

# The “New Mind” revisited, or minding the content/vehicle distinction: a response to Manzotti and Pepperell

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Received: 13 February 2013 / Accepted: 6 March 2013 / Published online: 5 April 2013  
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**Abstract** I argue that Manzotti and Pepperell’s presentation of the New Mind not only obfuscates pertinent differences between externalist views of various strengths, but also, and most problematically, conflates a distinction that cannot, without consequences, be conflated. We can talk about the contents of the mind and/or about the vehicles of those contents. But we should not conflate the two. Conflation of contents and vehicles comes with a price. In Manzotti and Pepperell’s case, it undermines claims they make about the implications of the New Mind.

**Keywords** Extended mind · Externalism · Consciousness · Content · Vehicles

## 1 Introduction

“[T]he contemporary views about the mind are changing,” Manzotti and Pepperell (2012, p. 2) tell us. “Certain scientific, philosophical and technological factors” vindicate a view of mentality according to which the mind is not contained within its cranial prison; the mind instead is “spread out through the body and into the environment” (*ibid.*). Manzotti and Pepperell dub this externalist conception of the mind “New Mind” (*ibid.*).<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I argue that Manzotti and Pepperell’s presentation of the New Mind not only obfuscates pertinent differences between externalist

views of various strengths, but also, and most problematically, conflates a distinction that cannot, without consequences, be conflated. We can talk about the contents of the mind and/or about the vehicles of those contents. But we should not conflate the two. Conflation of contents and vehicles comes with a price (Dennett 1991; Hurley 1998). In Manzotti and Pepperell’s case, it undermines claims they make about the implications of the New Mind.

## 2 Contents vs. vehicles

*Mental* content is the content possessed by mental states.<sup>2</sup> But what is *content*? To a first approximation, we can say that contents are what thoughts, beliefs, desires, perceptions, etc., are made of. Advancing a more precise definition of content turns out to be a trickier task, for the relevant literature offers more than one definition of mental content. For instance, some hold that the content of a mental state is that which the state is about: an object, property, or state of affairs. Others maintain that contents are modes of presentations—that is, ways in which something is presented to us. Yet others combine these two understandings of content into one.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, we need not adjudicate between

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This paper is a response to the paper: “The new mind: Thinking beyond the head”. doi:10.1007/s00146-012-0405-3

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<sup>1</sup> The aforesaid conception of the mind, as the authors themselves recognize, isn’t really *new*. Not only does it have a long philosophical history, it has also been the subject of a vigorous debate in the last fifteen or so years. (see, e.g., Clark 1997, 2008, 2010; Clark and Chalmers 1998, Rowlands 1999, 2003, 2006, 2010; Hurley 1998; Rupert 2004, 2010; Adams and Aizawa 2001, 2010a, b; Wilson 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Do mental *processes*, in addition to mental states, possess mental content? Here, I shall assume that they do but only derivatively. That is to say, mental processes possess mental content only insofar as the products of such processes—that is, mental states—can be contentful.

<sup>3</sup> For an outstanding presentation of the different accounts of mental content, I direct the reader to Hopp (2011, ch. 1).