistent with normative states being sometimes directly perceptible. To make this point is not the same as having shown that normative states sometimes *are* directly perceptible. As a first step in this direction, the account of direct perception was presented in the last chapter. It takes as its starting point the assumption that everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe, are within the scope of perception. By appeal to this account, it may now be shown that normative states sometimes qualify as directly perceptible too.

The account of direct perception states the necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of direct perception. It consists of a description of perception as state and as process. In this chapter, I begin by arguing that individuals form true beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of their eyes makes some action appropriate or inappropriate. This being the case, individuals' beliefs about normative states fit the characterization of perceptual states. Next, I show that these beliefs about normative states are sometimes caused by the environment via the activation of their retinal cells and without any inferential activity among conceptual representations taking place. This means that individuals sometimes form beliefs about normative states in a manner that tallies with the specification of perception as process. Accordingly, I conclude that, by the lights of the account of direct perception, normative states

qualify as being sometimes directly perceptible: Sometimes individuals have the ability directly to perceive normative states. Moreover, I elaborate on this finding by providing a specification of when, in situations of social interaction, individuals are likely to possess and exercise this ability.

The first and main part of the present chapter is devoted to making the case that, in situations of social interaction, individuals sometimes have the ability directly to perceive normative states. Once this claim has been established, I move on to show that individuals' exercise of this ability underwrites their ability to act appropriately. In light of this point, the thesis I am advocating may be regarded as vindicated: In situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states. Finally, I briefly explain how my development and defense of this thesis is compatible with the basic claims and arguments associated with ability theories of practice. For this reason, the account may serve as an elaboration of the basic ability approach to practices.

6.1 PERCEPTION AS STATE: TRUE BELIEFS ABOUT NORMATIVE STATES

Perception may be considered from the perspective of its being a state. According to the account of direct perception, perceptual states are true beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of one's eyes is a certain way. A first step in the direction of showing that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible is to argue that individuals form true beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of their eyes makes some action appropriate or inappropriate. To establish

this claim, I shall proceed stepwise in a way that mirrors the discussion, in the last chapter, of perception as state.

For a start, it may simply be noticed that individuals may correctly represent the situation in which they find themselves as making some action appropriate or inappropriate. For instance, consider an individual who is sitting in a crowded bus. She has her eyes turned in the direction of the bus door when an elderly person enters. This individual may correctly represent the situation as making it appropriate for her to offer her seat to the old person. Likewise, an individual who arrives at a beach where several persons are sitting may correctly represent the situation as making it inappropriate for her to strip naked.

The insistence on this point leaves it open whether individuals' correct representations of normative states are conceptually contentful. In order for this to be the case, individuals must have the ability to let these representations serve as, and be sustained by, reasons. The bus and the beach examples may be considered from this perspective. It is reasonable to hold that an individual typically has the ability to reason along the lines of "I should offer the elderly person my seat because she is too feeble to stand up" and "if I don't offer my seat to the elderly person, other people are in their right to reproach me." Likewise, an individual typically has the ability to reason that she should not strip naked since, say, the other beachgoers would be offended and the beach is not intended for nudists. Also, her representation of the situation as making it inappropriate for her to strip naked may be the reason why she refrains from taking off all her clothes. Generalizing from these examples, it may be maintained that sometimes, if not mostly, individuals' correct representations of normative states qualify as conceptually contentful according to the reason-based criterion of conceptual content.

This observation paves the way for the final point to be made: Individuals who conceptually represent the environment in front of their eyes as making some action appropriate or inappropriate typically believe that the environment in front of their eyes actually makes that action appropriate or inappropriate. An individual who conceptually represents the situation as making it appropriate for her to offer her bus seat to an elderly person usually believes that the situation does indeed make it appropriate for her to act in this manner. In the same way, an individual who conceptually represents the situation as making it inappropriate for her to strip naked ordinarily believes that the situation does indeed make it inappropriate for her to take off all her clothes. And so on.

It follows from these considerations that individuals should be seen as forming true beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of their eyes makes some action appropriate or inappropriate. This conclusion is, I think, quite uncontroversial. It does not entail that individuals may sometimes directly perceive normative states. Still, it constitutes a step in this direction. It means that individuals form beliefs about normative states that fit the characterization of perceptual states as true beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of one's eyes is a certain way.

6.2 PERCEPTION AS PROCESS: BELIEFS ABOUT NORMATIVE STATES AS CAUSED VIA THE STIMULATION OF THE RETINAL CELLS

In order to show that normative states sometimes qualify as directly perceptible, it must further be demonstrated that beliefs about normative states may be brought about in a way that accords

with the characterization of perception as process. The account of direct perception states that in perception the environment causes the stimulation of individuals' retinal cells via the light it emits and reflects. I shall now discuss how individuals' true beliefs about normative states may be caused by the environment in this manner.

To begin with, it may be pointed out that situations of social interaction cause individuals to form true beliefs about the normative states of these situations. Or differently put, individuals respond to situations of social interaction by forming true beliefs to the effect that a given situation makes some action appropriate or inappropriate. Once this is realized, it is only a small step to see that environments may cause individuals' beliefs about normative states via the stimulation of their retinal cells: Individuals' use of their eyes alone may suffice for the generation of these beliefs.⁷⁶ Consider again the bus and the beach examples. Assume that an individual is sitting with a view to the entrance in a crowded bus. When the bus stops, an elderly person enters. The situation causes the individual to form the belief that she should offer the elderly person her seat. The individual only has to make use of her eyes in order to arrive at this belief. Likewise, suppose that an individual arrives at the beach where other people are present. The situation causes the individual to acquire the belief that she should not strip naked. This individual, too, has to make use of her eyes alone in order to arrive at this belief.⁷⁷

Making this point is not the same as suggesting that environments always cause individuals to form true beliefs about normative states via the stimulation of their retinal cells. In many situations of social interaction, individuals' use of their eyes is insufficient or even dispensable when it comes to the formation of these beliefs. Their generation depends instead on

⁷⁶ Henceforth, I shall talk interchangeably about the stimulation of individuals' retinal cells and individuals' making use of their eyes.

⁷⁷ Needless to say, this should not be taken to imply that the individuals in these two situations may not – and do not – make use of their other senses.

individuals' relying on one or several of their other senses. To see this, contemplate an individual who has her eyes turned towards a tree at some distance from her. Her friend is hidden behind the tree while crying out for help. In this situation, the individual's use of her eyes is irrelevant to her formation of the belief that she should help her friend: She will form the belief insofar as her sense of hearing is in proper working order.

In the examples considered here, it is pretty straightforward whether individuals' true beliefs about normative states should be seen as caused by the environment via the stimulation of their retinal cells. There may be situations of social interaction in which this is less obvious, however. For instance, it may be unclear whether individuals make use of their eyes or their ears when arriving at a true belief about a normative state. In this case, the question may be determined by examining whether individuals still acquire the belief if their ears are plugged. Insofar as they do, this suggests that their use of the eyes suffices for the generation of the belief. More generally, experiments along these lines may be employed in this and similar cases to find out whether an environment may cause individuals to form true beliefs about some normative state via the stimulation of their retinal cells alone.

Leaving these methodological considerations behind, the upshot of the present discussion may be summarized as follows: Situations of social interaction may, via the light they emit and reflect, cause the stimulation of individuals' retinal cells such that they form true beliefs to the effect that the situation in front of their eyes makes some action appropriate or inappropriate.

6.3 PERCEPTION AS PROCESS: BELIEFS ABOUT NORMATIVE STATES AS NONINFERENTIALLY ACQUIRED

There is also a second part to the characterization of perception as process. The account of direct perception states that the stimulation of individuals' retinal cells initiates a process that does not involve any inferential activity among conceptual representations before it culminates in beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of their eyes is a certain way. It must further be shown that true beliefs about normative states may meet this condition too. From what has been said so far, this is not obvious. The stimulation of individuals' retinal cells marks the beginning of the perceptual process. Accordingly, the claim that the environment may, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, cause individuals to acquire true beliefs about normative states, implies that perception plays a role in the generation of these beliefs. This point is perfectly compatible with the contention that these beliefs are not perceptual because they are the result of inferential activity. I shall first dwell at some length on this point and show how inferential activity may be involved in the formation of true beliefs about normative states. On that basis, I shall move on to argue that true beliefs about normative states may be noninferentially acquired too. Throughout the discussion, I shall understand inferential activity, its being conscious, nonconscious, etc. in the way outlined in the last chapter in section 5.4.

6.3.1 Inferentially Acquired True Beliefs about Normative States

In order to present the idea that inferential activity contributes to the formation of true beliefs about normative states, it is useful first to clarify two issues. These are: What kinds of properties

of an environment make the performance of a given action appropriate or inappropriate? And what kinds of properties must individuals have in order for the environment to make it appropriate or inappropriate for them to act in a given manner?

To begin with the environment, there are various kinds of properties that, either on their own or in combination, make the performance of an action appropriate or inappropriate. These include the setting in which the acting individual finds herself, the objects present, the social status of the other individuals present, their physical/biological characteristics, and/or the actions or activities in which they are engaged:

- A setting is exemplified by a bus, a lecture hall, a school, a beach, Pittsburgh, the US, and a Western country. Settings may (partly) make an action appropriate or inappropriate: Being on the beach makes it appropriate for women to wear a bikini only, whereas being in a church makes the same attire highly inappropriate.⁷⁸ Likewise, being in Pittsburgh, rather than in Copenhagen, makes it appropriate to greet the bus driver upon entering the bus.
- An object is exemplified by a table, a chair, an altar, a throne, and a fork. Objects may (partly) make an action appropriate or inappropriate: Something being a table makes it inappropriate to put one's feet on it, just as something being a fork makes it appropriate to put it in the mouth.
- A social status is exemplified by being a passenger, a guest, a queen, a policeman, a priest, a member of the local chess club, a pedestrian, and an American. Somebody else's social status may (partly) make it appropriate or inappropriate for an individual to act in a certain manner: The presence of a priest makes it inappropriate to swear, just as somebody being a queen makes it appropriate to address her with "your majesty."
- A physical/biological characteristic is exemplified by being old, young, a man, a woman, and fat. Somebody else's physical/biological characteristic may (partly) make it appropriate or inappropriate for an individual to act in a certain manner: A person being old makes it appropriate for an individual to offer the old person her bus seat if there are no available seats. Similarly, a woman being present makes it inappropriate for men to embark upon certain topics of conversation.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ It goes without saying that whether a beach makes it appropriate for women to wear nothing but a bikini depends, in turn, on whether the beach is located in, say, a Western country. Here, I shall ignore this complication. Actually, I shall continue to ignore complications of this sort in the examples to be presented in the following. They may be disregarded for the present purposes of exemplification.

⁷⁹ What I am here calling individuals' physical/biological characteristics are sometimes said to be socially constructed. This may mean that whether an individual is counted as old is a matter of social convention, just as how skinny an individual must be in order to qualify as thin is a matter of social "decision." Referring to individuals'

- An action or activity is exemplified by reading, sleeping, stepping onto the bus, cleaning the table, asking for the salt, soccer games, dinner parties, lectures, and wedding ceremonies. Somebody else being engaged in a certain action or activity may (partly) make it appropriate or inappropriate for an individual to act in a certain manner: Entering the room where a friend's children are peacefully asleep makes it appropriate to lower one's voice. Likewise, entering a church where a wedding ritual takes place makes it appropriate to act in a non-disturbing manner.

I shall refer to these properties as the normatively relevant aspects of environments. Notice that it is possible directly to see that something is a bus, a beach, a church, a table, or an altar; that somebody is a policeman on duty, a priest on duty, a nurse on duty, or a pedestrian; that somebody is old, young, a man, or a woman; that somebody is asleep, is standing up, or is sitting; that a wedding ceremony or a football game is taking place, and so on.⁸⁰ In sum, many normatively relevant aspects of environments are directly perceptible.

Turning to individuals, they have different kinds of properties that may, either singly or in combination, make it the case that an environment makes it appropriate or inappropriate for them to act in a given manner. Most notably, these properties are their social status, their physical/biological characteristics, and the action or activities in which they are engaged. Here are some examples of the role these may play:

- Social status: Being the host at a dinner party makes it inappropriate to be the first to serve oneself some food: The guests should begin. Being a passenger on an airplane makes it appropriate to return to one's seat when told to do so by the stewardess. Being

being old or young, fat or thin, and the like, as their physical/biological characteristics should be seen as perfectly compatible with this point. The choice of terminology is simply meant to signal that whatever the standards are, it is an individual's biological/physical characteristics that determine whether the standards are met. These characteristics play no role, or only a very limited role, when it comes to determining whether an individual qualifies as having a certain social status. In any event, nothing in the following hinges upon this distinction between an individual's physical/biological characteristics and her social status. Its purpose is solely to provide a useful way of organizing the above discussion.

⁸⁰ These are all intended as uncontroversial examples of everyday phenomena that qualify as directly perceptible according to the account of direct perception.

the guest at a friend's house makes it appropriate to offer to help taking out the plates after dinner.

- Physical/biological characteristics: Being young and healthy makes it appropriate for an individual, in a crowded bus, to offer her seat to an elderly person. Being a woman makes it inappropriate to sit with one's legs spread.
- Action/activity: Sitting down makes it appropriate to offer one's bus seat to an elderly person in a crowded bus. Being in the midst of finishing the preparation of the dinner makes it appropriate to leave it to one's partner to welcome the guests when they arrive.

I shall refer to these properties as the normatively relevant standings of individuals. Even if the normatively relevant standings of acting individuals are perceptible, it is only rarely that they take advantage of this opportunity. Typically, an individual does not look down herself to determine that she is a doctor or whether she is a man or a woman. This point is also good to keep in mind in the following.

In light of these considerations, the proposal that the generation of true beliefs about normative states involves inferential activity may be specified as follows: The environment causes individuals, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, to form perceptual beliefs about one or several of its normatively relevant aspects. These beliefs combine with suitable background beliefs. Usually, the latter include individuals' beliefs about their normatively relevant standings and previously acquired beliefs about normatively relevant aspects of the environment. On this basis, individuals infer that the environment in front of their eyes makes some action appropriate or inappropriate.⁸¹

This line of thinking may be exemplified in relation to the individual on the bus and on the beach. In the bus case, the individual forms the perceptual belief that an elderly person enters. Moreover, she has background beliefs to the effect that she is sitting down, that she is

⁸¹ For the sake of simplicity, I am here disregarding beliefs that concern, or take off from, what individuals may hear, touch, smell, and taste. Needless to say, beliefs of this stripe too may figure as premises in inferences to conclusions in the form of beliefs about normative states.

young and generally fit to stand up, and that there are no free seats in the bus. She lets her perceptual belief and background beliefs serve as premises and she infers that she should offer the elderly person her bus seat. Similarly, in the beach example, the individual acquires the perceptual belief that she has arrived at a beach where there are other people present. She combines this belief with background beliefs such as that the beach is not intended for nudists and that she is no longer a child allowed to run around naked. On this basis, she infers that she should not take off all her clothes.

In this fashion, then, the view that the environment may, via the stimulation of individuals' retinal cells, cause them to form true beliefs about normative states is compatible with the claim that these beliefs are not perceptual. That is, even though individuals' use of their eyes plays a role in the generation of their beliefs, these are not perceptual. The reason is that the beliefs are the upshot of inferential activity.

6.3.2 Noninferentially Acquired True Beliefs about Normative States

There is no doubt that beliefs about normative states may be brought about in the inferential way just considered. Still, and as I shall now argue, this is far from always the case. The demonstration of this will closely follow the discussion, in the last chapter, of the perceptual process as characterized by the absence of inferential activity. I shall show that true beliefs about

normative state are sometimes not the result of either conscious, nonconscious, or weakly unconscious inferential activity.⁸²

It is clear that environments may cause individuals, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, to form true beliefs about normative states without these beliefs being the result of conscious inferential activity, that is, inferential activity which is actively noticed. These beliefs about normative states are sometimes phenomenologically immediate. For instance, suppose that an individual is sitting in a crowded bus facing the bus door where an elderly person enters. This individual may react to the situation by instantaneously forming the belief that she should offer her bus seat to the elderly person. Likewise, assume that an individual arrives at a beach where other people are present. In response to the situation, this individual may simply find herself with the belief that it is inappropriate for her to take off all her clothes. Needless to say, these observations are incompatible with the view that individuals always actively notice the presence of some normatively relevant aspect of an environment while using these aspects as basis for an inference to the conclusion that the situation makes it appropriate or inappropriate to act in a given manner.

Also, but perhaps less evidently, environments may cause individuals, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, to acquire true beliefs about normative states, without any nonconscious inferential activity taking place either. When individuals engage in nonconscious inferential activity, they do not notice this activity. Still, they might as well effortlessly have done so: It would only require them to pay attention to the matter. In this fashion, nonconscious inferential activity is always potentially conscious. Applying these points to the present discussion, this

⁸² The possibility that strongly unconscious activity occurs does not need to be rejected. As explained in the last chapter, section 5.4, there is no such thing as strongly unconscious inferential activity among conceptual representations.

means that if individuals' true beliefs about normative states are the upshot of nonconscious inferential activity, then they must be able to notice the activity when paying attention to the matter. Against this background, consider the following scenario: Individuals who are used to Danish traffic signals are enrolled in an experiment. In the first part of the experiment, it is made sure that when they are placed in front of a cross walk where the little man turns green, they do not engage in conscious inferential activity: They do not actively notice any conceptual representation of the little green man and a move from here to the belief that it is appropriate to walk. In the second part, they are once more placed in front of a cross walk where the little man turns green. This time, they have been given the task of attending to whether they engage in any inferential activity in order to acquire their true belief that it is appropriate to traverse the cross walk. It is quite clear, I think, that most, if not all, of the participants in the experiment will answer that they detect no inferential activity.⁸³ It follows from here that, in this situation, they do typically not engage in nonconscious inferential activity. Generalizing from this example, it is reasonable to hold that an environment may cause individuals, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, to acquire true beliefs about normative states without these beliefs being the upshot of either conscious or nonconscious inferential activity.

Lastly, it may be shown that environments may cause individuals, via the activation of their retinal cells, to acquire true beliefs about normative states without any weakly unconscious inferential activity occurring either. Insofar as individuals engage in weakly unconscious inferential activity, they do not actively notice this activity. Still, they might as well have done so if they had made a sustained effort in this direction. In this sense, weakly unconscious inferential

⁸³ The reader is invited to verify this claim by carrying out this, or a similar, experiment herself. In fact, I am using the cross walk case because it is a situation which the reader may easily seek out in order to confirm the claim that she will not, effortlessly, notice any inferential activity taking place. In this spirit, the reader is also invited to perform the next experiment to be discussed.

activity is always potentially conscious too. In relation to the present concerns, this means that if individuals' true beliefs about normative states are the upshot of weakly unconscious inferential activity, then they must be able to notice this activity if making a sustained effort in this direction. Keeping this point in mind, consider again the experiment with the individuals who are used to Danish traffic signals. Assume that the first and second part of the experiment have been carried out and that it has been determined that the participants do not engage in conscious and nonconscious inferential activity. On that basis, the participants are presented with a third task: They are required to make a *sustained* effort to notice whether their belief that it is appropriate to traverse the crosswalk is the result of inferential activity. For instance, they may be placed several times in front of a crosswalk where the little man turns green. Each time they are then invited to notice whether they engage in inferential activity. Or, they may be encouraged to train their ability to concentrate on the task of noticing inferential activity. Once they have done so, they are then expected to make a new attempt to notice whether they engage in inferential activity in order to arrive at the belief that it is appropriate to traverse the crosswalk. Despite making a sustained effort in this manner, I submit, most, if not all, of the participants in the experiment will answer that they do still not detect any inferential activity. This indicates that in this situation, they do typically not engage in weakly unconscious inferential activity. Similar experiments, I think, are likely to yield the same result. Insofar as this is the case, it may, on a more general note, be concluded that an environment may cause individuals, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, to acquire true beliefs about normative states without these beliefs being the upshot of either conscious, nonconscious, or weakly unconscious inferential activity.

In connection with the outline of how normative states may be inferentially acquired, it was explained how background beliefs figure as premises in these inferences. On the one hand,

background beliefs may be assigned the same important role in relation to the generation of noninferentially acquired true beliefs about normative states. More precisely, it may be maintained that individuals' background beliefs synchronically penetrate the process which results in these beliefs.⁸⁴ For example, suppose that an individual noninferentially forms the true belief that she should offer her bus seat to an elderly person. It may be held that the process which led to the formation of this belief is penetrated by background beliefs such as "I am sitting down," "I am young and generally healthy," and "the bus is crowded." On the other hand, it is equally possible to deny background beliefs this prominent role. It may be insisted that even though the process may be construed *as if* penetrated by numerous background beliefs, individuals do not necessarily have conceptual representations corresponding to all – or even any – of these beliefs. Or, if they do, their beliefs do not necessarily have any impact on the process which culminates in the acquisition of true beliefs about normative states. There are nonconceptual representational states and/or nonrepresentational states, it may be claimed, that play the same causal role as that assigned to background beliefs. These states influence or form part of the process which upshot is true beliefs to the effect that a situation of social interaction makes some action appropriate or inappropriate. This line of thinking may likewise be illustrated in terms of an individual who noninferentially acquires the true belief that she should offer her bus seat to an elderly person: The individual should not be viewed as having the background belief that she is sitting down, say. Rather, she should be ascribed a nonconceptual representation or a nonrepresentational state that has the same effect as this background belief.

For the present purposes, there is no need to go into the complicated issue as to when to take it that individuals have background beliefs that synchronically penetrate the process which

⁸⁴ The notion of synchronic penetration was introduced and briefly discussed in chapter 5, section 5.5.

culminates in noninferentially acquired true beliefs about normative states. It suffices to notice that it is rarely the case that individuals directly perceive both all the normatively relevant aspects of an environment and all their normatively relevant standings. Consequently, it is typically the case that their true noninferentially acquired beliefs about normative states may, at the very least, be construed *as if* penetrated by their beliefs about the aspects and standings that they do not directly perceive. In sum, individuals' noninferentially acquired true beliefs about normative states may nearly always, and at the very least, be seen *as if* synchronically penetrated by multiple background beliefs.

Be that as it may, the finding that an environment may sometimes cause individuals, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, noninferentially to form true beliefs about normative states has important implications. It means that these beliefs may be brought about in a way that fit the second and last part of the characterization of perception as process. This being the case, it may be concluded that, by the lights of the account of direct perception, there are situations of social interaction in which individuals directly perceive normative states: Insofar as it is granted that the account states the necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of direct perception, everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe, are not alone in meeting these requirements. Sometimes, they are met by normative states as well. Further elaborating on this point, it is reasonable to hold that, in situations of social interaction, individuals may be reliably able to form perceptual beliefs about normative states: In these situations, they sometimes have the ability directly to perceive that the situation makes some action appropriate or inappropriate. They should be seen as exercising this ability when their true beliefs about the normative states are caused by the environment, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, in a way that does not involve any inferential activity on their part.

6.4 A CASE SPECIFIC ELABORATION: WHEN ARE INDIVIDUALS LIKELY TO HAVE THE ABILITY DIRECTLY TO PERCEIVE NORMATIVE STATES?

As pointed out toward the end of the last chapter, the use of the account of direct perception may be supplemented in various ways. One type of supplement consists in analyses of how perception works in relation to a specific type of object, event, or property that, by the lights of the account of direct perception, qualifies as directly perceptible. I referred to analyses along these lines as case specific elaborations. In order to ensure a fuller appreciation of the finding that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible, a supplement of this type may be added. It may be specified exactly when, in situations of social interaction, individuals are likely to have – and exercise – the ability directly to perceive normative states. In the following, I shall say something on this account while taking as my point of departure the foregoing discussion of normative states as directly perceptible.

To begin with, think back at the contention that in order for a normative state to be directly perceptible, a situation of social interaction must, among other things, cause individuals to form true beliefs about the normative state *via the stimulation of their retinal cells*. As brought out by the discussion above, it is only some situations of social interaction that may cause individuals, via their use of their eyes, to form true beliefs about normative states. This observation makes it natural to wonder whether there is anything that sets these situations apart. Do they have anything in common that is absent in situations where individuals' use of their eyes plays no role in their acquisition of true beliefs about normative states?

This appears to be the case. To make this point, the notion of the normatively relevant aspects of an environment is helpful. It refers, remember, to those properties of an environment that, either singly or in combination, make it appropriate or inappropriate to act in a given way. Equipped with this notion, it may be ventured that the following is distinctive of a situation of social interaction that may cause individuals, via the activation of their retinal cells, to acquire true beliefs about normative state: The situation might also cause a perceptual belief about the presence of at least one of its normatively relevant aspects.⁸⁵ That is, in an environment which may cause individuals, by use of their eyes, to form true beliefs about a normative state, there will also be at least one normatively relevant aspect of the environment that is directly perceptible to them.

This contention may be illustrated in terms of three examples. In the well known bus case, an individual is sitting down, facing the entrance, in a crowded bus. An elderly person enters. The situation causes the individual, via the stimulation of her retinal cells, to form the belief that she should offer her seat to the elderly person. Here, the situation might also cause her to acquire a perceptual belief about one of its normatively relevant aspects: She might acquire the perceptual belief that an elderly person steps on the bus. In the familiar beach case, an individual arrives at the beach where other people are present. The situation causes her, via the use of her eyes, to acquire the belief that she should refrain from taking off all her clothes. Once more, the situation might also cause her to acquire a perceptual belief about two normatively relevant aspects: She might form the perceptual belief that she is now on a beach where other people are present. Finally, consider an example mentioned once above: An individual has her

⁸⁵ It is important to be clear on the significance of the “might” in this formulation. The idea is not that the situation will actually cause individuals to form a perceptual belief to the effect that at least one normatively relevant aspect is present. Rather, the point is that the formation of such a belief must be a standing possibility.

eyes turned towards a tree at some distance from her. Her friend cries out for help from behind the tree. In this case, the situation may not cause the individual, via the stimulation of her retinal cells, to acquire the belief that she should help her friend. Further, the normatively relevant aspect of the situation is not directly perceptible: She might not form a perceptual belief to the effect that her friend cries out for help. She cannot see, but only hear, that her friend cries out for help. As these examples bring out, a situation may cause individuals, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, to form true beliefs about normative states only insofar as at least one normatively relevant aspect is directly perceptible to them.

As part of the discussion of normative states as directly perceptible, another requirement was examined too: In order for it to be directly perceptible that a situation makes some action appropriate or inappropriate, the environment must cause individuals, via the activation of their retinal cells, *noninferentially* to form a true belief about it. It was noticed that a situation of social interaction may also cause individuals, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, *inferentially* to form true beliefs about normative states. This raises the following question: Is there anything that distinguishes situations that cause individuals, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, *noninferentially* to form true beliefs about normative states from those in which they fail to acquire these beliefs in this manner? Again, this appears to be the case. It may plausibly be maintained that individuals are likely to form such beliefs noninferentially insofar as they find themselves acting in a kind of situation to which they have been repeatedly exposed.

To see this, consider a situation of social interaction which does not cause an individual to form a true belief to the effect that the situation makes some action appropriate or inappropriate. First, assume that the individual is told how to infer the presence of the normative state from, among other things, the directly perceptible normatively relevant aspects of the

situation. Typically, she will begin by drawing the suggested inference whenever she finds herself in the situation. As she gets more used to that kind of situation, however, it is likely that she stops drawing any inference to this effect. She becomes reliably able noninferentially to acquire the belief. Diachronic penetration has occurred.⁸⁶ A single example may serve to illustrate this point. An individual is told that if she is sitting down in a crowded bus and an elderly person enters, she should offer her seat to that person. For a start, she draws the inference whenever she finds herself in that situation. Then, after a while she becomes reliably able noninferentially to acquire the belief that, in this situation, she should offer the elderly person her seat. In other words, as the result of having been repeatedly exposed to acting in that kind of situation, she noninferentially forms the belief that the situation makes it appropriate for her to act in this manner.

As a matter of fact, it is only rarely that individuals are told how to infer that some action is appropriate or inappropriate in a given situation. Instead, the most common is that all an individual has to go on is how competent individuals act and how they express approval and disapproval of others' actions. So, suppose next that an individual finds herself in this situation. Then she is likely to pick up on how it is appropriate or inappropriate to act insofar as she is repeatedly exposed to competent individuals' actions and their reactions to others' and her own actions. More specifically, as she becomes used to acting in that kind of situation, she is likely to begin, and eventually become reliably able, noninferentially to form true beliefs about the normative state in question. For instance, a little girl may see how her parents and other adults tend to offer their bus seat to elderly persons. Likewise, she may notice how they express their approval or disapproval of the manner in which she and others act in this situation: Her parents

⁸⁶ The notion of diachronic penetration was introduced and briefly discussed in chapter 5, section 5.5.

and other adults may make comments along the lines of “that was nice of the young man to offer his seat to the old woman” and “you should get up so that the old woman can sit down.” Also, they may send her a smile of approval when she rises to her feet so that an elderly person can sit down. At some point, she is likely to catch on: She becomes able noninferentially to form the belief that a situation of that kind makes it appropriate for her to offer her bus seat to an elderly person. Insofar as this and the preceding account are recognized as plausible stories of how learning may take place, the following appears to be the case: It is first and foremost if individuals have been repeatedly exposed to acting in a given kind of situation of social interaction that this situation may cause them, via the activation of their retinal cells, noninferentially to form a true belief to the effect that it makes some action appropriate or inappropriate.

This point concludes the examination of the manner in which perception works in relation to normative states. In light of it, it is possible to provide an answer to the query as to exactly when, in situations of social interaction, individuals are likely to have – and exercise – the ability directly to perceive normative states. Individuals are likely to have – and exercise – this ability if the situation presents at least one normatively relevant aspect that is directly perceptible and if they have been repeatedly exposed to acting in a situation of that kind.

6.5 THE ABILITY TO ACT APPROPRIATELY

It has been demonstrated that in situations of social interaction, individuals sometimes have the ability directly to perceive whether a situation makes some action appropriate or inappropriate.

This finding makes it possible – and plausible – to hold that individuals’ ability to act appropriately should sometimes be explained by reference to their exercise of this ability directly to perceive that a situation makes some action appropriate or inappropriate. To see this, consider the bus and the beach examples one last time: An individual is on a crowded bus. An elderly person enters and the individual forms the perceptual belief that she should offer her seat to this person. It is reasonable to hold that it is this belief that causes her subsequent action being appropriate: She gets up while saying to the old person “please, you can sit here.” In the same vein, the individual who arrives at the beach acquires the perceptual belief that it is inappropriate of her to strip naked. Once more, it is only natural to think that it is this belief that causes her to act appropriately: She refrains from taking off all her clothes – she leaves on her bikini. Generalizing from these examples, the thesis defended in the present work may be regarded as vindicated. In situations of social interaction, individuals’ ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive the appropriateness of actions.

6.6 THE ACCOUNT AS AN EXTENSION OF ABILITY THEORIES OF PRACTICE

In light of the conclusion just reached, it remains to be shown that the manner in which I have developed and defended my thesis is compatible with the basic claims and arguments associated with ability theories of practice. To this end, I shall consider the two main moves made in order to establish the thesis and show that they are combinable with the basic ability approach.

The first main move was made in chapter 4. Here it was shown that it is possible to make ontological sense of the idea that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible. More

specifically, it was proposed to construe normative states as response-dependent properties. This suggestion is consistent with the basic claims and arguments advanced by ability theorists. The reason is simply that the basic ability approach does not address this issue and that it does not have implications that rule out this stance on the ontological status of normative states.

The second main move was made in chapter 5. Here, the account of direct perception was laid out together with a specification of the ability directly to perceive something to be the case. The latter was explicated as the ability to form true beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of one's eyes is a certain way. Moreover, it was argued that individuals possess this ability insofar as the environment, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, causes them noninferentially to form these beliefs. The basic claims and arguments associated with ability theories are rather silent on the topic of perception. It is recognized that when individuals participate in practices, they often rely on their ability to perceive something to be the case. Yet, the nature and exercise of this ability is not assigned very much attention, to say the least. This being the case, the basic ability approach is compatible with the suggested characterization of individuals' perceptual abilities. But that is not all. Many of the basic claims and arguments associated with ability theories revolve around the point that individuals' actions and executions of actions are usually not caused by rules: Individuals do typically not infer, by appeal to rules, how it is appropriate and/or effective to act and execute actions. Similarly, the characterization of individuals' perceptual abilities stresses that perceptual beliefs are not the upshot of inferential activity, including inferential activity that involves rules. In this fashion, the basic ability approach and the characterization of individuals' perceptual abilities share an emphasis upon the explanatory insignificance of rules. In view of that, the specification of the ability directly to perceive

something to be the case should be regarded as being not merely compatible with, but even very much in line with, the basic claims and arguments associated with ability theories.

The two moves paved the way for showing, in the present chapter, that in situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states. Insofar as these moves are consistent with the basic ability approach, the development and defense of this thesis is compatible with it too. Accordingly, the account I have offered may serve as a supplement to the basic ability approach to practices.

6.7 SUMMARY

The main part of the present chapter has been devoted to arguing that normative states sometimes meet the necessary and sufficient conditions stated by the account of direct perception. More specifically, it was first established that individuals may form beliefs about normative states that fit the characterization of perception as a state. Next, it was demonstrated that the manner in which individuals acquire these beliefs about normative states sometimes fits the characterization of perception as process. On this basis, it was concluded that, in situations of social interaction, individuals sometimes have the ability directly to perceive normative states. Moreover, the conclusion was further specified in terms of an analysis of when, in situations of social interaction, individuals are likely to possess and exercise this ability.

Equipped with the insight that normative states are sometimes directly perceptible, it was possible to explain individuals' ability to act appropriately in situations of social interaction. It

was shown that, in these situations, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states. This is the thesis which I set out to develop and defend. Finally, it was made clear that the manner in which this thesis has been worked out is compatible with the basic claims and arguments associated with ability theories of practice. This means that the analysis may be viewed as an elaboration of the basic ability approach to practices.

7.0 CONCLUSION

In the present work, I have developed and defended the thesis that, in situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states specified as the appropriateness of actions. It is now time to recap my discussion.

Chapter 2 and 3 served to introduce the thesis. More specifically, the thesis was presented and motivated as a natural way to supplement an important subset of theories of practice: Ability theories of practice. In chapter 2, I began by making clear my focus on ability theories as advanced within the social sciences and the philosophy of the social sciences. Next, I provided an overview of the basic ability approach, that is, the main claims and arguments associated with ability theories of practice. In this connection, I noticed that ability theorists of practice are concerned with individuals' ability to act appropriately. But how, more precisely, is this ability on individuals' part to be understood? This question is of central importance to ability theorists. I put forward my thesis as a partial answer to it: In situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their ability directly to perceive normative states.

In chapter 3, I moved on to examine three highly influential ability theories of practice: Garfinkel's, Bourdieu's, and Giddens' theories. The discussion of their views exemplified some of the main characteristics of the basic ability approach and the different ways in which this

framework may be filled in. Further, it was shown how all three ability theorists toy with the idea that individuals' ability to act appropriately is sometimes underwritten by their ability directly to perceive normative states. Or, they invite an elaboration of their views along these lines insofar as they work with a very broad notion of the scope of perception. For this reason, I stated, working out and establishing the thesis should be regarded as an obvious or natural way to extend the basic ability approach to practices.

Thus presented and motivated, chapter 4, 5, and 6 were devoted to the actual development and defense of the thesis. The thesis involves the claim that individuals have the ability directly to perceive normative states. The discussion in all three chapters mainly revolved around this contention. In chapter 4, I showed that it is possible to make ontological sense of this idea. To this end, I presented an analysis of Gibson's notion of affordances as response-dependent properties of environments. This account served as model for a similar proposal in relation to normative states: These, too, may be construed, realistically, as response-dependent properties. Further, I explained how this ontological stance is compatible with normative states being sometimes directly perceptible: Given this ontological construal of normative states, there is nothing, ontologically speaking, that stands in the way of holding that, in situation of social interaction, normative states are sometimes directly perceptible.

This point still leaves it open whether it is really the case that individuals sometimes have the ability directly to perceive normative states. In chapter 5, I paved the way for a positive answer to this query. I took as starting point the assumption that everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe, are within the scope of perception. Keeping this requirement in mind, I examined perception from the perspective of its being both a state and a process. The upshot was the account of direct perception. It states the necessary and sufficient conditions for

the occurrence of direct perception. Finally, in light of this analysis, I offered the following characterization of the ability directly to perceive something to be the case: It is the ability to form perceptual beliefs to the effect that the environment in front of one's eyes is a certain way. Individuals exercise this ability if the environment, via the stimulation of their retinal cells, causes them noninferentially to acquire such beliefs.

In chapter 6, I put the account of direct perception to work. I demonstrated that insofar as it states the necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of direct perception, it is not only everyday phenomena, such as tomatoes and their being ripe, that qualify as directly perceptible. Also, in situations of social interaction, its conditions are sometimes met by normative states. By its lights, individuals may sometimes, in situations of social interaction, be seen as having the ability directly to perceive normative states. Once I had reached this conclusion, I went on to argue that if individuals act appropriately while exercising their ability directly to perceive normative states, then it is only reasonable to maintain that their direct perception of normative states is what causes their actions being appropriate. On that basis, I concluded that, in situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately *is* sometimes a function of their ability directly to perceive normative states. Finally, I briefly showed that my development and defense of the thesis is compatible with the main arguments and claims associated with ability theories of practice. This means that the account may serve as a supplement to the basic ability approach to practices: Ability theorists of practice may, without problem, avail themselves of the analysis. By way of ending, let me say a few words as to how they may do so.

Most obviously, ability theorists of practice may draw on the analysis when studying specific practices that involve social interaction. The thesis states that, in situations of social

interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately is sometimes underwritten by their exercise of the ability directly to perceive normative states. Moreover, as part of the discussion, it was clarified when individuals' ability to act appropriately is likely to be thus underwritten: A specification was provided as to when, in these situations, individuals are likely to possess and exercise the ability directly to perceive normative states. Ability theorists of practice may bring these insights into play when studying individuals' ability to act appropriately in particular practices that involve social interaction. The insights put them in a position better to understand this ability on the part of the individuals they study. Since ability theorists are immensely impressed by, and repeatedly stress, individuals' ability to act appropriately this is an important use to which the account may be put.

It is not the only one. The account I have offered involves a detailed characterization of the ability directly to perceive something to be the case. Individuals do not exercise this ability merely in relation to normative states. They perceive a lot of other things to be the case too. Moreover, they do not solely exercise this ability when engaging in practices that involve social interaction. They exercise it in practices circumscribed in all kinds of ways. The detailed specification of individuals' ability directly to perceive something to be the case may serve as the basis for the study of these different exercises of the ability and/or of the different kinds of contexts in which the ability is exercised. For instance, an ability theorist may be interested in scientific practices and hence she may want to study an instance of practices thus circumscribed. To this end, she may rely on the characterization of the ability directly to perceive something to be the case. The characterization may serve as the basis for a better understanding and explanation of individuals' perceptual abilities and the role these play in this specific context.

So far I have only stressed how the analysis I have offered may be employed by ability theorists when studying particular practices. There is also another and rather different way in which the account may be put to use. The account involves a specification of the ability directly to perceive something to be the case and of the manner in which this ability relates to the ability to act appropriately. As such, it may inspire, and serve as model for, further attempts to elaborate the basic ability approach in terms of detailed analyses of the abilities that individuals exercise when participating in practices and of the way these abilities interrelate. An example of an analysis of this sort might be the examination of the ability to execute actions and the relation between this ability and the ability directly to perceive something to be the case. Or, it might be the study of the ability to act appropriately and the manner in which this ability relates to other abilities than individuals' perceptual ones. As noticed in the introduction, ability theorists of practice hardly ever provide such specifications. Accordingly, there is also ample room for the further elaboration of the basic ability approach along these lines.

In this fashion, then, there are various ways in which ability theorists may draw on my development and defense of the thesis that, in situations of social interaction, individuals' ability to act appropriately sometimes depends on their ability directly to perceive normative states. The analysis is of both practical and theoretical value, as it may be put.

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