

# Representationalism and Anti-Representationalism About Perceptual Experience

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2013

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## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to my supervisors, Bill Brewer and Matthew Soteriou, for their invaluable help and advice throughout the writing of this thesis, to my examiners, Tim Crane and Naomi Eilan for their generous comments and suggestions, and to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding my research. Thanks also to Avery Archer, Thomas Baldwin, Alex Byrne, Quassim Cassam, Wesley Chai, Tony Cheng, Sarah Cooper, Joe Cunningham, Nadja El Kassar, Juan Camilo Espejo-Serna, Michael Fenton, Craig French, Johan Gersel, Thomas Hodgson, Ivan Ivanov, Mark Kalderon, Alex Kelly, Hasen Khudairi, Peter Lamarque, Hemdat Lerman, Guy Longworth, Brent Madison, Mike Martin, Anna Marmodoro, Richard Moore, John Morrison, Alva Noë, Christopher Peacocke, Simon Prosser, Louise Richardson, Johannes Roessler, Kranti Saran, Miguel Angel Sebastian, Susanna Schellenberg, Liam Shields, Matthias Somers, Karen Somers-Hall, Tom Stoneham, Charles Travis, Michael Tye and Barnaby Walker for their helpful suggestions, discussions and support along the way. (Any errors and inaccuracies of course remain my own.)

Most of all, I dedicate this thesis to my wife for her endless love and patience, and to my parents, who always encouraged me to think.

## Declaration

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for a degree at another university.

## Abstract

Many philosophers have held that perceptual experience is fundamentally a matter of perceivers being in particular representational states. Such states are said to have representational content, i.e. accuracy or veridicality conditions, capturing the way that things, according to that experience, appear to be. In this thesis I argue that the case against *representationalism*—the view that perceptual experience is fundamentally and irreducibly representational—that is set out in Charles Travis’s ‘The Silence of the Senses’ (2004) constitutes a powerful, but much misunderstood and neglected argument against this prevailing philosophical orthodoxy.

In chapter 2, I present an interpretation of Travis’s arguments that poses a dilemma for the representationalist concerning the indeterminacy and availability of perceptual content. Chapters 3 and 4 evaluate a variety of arguments in favour of such content based upon the nature of appearances, or ‘looks’, including those by Byrne (2009), Siegel (2010) and Schellenberg (2011b), each of which I find to be problematic. Finally, chapters 5 and 6 examine the relationship between representational content and phenomenal character, i.e. what perceptual experience is subjectively like, outlining some potential responses to Travis’s anti-representationalism. These include the external individuation of content and self-knowledge, and the operation of perceptual discriminatory capacities, the latter of which does not necessarily favour a representationalist account of experience.

I conclude that Travis’s arguments establish substantive constraints upon the nature and role of perceptual content. Moreover, I argue that the debate centres less upon the existence of such content than its explanatory role, particularly in relation to phenomenal character and the contents of other mental states: belief, intention, thought, knowledge, and so on. This in turn highlights the need for representationalists to better clarify the role of the contents their theories posit, and why such theories constitute a better explanation of the relevant phenomena than the corresponding non-representational view.

# 1. Introduction

## *Representationalism & anti-representationalism*

### 1.1. Background

The notion that perceptual experience is *representational* or has *representational content* has become something close to orthodoxy in recent philosophy of perception. Drawing upon the notions of belief and thought, philosophers have sought to characterise perceptual experience in terms of its ‘content’, or how, in experience, a perceiving subject ‘represents’ the world as being. An alternative philosophical tradition, however, sees perceptual experience as being essentially *presentational*. That is, to perceive something consists in being immediately and directly acquainted with some mind-independent object and its properties. To the extent that this presentational view is incompatible with the more formal notion of representation—and it is not clear that they *are* incompatible—some of its advocates are concerned to argue that there is no need, or room, for the notion of representation in a philosophical account of perceptual experience. It is, to borrow an image from Wittgenstein (1953: §271), a wheel that may be turned, but that does not form part of the mechanism.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, some doubt the very coherence of the representationalist account.

This divergence of views may be traced back at least as far as David Hume, who famously argued that the objects of perception cannot be the familiar mind-independent objects of the physical world, but are rather ideas or ‘sense impressions’ in the mind (Hume 1999: XII.i, 201). Whilst few modern-day philosophers would endorse Hume’s ‘argument from illusion’ for the conclusion that the objects of perception are mental and not physical in nature,<sup>2</sup> the above views can be seen as offering different responses to the challenge it presents. The presentational view rejects Hume’s argument from illusion as unsound,<sup>3</sup> instead

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<sup>1</sup> A comment that is echoed by Travis (2004: 86).

<sup>2</sup> Robinson (1994) being a notable exception.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Reid 1997: VI.xxii, 186; Snowdon 1990.

characterising perception as having an ‘act–object’ structure in which the subject is directly confronted by, or acquainted with, external objects and/or their properties. This yields a *relational conception* of experience according to which perception cannot be explained in terms of anything that omits either of its *relata* (e.g. representation). The *representational view*, on the other hand, accepts Hume’s contention that perception cannot be accounted for in terms of the presentation of external objects alone. Unlike Hume’s ‘ideas’, however, representational contents are not themselves perceived, but rather are a way of capturing the connection between perceptual subjects and objects in a metaphysically neutral way—something that many advocates of the presentational view consider to be either misguided or impossible. The precise reasons for thinking that subjects perceive the world by representing it (albeit more or less distinctly) to be some particular way, however, are less than clear, and have become a matter of considerable dispute within the literature.

In this thesis, I aim to contribute to this debate by articulating and evaluating a series of challenges to the view that perceptual experiences have specific representational contents, and consequently whether representation is a necessary condition for perception. In particular, I examine a number of arguments arising from Charles Travis’s ‘The Silence of the Senses’ (Travis 2004) that purport to show that there is no role for the notion of representation in a philosophical account of perceptual experience. If sound, these arguments present a direct challenge to the representationalist strand of Hume’s legacy, which has often—somewhat misleadingly in my view—been placed in opposition to a so-called *relational view* of experience. According to the relational view (of which there are many variants), perceptual experience is not most fundamentally a matter of representing the world to be some way, but of standing in a particular relation—the *perceptual relation* (Crane 2006)—to the mind-independent objects of experience. It is therefore fundamentally presentational in character. Supporters of such a view include Charles Travis (*ibid*; forthcoming), John Campbell (2002), M. G. F. Martin (2002b) and Bill Brewer (2011), all of whom deny that the notion of representation plays a fundamental role, or in some cases any role at all, in a philosophical account of perceptual experience.

In what follows, I examine the effectiveness of Travis’s arguments in ruling out various forms and accounts of representational content in order to clarify both (i) the nature of the challenge to the representational view, and (ii) the extent to which this supports a non-representational view of perceptual experience. I conclude that the arguments set out in chapter 2 below present a serious and important challenge to the prevailing representationalist orthodoxy—one that has yet to be adequately addressed by its advocates. Moreover, these arguments offer a means of framing the debate in terms of the theoretical commitments and explanatory role of representational content—in particular its role in explaining the subjective phenomenological character of experience—in a way that helps to clarify the various issues at stake. Thus, instead of the potentially misleading dichotomy between ‘representational’ and

‘presentational’, or relational, views of experience we find that there are (at least) two distinct roles that representational contents are thought to play, one of which turns out to be highly problematic. Thus, not only do Travis’s arguments rule out many otherwise seemingly plausible accounts of representational content (chapters 3 and 4), but they also present a challenge to the representational theory’s ability to account for how we are able to recognise, or come to know, the representational contents of experience (chapters 5 and 6). Indeed, the issue of recognisability, as I will call it, turns out to lie at the heart of the debate.

## 1.2. Perceptual Experience and Representation

Before providing an overview of the various arguments and chapters of my thesis below, it will be useful to first establish some terminology concerning the concepts to which it relates. Foremost amongst these are the notions of *perceptual experience*, *phenomenal character* and *representational content*.

### 1.2.1. Perceptual experience

The term ‘perception’, at least as it applies to the present debate, refers to *sensory perception*: touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing, and so on. It is therefore distinct from what might be called, in a more general sense, *mere perception*, as this term is sometimes used to emphasise the subjectivity of human belief or experience. Nevertheless, there is a distinctively subjective aspect to sensory perception in terms of the subjective character of the experiences that individual perceptual subjects enjoy, or what I will call their *phenomenal character* (1.2.2).

In the sense in which I use the term below, an *experience* is a perceptual episode in one or more sense modalities that occurs to some individual subject and is of some determinate duration.<sup>4</sup> Such token (i.e. particular) occurrences of experiences might more properly be called ‘*experiencings*’, since the term ‘experience’ is potentially ambiguous between a general *experience-type* (a universal) and its particular instantiations. Nevertheless, I do not propose to take a stand on this issue here. Similarly, in referring to (perceptual) experience *simpliciter*, I do not mean to exclude the possibility of other types of experiences, such as thinkings, feelings, imaginings, and so on. Since this thesis is primarily concerned with the philosophy of perception, however, I will use the term ‘experience’ to refer to *perceptual* experience throughout, except where otherwise noted.

Somewhat unfortunately, philosophers have tended to take visual perceptual experience to be paradigmatic of perceptual experience in general. This is perhaps due to its rich and complex structure, which is more obviously amenable to introspection than, say, touch or smell. Alternatively, it may be because out of all the external senses, vision most obviously seems to connect us

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<sup>4</sup> I will remain neutral on the question of whether experiences can be literally instantaneous, or must be of non-zero duration, though philosophical considerations concerning our experience of the time and change point to the latter (Gallagher 1998).

with external objects in a—at least *prima facie*—peculiarly immediate and direct way. Ironically, these very features may be what sets vision apart from the other senses as something of a special case, at least in terms of its complexity, though each of these points can to a greater or lesser extent also be said to apply to other sensory modalities. Indeed, many advocates of representational content, whether explicitly or implicitly, take their accounts to generalise more or less unproblematically across the senses. For present purposes, however, I will follow philosophical convention in taking visual experiences to be at least illustrative of perceptual experience in general, if not paradigmatically so. As such, none of the main arguments I give below are intended to be peculiar to vision. In cases where particular senses—smell, touch, proprioception, etc.—may be thought to pose particular difficulties or problems, I will set these to one side to concentrate on the more general point. It is a substantive question, however, to what extent both representational and relational theories of perception apply to each of the sense modalities, as well as to the multi-sensory nature of perceptual experience as a whole. These, however, are not problems I consider in detail here.

There exists a further issue concerning whether ‘perception’ and its cognates, as well as ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’ and so on, should be taken as success terms. Some philosophers, as well as many non-philosophers, use perceptual terms to denote only genuine (i.e. non-deviant or illusory) perceptual episodes. On this usage, a subject’s ‘seeing’ a tree, for example, entails the existence of the tree that is seen. Or, to put the point another way, if there were no such tree, then they could not have seen it. On another usage of ‘seeing’, however, one might be said to ‘see’ a dagger even though one is exposed to no such object—when experiencing a hallucination, for example. This use of ‘seeing’ is neutral about the existence of its objects, instead answering to the disjunctive criterion that *either* the perceptual episode is a genuine perceptual seeing (i.e. that there is such an object) *or* it is subjectively indistinguishable from such an experience (e.g. it is a hallucination or imagining). What goes for ‘seeing’ also goes for (mere) ‘perceiving’ such that many philosophers take sensory imaginings or hallucinations to be cases of *perceptual* experience, as opposed to some other kind of experience that is merely subjectively indistinguishable from it. On this terminological point, I take ‘perception’ and ‘experience’ to be committed to the existence of the objects or properties to which they refer; i.e. they are success terms. In deference to common usage, however, I will extend the term ‘perceptual experience’ to include hallucinations and other perception-like episodes, and not only genuine (i.e. appropriately caused veridical) perceivings. This should not be taken to beg important philosophical questions concerning whether hallucinations and genuine perception are of the same psychological kind—a point that disjunctivists deny.<sup>5</sup> However, for convenience and consistency with the literature it will be useful to group all such experiences under a single heading.

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<sup>5</sup> Hinton (1973), Snowdon (1990; 2005), McDowell (1982; 1986), Martin (2002; 2004; 2006).

### 1.2.2. *Phenomenal character*

It is intuitively evident that perceptual experiences have a certain subjective aspect that constitutes (or can constitute) part of the subject's conscious state. I will call this its *phenomenal character*. The phenomena in question are perfectly familiar ones and reflect the sense in which, for example, the experience of a red tomato differs from that of a green one, or the feel of a rough surface differs from the feel of a smooth surface, and so on. This may variously be described as 'subjective character', 'phenomenology', 'what it's like', 'raw feel', and so on, and is no doubt due to some combination of the qualities of the relevant experience, its objects, and the particular sensations that they evoke. The precise definition and explanatory role of phenomenal character, however, are contentious—indeed, this turns out to be one of the central issues in the present debate (chapters 5, 6). Some theorists reject the idea that perceptual experiences have any additional qualitative aspect over and above their content, whether this be representational or object-involving. Nevertheless, it is important to mark the role that phenomenal character plays both in conscious experience and in philosophical accounts of perception more generally.

For present purposes, I take the term 'phenomenal character' to be neutral both between the various metaphysical accounts of it (e.g. Naïve Realist or representational) as well as between what is subjectively distinguishable to the subject having the experience and what M. G. F. Martin (2002a: 186) has called its 'phenomenal nature'. Some philosophers take it as definitional that two experiences which are subjectively indistinguishable from one another—e.g. a genuine perception and a qualitatively matching hallucination or illusion—have the same (i.e. type-identical) phenomenal character. Others, notably Martin and other Naïve Realists, argue that an experience's phenomenal character extends beyond what is discriminable to the subject so that two qualitatively matching experiences may possess differing phenomenal characters, the precise nature of which may not be apparent to the subject. For the avoidance of confusion, I take phenomenal character to include *at least* what is discriminable to the subject in terms of the subjectively distinguishable phenomenology of perceptual experience, but that it may extend to aspects of experience that are not readily available to introspection.<sup>6</sup> Thus, according to this usage, an experience's phenomenal character may, though need not, outstrip what is subjectively distinguishable to the subject of the relevant experience.

### 1.2.3. *Representational content*

Since I will be considering whether experiences have representational content, it is important to be clear about what does and does not constitute 'representation' in this context. Paradigm cases of representation include: man-

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'introspection' is another somewhat unfortunate term of art, suggesting as it does a perception-like faculty for gaining self-knowledge concerning the contents of one's experience. For present purposes I take this term to be synonymous with first-personal reflection upon experience without prejudicing the nature of, or processes involved in, self-reflection (cf. 6.3.2).

made artefacts such as photographs, which represent the visible appearances of objects; maps, which represent spatial and geographical features; and language, which represents the content of thoughts and discourse. Representations are standardly thought to admit of a *content–vehicle distinction* such that wherever we find representation, we find both representational *vehicles*—photos, maps, utterances, etc.—and representational *contents*, i.e. what is represented by those vehicles. It is therefore of the essence of representation that *what does the representing* is logically distinct from *what is being represented*—in this case the objects and properties of perception.<sup>7</sup>

Applying the notion of representation to the realm of mental phenomena is notoriously problematic, but typically involves the attribution of content to a series of representational vehicles that includes the brain and central nervous system.<sup>8</sup> It is a substantive philosophical question whether the vehicles of mental representation and content are limited to the brain and body or whether they extend to features of the subject’s physical or linguistic environment. This question has particular implications in the philosophy of perception, this being the faculty (if any) by which subjects become aware of, or are connected to, their surrounding environment, thereby creating the possibility of objective thought. Indeed, the ability of our perceptual faculties to ground thought and knowledge is one of the issues that drives much of the present debate. According to various forms of *semantic externalism*, the content of mental representations not only supervene upon the subject’s bodily state, but also upon aspects of their environment (Kripke 1972; Putnam 1975; Burge 1979, 1986). Similarly, various forms of *vehicle externalism* attribute a representation-bearing role to objects and events beyond the subject’s physical body (Hurley 1998: ch. 8). Again, I will not take a stance on these issues here except insofar as they impact upon the status and role of representational content in perception (chapters 5 and 6). My thesis, however, concerns the *contents* of perceptual experiences rather than their vehicles as I take the precise nature of the latter to be a primarily empirical question. The nature of perceptual content, however, is not necessarily something that can be settled solely by scientific investigation since it also concerns the function(s) and explanatory role(s) of such content in accounting for a subject’s mental life, thought and behaviour. There is also, as I discuss in chapters 2, 6 and elsewhere, room for the idea that experiences may have *multiple* contents, each fulfilling a different explanatory role (cf. Chalmers 2006; Crane forthcoming). This approach is not, however, immune to the criticisms set out below (2.2.2).

Central to the notion of representation and the content–vehicle distinction is the idea of one thing varying in accordance with another, or *covariance*. Contrary to Berkeley, as Reid (1977: V.xiii, 74) pointed out, there is no need for mental representations to literally *resemble* their contents—indeed, the idea seems absurd. My belief that I am seeing a red rose is not itself red, nor is it a

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<sup>7</sup> A notable exception is Sedivy (2004), who has questioned whether this distinction is applicable to mental representation.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, by ‘content’ I mean *representational* content.

rose, and so on. The relevant covariance must therefore take place across different qualities, such as correspondence between the perceptible attributes of some external object and the firing patterns of neuronal assemblies in the optic nerve and brain, for example. Such covariance is not, however, sufficient for representation in the sense that is relevant here. In order for there to be representation, there must also be the possibility of *misrepresentation* such that the relevant content can either be accurate or inaccurate. For example, if I think that some actual violets are red when they are in fact blue, then my thought does not accurately represent the world, and is therefore non-veridical, or false. Conversely, when the conditions specified by my mental content are satisfied, then my thought can be said to be an accurate representation, and so is veridical, or true. The notion that content entails a series of accuracy or veridicality conditions is central to the notion of representation outlined here, though the precise nature of these conditions is open to debate. Any notion of content that rejects this entailment is therefore not a form of representation in the sense that I mean here, but rather relates to a more generic use of the term to mean *what a perception* (thought, belief, etc.) *is of*—or what I shall call its *objects*.<sup>9</sup>

Complications arise when we consider that even representational contents which are satisfied, and so veridical, can be the result of deviant perceptual experiences—the direct stimulation of the brain via electrodes, or perceptual hallucinations, for example. In such cases, even though the *content* of the experience may be accurate, the mental state that bears that content is not related to its objects in the appropriate way, yielding a subjectively matching hallucination.<sup>10</sup> Thus, whilst genuine perception (i.e. not including perceptual illusions and hallucination) is by definition veridical, not all veridical (in the present sense) perceptual experiences are genuine perceptions. According to the representational view, then, a perceptual state must both (a) possess representational content whose accuracy conditions are satisfied, and (b) be appropriately related—whether causally or otherwise—to the objects that make the content veridical in order to constitute genuine perception.<sup>11</sup> Opponents of the view deny that any such characterisation can be given. For present purposes, however, I will differentiate between *veridicality*, meaning accuracy or satisfaction of content, and *types of experience*—perception, hallucination, illusion, and so on.

The above conditions on representational states—the content–vehicle distinction, the ability to misrepresent, veridicality—rule out a large number of ostensible cases as being representational in the appropriate sense. These include, though are not limited to:

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Martin forthcoming a: ch. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Sometimes called a ‘veridical hallucination’; e.g. Johnston 2006: 273.

<sup>11</sup> Siegel (2010: 36) calls these conditions ‘weak veridicality’ and ‘strong veridicality’, respectively, where the latter entails the former. However, this terminology is potentially misleading as it places what are arguably two quite different kinds of conditions under the same banner.

- (i) **Causal traces**, such as tree rings, which are sometimes said to ‘represent’ the age of the tree. Here, ‘representation’ is synonymous with mere causal correlation since, in the normal case, the number of rings correspond to the age of the tree in years. However, as Travis (2004: 58–59) points out, this cannot be considered representation in the stronger sense since we would not say that number of rings *misrepresented* (i.e. represented falsely) the tree’s age where the number of rings did not so correspond. Similarly, the mere activity of neurons in the brain or nervous system—for example in the retina or visual cortex—in response to external stimuli is insufficient for representation, though under appropriate circumstances such activity may constitute *vehicles* of representations. Such stimulus–response patterns are merely causal traces of external events and interactions that, whilst they may carry information, do not amount to representation unless part of a more complex intensional system.<sup>12</sup> Rather, such traces *indicate* or are factively correlated with their immediate or distal causes.
- (ii) **Stand-ins, markers or proxies** such as a piece in a board game or a pin in a map. In the final case, such a marker may be said to ‘represent’ a location of some real-world object or geographical feature that corresponds to its position on the map. However, strictly speaking, it is the *location* of the marker within the representational system of the map that represents a geographical location, and not the marker itself. Such a marker does not represent a real world object unless it *depicts* it in some literal sense—as a picture of church depicts a church, for example. Similarly, a piece in a board game does not represent the player in the sense that is relevant here, but rather serves as a proxy whose location, rather than the marker or piece itself, represents that player’s location in the game. Again, such ‘stand-ins’ may form part of, or draw upon the representational properties of, a more complex representational system, but they do not themselves represent in the sense of ‘representation’ that is relevant here.

Whilst it is commonplace to talk about each of the above examples as forms of ‘representation’, they are not the kinds of representation that theorists take to constitute mental representation. This is perhaps better captured by the philosophical notion of *intentionality* or *aboutness*, i.e. intentional directedness towards some object or property which that state or content is about. Indeed, since all other kinds of representation, whether directly or indirectly, owe their representational status to some form of mental representation, the notion of intentionality may be thought to have a certain kind of priority or privileged status within the debate about representational content.

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<sup>12</sup> In neuroscience and other scientific literature, ‘representation’ is often used to denote just this sort of information carrying. This is, however, a weaker sense of representation than the one intended here.

In the following chapter I establish the more precise notion of *p-representation*—intended to suggest ‘perceptual representation’—with which I will be concerned throughout the rest of this thesis. It is an open question at this point whether perceptual experience, as I have defined it, involves *p-representation*, and if so, what the conditions for *p-representation* are. Indeed, whether there *is* such a thing as *p-representation*, and what form its contents might take, are two of the main questions with which I engage.

#### 1.2.4. *Representationalism and relationalism*

As suggested above, much of the recent debate about representational content in experience has been concerned with the distinction between views that accord representational content a fundamental, and so irreducible, role in a philosophical account of perceptual states, and those that deny that it has any such role. I will label these positions *representationalism* and *anti-representationalism*, respectively.

The central claim of representationalism can be summarised as follows:

REP    The notions of *representation* and *representational content* make a fundamental, and so ineliminable, contribution to explaining the nature and role of perceptual psychological states in thought and behaviour.

Anti-representationalism is simply the denial of this claim. Call this *NREP*. Note that representationalism is not to be confused with the position commonly known as *intentionalism*, which is a thesis about the representational basis of phenomenal character (Byrne 2001). Intentionalism presupposes representationalism in the sense that I use that term here, but it is not identical to it since one could coherently hold representationalism to be true and yet reject intentionalism (chapter 5). Unfortunately, some philosophers have used the term ‘representationalism’ as a synonym for intentionalism, but I propose to keep them separate.

A further position claims that the perceptual relation between subject and object plays a similarly irreducible role in the explanation of perceptual psychological states. I will label this position *relationalism*. Relationalists claim that:

REL    The subject’s relation to the mind-independent objects (and/or their properties) of sensory perception makes a fundamental, and so ineliminable, contribution to explaining the nature and role of perceptual psychological states in thought and behaviour.

Note that relationalism, as I have formulated it, is a claim about genuine (i.e. non-deviant) perception. REL is therefore silent on the status of non-veridical perceptual experiences, such as hallucinations and illusions. Anti-relationalism is simply the denial of REL. Call this *NREL*.

Now, it is a substantive question which combinations of these theses are compatible with one another; that is, whether it is possible, or indeed coherent, to be both a representationalist and a relationalist—or indeed an anti-representationalist and an anti-relationalist (the ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ versions of each view are obviously incompatible with one another). Those who take these positions to be compatible can be said to adopt some form of *hybrid* or *compatibilist* view concerning the nature of perceptual states, as discussed in chapters 5 and 6. The conjunction of REP and REL—call this COM—therefore entails that:

COM Both representational content and the subject’s relation to the objects or properties of perception play a fundamental, and so ineliminable, role in explaining the nature and role of perceptual psychological states in thought and behaviour.

There are further substantive philosophical questions as to whether REP, REL and COM are plausible or coherent positions, and what the motivations for holding them might be. These chiefly fall under the headings of

- (i) *Psychological*: explaining the nature or types of perceptual states for the purpose of giving a comprehensive account of thought and behaviour;
- (ii) *Epistemological*: explaining the justificatory role of such states in the ability of conscious subjects to gain knowledge and awareness of their environment;
- (iii) *Phenomenological*: accounting for the distinctive nature and contribution that the phenomenal character of perceptual experiences make to the mental life of perceptual subjects.
- (iv) *Metaphysical*: accounting for the nature of the relation between perceivers, experiences, objects and properties in the world.

These explanatory projects are not mutually exclusive, nor do they neatly map onto the taxonomy of views I sketched out above. Indeed, a large part of this thesis will be devoted to clarifying and untangling the roles of the above claims and positions in satisfying these various desiderata for a philosophically satisfying account of sensory perception, as is summarised below.

### 1.3. Overview

Chapter 2 presents an interpretation of Charles Travis’s influential but, in my view, often misunderstood paper, ‘The Silence of the Senses’ (2004; forthcoming). In it, Travis aims to show via a series of arguments that the notions of *representation* and *representational content* have no place in a philosophical account of perceptual experience. Foremost among these arguments is the ‘argument from looks’ in which Travis sets up a dilemma for

the representationalist about perceptual experience. In order for perceptual representations, or what I call *p-representations*, to perform the role their proponents assign them, they would, according to Travis, have to pick out some way that the world must be in order for them to be veridical; i.e. their accuracy conditions. However, p-representations are incapable of doing this in a way that is consistent with our being able to recognise, i.e. grasp or gain reflective access to, those representational contents. Since such recognisability is, according to Travis, a necessary condition for representation, there can be no such representations, and so representationalism is false.

I examine these ideas at greater length in chapters 3 and 4 which consider a number of oft-cited objections to Travis's arguments, along with the role that perceptual appearances—'looks' in the case of vision—play, respectively. Chapter 3 addresses objections to Travis made by Alex Byrne (2009), Susannah Siegel (2011) and Susannah Schellenberg (2011b). These centre upon Travis's notion of 'looks-indexing', according to which the representational contents of perceptual states are recognised by the subject in virtue or because of how things, in those experiences, look (*mutatis mutandis* for non-visual modalities). Byrne concurs with Travis that perceptual states cannot be looks-indexed, but nevertheless goes on to propose a kind of content based on the phenomenal character of experience that he alleges is capable of meeting Travis's recognisability condition. I argue that Travis's argument from looks is equally applicable to such 'non-comparative looks', which do not—as Byrne, Siegel and Schellenberg seem to think—constitute a satisfactory response to it. Indeed, the argument simply reiterates at the level of non-comparative looks with the same problematic outcome for representationalism as for comparative looks. Further arguments from Siegel and Schellenberg similarly fail to establish REP due to equivocation or because they beg the question against the opposing anti-representationalist view.

Chapter 4 takes up the question of whether it is possible to ground any satisfactory account of p-representation on the semantics of 'looks' or the nature of appearances. Since phenomenal character, at least insofar as this is accessible to introspection, is (*pace* Byrne) equivocal between different representational contents, it is incapable of fixing univocal, mind-independent accuracy conditions for p-representation. The only accuracy conditions that are fixed in this way are, as argued in chapter 3, the mind-dependent conditions for the subject's having that very experience.<sup>13</sup> This does not, however, constitute grounds for thinking that such contents generalise to all suitably individuated experience-types in the way that representationalism requires, as my argument against Siegel shows. Furthermore, the availability of alternative comparative analyses of the semantics of 'looks', such as Martin's 'parsimonious' view (Martin 2010) and Brewer's 'relevant similarities' (Brewer 2011), means that any argument for representational content on the basis of looks is at best neutral in the debate between representationalism and anti-representationalism about experience. Concerns about the contents of non-veridical perceptual states turn

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Glüer (2009).

out to be similarly equivocal, though do highlight an important methodological difference in the construction of a theory of perception—namely, whether to consider perception from a primarily epistemological (i.e. knowledge-based) or primarily phenomenological (i.e. subjective character-based) perspective. Such methodological differences, however, are not easily resolved on the basis of the distinctions or concerns outlined here, and to a large extent are as much determined by the outcome of the present debate as they inform it.

In chapter 5, having rejected the notion of looks-indexing, as well as the possibility of grounding p-representational content in appearances to the subject, I examine some further responses to Travis's anti-representationalism. These divide into two categories: (i) those that reject and (ii) those that attempt to satisfy Travis's recognisability requirement. I argue that the first of these routes is successful in delivering a kind of representational content, but one that cannot—at least not without substantive further theoretical commitments and exposition—explain the phenomenal character of perceptual experience. This amounts to a rejection of the intentionalist claim that the phenomenal character of experience supervenes upon representational content and so favours a non-representational account of perceptual phenomenology. The second route aims to satisfy the recognisability requirement, but faces a further question with regard to the contribution of phenomenal character to perceptual awareness—the so-called 'phenomenological objection'. I argue that this objection is not well motivated and so without substantial further argument does not necessarily represent a genuine problem for representationalism.

In chapter 6, I address the question of whether any views that explain the individuation and recognisability of p-representational content via a single common element are able to meet the challenge posed by Travis. (Whilst it is difficult to rule out the possibility of independent explanations for these two aspects of perceptual experience, I argue that there are substantial theoretical barriers to doing so.) Teleosemantic and other externalist accounts of p-representation are particularly problematic in this regard due to the externally individuated nature of the content that they posit. One solution to this is to adopt an externalist account of self-knowledge. This satisfies Travis's recognisability requirement, but leads to a form of externalism about phenomenal character, or *phenomenal externalism*, that many philosophers find implausible or problematic. A more promising line of response lies with the conceptualism of McDowell (1998), Brewer (1999) and Schellenberg (2011a; 2011b). By accounting for both the individuation of content and its subjective availability through a single common element—namely, so-called *recognitional* or *discriminatory capacities*—such accounts are potentially able to meet the challenge that Travis presents. However, this raises a series of further questions concerning the relation between the operation of such capacities and the resulting content. Depending on how these questions are answered, a comparable account may also be given by the anti-representationalist, making the role of such content less than fundamental. This may explain why such views have, to a large extent, been abandoned by their original proponents in

favour of moderate or strong versions of relationalism. Nevertheless, if these problems can be overcome, such views offer the potential of unifying representationalism and relationalism in a form of compatibilism that accounts for perceptual phenomenology in terms of both representation and the perceptual relation.

I conclude that Travis's arguments present representationalists with a challenge. They must either (a) abandon the recognisability condition, thus severing the link between representation and perceptual phenomenology, or else (b) explain how representational content is recognisable to the subject, supposedly on the basis of perceptual phenomenology, despite being subjectively indistinguishable from other such contents with differing accuracy conditions. This in turn highlights the need for advocates of representationalism to be more explicit about the explanatory role of the representational content of experience, which is often employed for multiple, sometimes conflicting, purposes. Relationalist accounts, on the other hand, do not aim to explain perceptual phenomenology in terms of representational content, and so do not face this dilemma. Furthermore, I argue that there is no reason why such accounts should be taken to be incompatible with the existence of representational content, provided that such content is not taken to explain perceptual phenomenology. This in turn opens up the possibility of hybrid or 'compatibilist' views upon which both representational content and the perceptual relation have distinct or combined explanatory roles. In the meantime, Travis's objections pose a powerful and important challenge to representationalist views, as well as offering an important way of sharpening understanding of the debate whilst ruling out a number of otherwise apparently plausible views of perceptual content.

## 2. The Silence of the Senses

### *The Case Against Representationalism*

#### 2.1. Introduction

Kant famously stated that '[t]houghts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind' (Kant 1998: A51/B75). In 'The Silence of the Senses', Charles Travis (2004; forthcoming)<sup>1</sup> argues that perceptual experience is not only 'blind', but 'silent', in that it does not deliver representational content to the subject. Consequently, according to Travis, perception 'is, in a crucial way, not an intentional phenomenon' (ibid: 93). This chapter sets out the principal arguments that Travis presents for this view along with the conditions upon perceptual representation that he takes to underpin it. My aim here is to provide a clear expression of these arguments along with their relations to the various conditions upon representation that Travis describes. This in turn enables the construction a taxonomy of various forms of representationalism according to which of Travis's premises and conditions they endorse. Responses and counterarguments, both simple and subtle, to these arguments are considered in subsequent chapters.

I begin by outlining a notion of representation that I will call *p-representation*, short for *perceptual representation* (2.2), which characterises the form of representation to which Travis takes many advocates of representationalism to subscribe. This is captured by a number of conditions that an adequate notion of perceptual representation must conform to in order to meet various demands that representationalists place upon it. The second half of the chapter presents a series of arguments that can be found in Travis (2004) for the conclusion that perception does not constitutively involve *p-representation* (2.3). This helps identify a number of possible responses that the

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<sup>1</sup> Where possible, citations below refer to the original 2004 version of Travis's paper. I have, however, used the amended terminology and other clarifications of the revised version throughout, which at the time of writing had yet to be published.

representationalist might make, according to which of Travis's premises or conditions upon p-representation they wish to reject. These responses are then taken up in greater detail throughout chapters 3 to 6, which evaluate the effectiveness and implications of these arguments.

## 2.2. Perceptual Representation

The primary target of Travis's (2004) paper is the view that perceptual experience is essentially a representational phenomenon. This is the position characterised in chapter 1 as *representationalism*, or REP for short (1.2.4). Since Travis denies that perception is essentially representational, his position constitutes a form of *anti-representationalism*, or NREP (*ibid.*).<sup>2</sup> Travis contrasts such representationalism with the view that perception simply *presents* the world to us (as opposed to *representing* it) thereby making concrete external objects and properties available for thought, belief, judgement, etc. On Travis's preferred view, those aspects of experience which, according to representationalists, favour the existence of representational content are instead situated within the processes of judgement and/or interpretation that take place *on the basis of* experience, rather than forming part of experience itself. For example, Travis considers perceptual illusions to be cases in which the subject is misled by appearances rather than cases of misrepresentation since, according to him, perceptual experience does not involve any representation (2.3.1).

Travis contrasts his view with those of Davies (1992), McDowell (1994), McGinn (1982; 1991), Peacocke (1992), Searle (1983), Tye (1995), and others who take perceptual experience to possess determinate representational content in both veridical and non-veridical cases.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of both genuine perception and other perceptual experiences such as hallucination and illusion in terms of a single underlying 'common factor', i.e. their representational content, is one of the central features of the accounts of perception to which Travis is opposed. I will refer to this as the *principle of intentionality*, since it is equivalent to the claim that p-representations can occur in the absence of those objects that they are 'about'; i.e. that they have *intentional content*. Not all representationalists would agree with this claim, at least its unqualified form. However, since providing a uniform account of veridical and non-veridical perceptual experiences is one of the chief motivations for endorsing representationalism, most if not all representationalists would subscribe to the following closely related principle:

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<sup>2</sup> Whether REP is genuinely incompatible with the kind of presentational view that Travis favours is something I examine further in chapters 5 and 6. For the time being, I simply focus on explicating and evaluating his arguments against representationalism.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term 'determinate' in contrast to 'determinable', and not to 'vague'. Accuracy conditions that involve some degree of vagueness—about the precise number of items that are present, for example—can, on this usage, still be perfectly determinate.

*Common Content:* subjectively indistinguishable veridical and non-veridical perceptual experiences share a common representational content.

This principle is weaker than a straightforward identity claim between the representational content of ‘good’ (i.e. veridical perception) and ‘bad’ (i.e. non-veridical) cases. Indeed, such an identity is denied by those forms of representationalism whose contents incorporate an externally individuated or demonstrative aspect (6.3, 6.4.1). All of the above principles, however, are denied by Travis, who regards non-veridical perceptual experience as being explained by the phenomenon of *misleading* as opposed to the existence of any such common representational element (Travis 2004: 64).

Travis characterises the target forms of representationalism as endorsing four key constraints upon the notion of representation that features in accounts of perceptual experience. These constraints, set out in detail below (2.2.1–4), are largely interrelated and collectively define the notion of representation to which Travis is opposed (2.2.6). To avoid prejudicing the issue of whether there exists any other form of representation that does not satisfy Travis’s constraints (see 5.2.4), but which meets at least some of the representationalists’ requirements, I will call such representation *p-representation*. This term is intended to be suggestive of ‘perceptual representation’ and is a placeholder for the kind of representation that advocates of representationalism, *pace* Travis, hold to exist. According to Travis, only p-representation can support his opponents’ claims concerning the role of representation in perceptual experience (2.3). On his view, such a notion is unmotivated and the constraints upon it inconsistent, such that no form of representation could ever satisfy them. Consequently, there can be no such thing as p-representation. Travis’s aim, therefore, is to demonstrate that representationalism, at least in its most common form, is incoherent, and so that perceptual experience cannot be p-representational.

It is important to realise that Travis’s arguments do not rule out the possibility that there is some sense in which representational contents—in the form of phenomenal content, for example (3.2.3, 4.2.6)—may be associated with individual perceptual experiences; for the purposes of neuroscience or behavioural psychology, for example. Rather, the claim is that such content does not—indeed, according to Travis, it *cannot*—capture or exhaust the nature of perceptual experience. In particular, as will become clear in later chapters, these arguments present specific problems in accounting for the phenomenal character of experiences in representational terms—a position known as *intentionalism*. Furthermore, if such content fails to satisfy the conditions below, it would not, in Travis’s view, correspond to any familiar notion of representation, and consequently be unable to sustain the claims that representationalists make for their theories, such as the ability to explain the contents of perceptual beliefs, judgements or illusions. Such alternative uses of the term ‘representation’ are therefore besides the point, which is to exhaustively

characterise perceptual experience in terms of its representational content—something that Travis and other anti-representationalists hold to be impossible.

### 2.2.1. *Representing such-and-such as so*

The first condition by which Travis characterises his target notion of representation is that '[t]he representing in question is representing such-and-such as so' (Travis 2004: 58). Thus, p-representation represents the world as *being some way or other*; i.e. it has determinate *representational content* (1.2.3). Travis contrasts this form of representation with that of 'an effect or trace of something', such as the way that tree rings may be said to 'represent' the amount of growth or climatic conditions in a particular year, or some kind of 'stand-in, or substitute, for what is represented' (ibid.). The former qualification rules out much of the kind of 'representation' that, for example, neuroscientists find in the brain and nervous system, which are mere causal traces of perceptual stimuli. Such traces cannot, by definition, occur in the absence of what they are causal traces of, and so do not accord with the principle of intentionality. Nor can such traces misrepresent. The latter qualification is intended to rule out the sense in which a piece in a game 'represent[s] an infantry division in a game of strategy' or '[a] squiggle on a map may represent the Lot' (ibid.). Such representations provide a stand-in or proxy for another object by means of some established rule or convention (1.2.3). P-representations, on the other hand, possess content in virtue of their structure or logical form in a way that is not merely conventional, but revealed through their role in rational thought and behaviour, either by introspection or by reflection upon the nature and character of experience (see 2.2.4).

Central to the idea of representing such-and-such as so is the notion of *correctness* or *accuracy conditions*. Such conditions specify the situation, or situations, under which the relevant content is accurate or *veridical* (1.2.3). In the case of a given perceptual experience, this occurs when the content of that experience corresponds to the way that things, independently of how the subject perceives them as being, actually are. P-representational content, then, must be assessable for truth or accuracy.<sup>4</sup> That is to say, for any given representational content, there is a definite and principled answer as to whether it is accurate or not, depending upon its correspondence with the subject's immediate perceptual environment. Thus, such states purport to represent the way that the subject's environment objectively *is*, rather than how things subjectively *seem* or *appear*. (A state that represented only subjective features of the subject's own mental state would not qualify as objective in the relevant sense—see 3.2.3.) Consequently, on the representationalist's view, the phenomena of *seeming* or *appearing* are a matter of the subject's representing the world to be some particular way, rather than anything that features explicitly in the content of such representations. Appearing, we might say, is all in the attitude (cf. Travis 2004: 60).

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<sup>4</sup> 'Truth' normally indicates a bivalent notion of correspondence, whereas 'accuracy' may admit of degrees. For present purposes, it does not matter which of these terms we use.

We can summarise this first condition upon the notion of p-representation as follows:

*Objectivity:* p-representation represents things as being objectively so in a way that is capable of being assessed for truth or accuracy.

Note that Travis's use of the phrase '*representing such-and-such as so*' (Travis 2004: 58) might be taken to suggest that p-representational content must be propositional, and so by implication conceptual. However, since two of his stated targets—namely, Peacocke (1992) and Tye (1995)—both endorse notions of non-conceptual content, we can assume that Travis intends for his arguments to apply to both conceptual and non-conceptual content. Henceforth, I will use the term 'propositional' to cover any content that is assessable for truth, and 'content' as being assessable for accuracy, regardless of whether it is conceptual or otherwise. Thus, Travis may be taken to argue not only against the existence of conceptual p-representational content, but against any form of content that possesses determinate accuracy or correctness conditions.

### 2.2.2. *Face value*

Travis's second condition upon p-representation is intended to capture the representationalist intuition that every perceptual experience has a univocal, i.e. single and determinate, *face-value* content. The condition is motivated by the intuitive notion that *things can be just as they appear*, and has two distinct aspects. The first relates to how the way that experience represents the world as being—its representational content—can be 'read off', as it were, the experience itself. This corresponds to Travis's *Recognisability* condition below (2.2.4). It is not uncommon, however, to talk of taking experience 'at face value', meaning that one simply accepts the diktats of experience without doubting that things are in fact the way that they appear. The prevalence of such expressions might be taken to suggest that there is *some particular way* (as opposed to many different ways) that any given experience represents the world as being. It is this aspect of the 'face value' claim that is captured by Travis's second condition, which may be summarised as follows:

*Face-value:* p-representations have a determinate and univocal 'face value, at which [they] can be taken or declined'.<sup>5</sup>

This condition forms the basis for what is sometimes called Travis's 'indeterminacy objection' (Schellenberg 2011b: 7), and is a key premise in his argument from looks (2.3.2).

Two aspects of the above condition are necessary for Travis's purpose. First, and most importantly, it entails that p-representations have precisely *one* content, as opposed to many or none. Thus, each perceptual experience

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<sup>5</sup> Travis (2004: 63).

represents the world to be some particular way, and not a disjunction of possible alternatives, each of which shares the same perceptible appearance. For example, if there appears to be a lemon in front of me then, according to the representationalist, the representational content of my experience includes that *there is a lemon*, and not the open-ended disjunction *there is either a lemon, a wax imitation lemon, a lemon-shaped bar of soap, or ...*, even if each of these alternatives would appear, from the same location and angle, perceptually indistinguishable from an actual lemon. An account that meets *Face-value* may therefore be contrasted with the view that perceptual experiences have disjunctive content in which a potentially infinite range of possible ways that the world might be are ‘represented’, but without any one of these possibilities being singled out as *the* content of experience.<sup>6</sup> Travis claims that such a view

would make representation in perception incoherent, [therefore] not intelligibly representation at all. Too many things would thereby be represented as so at once. There are just too many things things look like.<sup>7</sup>

The second aspect of *Face-value* is that p-representations have the kind of content that can either be accepted or rejected. Thus, when enjoying a given perceptual experience, a subject is not thereby committed to believing or judging that something in particular is the case. Instead, experience is supposed to provide the grounds upon which such beliefs or judgements may be formed or withheld according to the context and dispositions of the perceiver. This further consequence of *Face-value* is addressed below (2.2.3).

In endorsing the *Face-value* condition, McDowell (1994: 26) states:

That things are thus and so is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgment. It becomes the content of a judgment if the subject decides to take the experience at face value.

Thus, when a perceptual subject has an experience with the content *there is a greenish lemon in front of me*, and where they have no reason to suspect the contrary, they will typically judge, and thereby come to believe, that there is indeed a greenish lemon in front of them. Conversely, in cases where one has a positive reason to doubt that things are as they appear—if one knew or had some reason to believe that the scene were illuminated by green light, for example—one might conclude that, contrary to the experience’s ‘face value’ content, the lemon is not green, but some other colour, and only *appears* green due to the unusual lighting conditions. Alternatively, one may choose to withhold judgement altogether. Furthermore, McDowell takes the contents of

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<sup>6</sup> Such views should not be confused with the position known as *disjunctivism*, which claims that perception and non-veridical perceptual experience are of fundamentally different psychological kinds.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid: 87. The alleged ‘incoherence’ is presumably based on the fact that the various disjuncts would be inconsistent and the set of possible disjuncts too large to constitute any recognisable form of p-representation.

the experience and the corresponding judgement to be identical (though both are presumably more complex than in this simple example). In this way, individual experiences provide defeasible warrant for believing that things are ‘just as they appear’, with their contents, or elements of it, figuring in the contents of perceptual judgements and beliefs. This further commitment, however, is not mandated by *Face-value*.

No doubt the principle that the content of any perceptual judgement or belief is identical to, or straightforwardly derivable from, the content of the experience is appealing and would be endorsed by representationalists of various stripes. Such a principle offers a simple and straightforward explanation of how perceptual judgements and beliefs are formed: one simply comes to believe what one sees, hears, tastes, and so on. Indeed, this is one of the benefits that advocates of representationalism suppose to flow from it: that we can judge or believe things to be just as they appear. Perceptual judgement, for such representationalists, is simply a matter of a subject’s endorsing the relevant part, or parts, of the content of one’s perceptual experience. This may be contrasted with anti-representationalist accounts according to which the process of belief and judgement formation play a more substantive role, expanding to assume one of the functions that representationalists take to be fulfilled by experience. A commitment to such a principle, however, is unnecessary for Travis’s purpose or for p-representation, which turns on the presence of univocal face value content as opposed to the role that such content plays in judgement or belief. We must therefore be careful to avoid to avoid conflating *Face-value* with the stronger, theoretically distinct claim that the contents of experience are identical to those that figure in perceptual judgements and belief.

Accounts of perceptual content that do not satisfy *Face-value* include the ‘content pluralism’ of Chalmers (2006) and Crane (forthcoming), both of which entail that experience has not one, but many such contents, or ‘content relations’, each of which has a distinct explanatory role. Whilst such views are not obviously targets of Travis (2004),<sup>8</sup> it is nevertheless possible to run the same arguments against them with respect to each individual content that such pluralists claim perceptual experience to have. In this case, the arguments will relate to the individual contents that occur within the context of some particular explanatory role, rather than the plurality of contents as a whole. This differs from the disjunctive form of content discussed above that takes experience to have only a single content with a disjunctive logical structure. In the latter case, Travis’s arguments will apply to the disjunction as a whole, as opposed to each of the individual disjuncts as in the case of content pluralism. Thus, Travis’s arguments may be taken to apply to any representational content that meets the conditions necessary for p-representation, even where no one content may be singled out as ‘the’ content of experience.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibid*: 82.

### 2.2.3. *Representation-to, not representation-by*

The third of Travis's conditions for p-representation distinguishes between two different forms, or roles, of representation, which Travis calls 'autorepresentation' and 'allorepresentation' (Travis 2004: 61), respectively. *Autorepresentation* corresponds to 'representing to ... oneself' (ibid.) or *taking something to be so*. It is therefore a form of *representation-by* a conscious subject. Examples of autorepresentation include belief, judgement and any other propositional attitude in which a subject accepts something to be true, or indeed false. Consequently, autorepresentation does not admit of a neutral attitude towards a content since to autorepresent *p* is already to accept (or reject) that *p*. Such representation is, as Travis puts it, '*all in the attitude*' (ibid: 60). *Allorepresentation*, on the other hand, occurs when whatever is being represented can be either accepted or rejected; it is *representation-to* the subject. Travis goes on to identify two subspecies of allorepresentation, which he calls 'committed' and 'uncommitted' allorepresentation. In *committed allorepresentation*, the content of the representation has some kind of authority which, all other things being equal, recommends it to the subject, as in the case of testimony from a normally reliable source. *Uncommitted allorepresentation*, on the other hand, has no such authority, there being nothing in the means of representation to determine or suggest that things are one way rather than another—English sentences being a case in point.<sup>9</sup> Travis argues that only committed representations can have a face value in the relevant sense, since uncommitted representation involves no commitment to any particular state of affairs being the case, and thus is incapable of providing a reason for belief or judgement (ibid. 62).

The term 'representation' may be used to denote both auto- and allorepresentation, and is therefore ambiguous. The location of a marker on a map, for example, may (allo)represent one's own location, whereas one can (auto)represent something to be the case by deciding that it is so, the difference being in whether the thinker is the 'consumer' or 'producer' of the representation.<sup>10</sup> The key point, however, is that since *Face-value* provides for the rejection as well as acceptance of contents (cf. 2.2.2), the relevant form of p-representation cannot be autorepresentation. In contrast to judgement (at least on some accounts), we cannot choose or decide what we perceive in experience, but rather its representational content is (on the representationalist view) in some sense 'given' to us. We simply find ourselves, to use McDowell's phrase, saddled with content.

We can capture this condition upon p-representation as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> Travis does not deny that such sentences can have truth or accuracy conditions, merely that the means of representation (i.e. English) does not itself recommend nor guarantee its representational content to be true (ibid. 61).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Millikan 1989.

*Givenness*: p-representation consists in content being ‘given’ to the subject (*representation-to*), not in subjects taking things to be the case (*representation-by*).

P-representations are thus defeasible in the sense that, in circumstances where an ideally rational subject has reason to believe their experience to be deceptive—when viewing a familiar perceptual illusion, for example—they can judge that things are not the way that their experience represents them to be. Similarly, if the subject has reason to believe that their perceptual experience may be misleading or faulty—when undergoing a blind clinical trial for a hallucinogenic drug, for example—they may choose to withhold judgement as to whether their experiences accurately reflect the way things are. Conversely, where the subject is aware of no such reasons, they will typically judge that things are the way that they appear.<sup>11</sup> This reflects the committed nature of p-representation, which possesses a form of authority that, under normal circumstances at least, recommends its content to the subject.

*Givenness* comes into play in Travis’s argument from recognisability (2.3.3) and entails that experiences are not perceptual ‘takings’. As such, whatever fixes the content of experience cannot solely depend upon how that experience is interpreted, or what it is taken it to indicate. This would in any case arguably be inconsistent with the role of perception as the basis for judgement or belief, which places the order of explanation precisely the other way round. If the content of experience were itself to depend upon such ‘takings’, this would give rise to a circularity since perceptual takings, in the form of perceptual belief or judgement, themselves depend upon experience. On accounts of experience in which perceptual belief and experience are separate and distinct mental states, the former is generally held to be explanatorily dependent upon the latter, precluding the possibility of the reverse dependence. This does not rule out the possibility that experiences may be identified with dispositions to believe, or ‘potential beliefs’ as suggested by Armstrong (1968: 242), provided that such dispositions are not themselves beliefs; i.e. they are not perceptual ‘takings’. In either case, however, what a given experience represents is supposed to be intrinsic to that very experience, with its content being simply ‘given’ to the subject.

Note that the notion of givenness employed here need not fall into the so-called ‘Myth of the Given’ (McDowell 2008) since there is no suggestion that experiential contents are independent of the subject’s cognitive capacities (the thing that is supposed to make McDowell’s ‘Given’ mythical). Rather, the idea is that, according to representationalism, the faculty of perception is what *gives* us representational contents that we are subsequently able to judge as true or false, guide our actions, and so on. In McDowell’s terms, p-representational content is ‘given’ with a small ‘g’, not a capital ‘G’. Similarly, we should not conclude that in order for the contents of experience to be given to the subject in the relevant sense, there must be some entity over and above experience itself

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<sup>11</sup> This presumption may of course turn out to be incorrect, thus granting scepticism a foothold.

that does the giving. Just as an arrow on a map can ‘give’ us a spatial location relative to the features it depicts, perceptual experience itself can give us information about how things are in our immediate surroundings. The sense in which p-representational content is ‘given’ is one that holds between an experience and a subject, rather than between two subjects in the manner of, for example, verbal testimony. The relevant representing is done by experience itself rather than, for example, any further sub-personal agent or ‘representer’ (though neither does this rule out the existence of such agents).

#### 2.2.4. *Recognisability*

The fourth and final condition that Travis places upon p-representation is that the contents of experience must be *recognisable* to the perceptual subject. This is perhaps the most important and contentious of Travis’s conditions, and consists of two main claims. First, perceptual experience must be recognisable *as* a form of representation since ‘you cannot represent things to people as so in a way they simply cannot recognize as doing that’ (Travis 2004: 63). This is not to say that we are always, or even normally, aware of being represented to in perception, or that perceptual subjects are necessarily capable of accurately describing the nature and content of their experiences—something that is clearly not the case. Rather, it must at least be possible in principle—perhaps through philosophical reasoning and reflection—to recognise the representational nature of experience as such.

Second, and more importantly for present purposes, we must be capable of recognising the content of our experiences. That is to say, we must be able to know what it is that is being represented to us, or equivalently, what it would take for any given perceptual experience to be veridical. Again, this does not mean that we are in practice able to determine whether the relevant state of affairs obtains, or to elucidate the relevant accuracy conditions in a formal manner. Indeed, these tasks may require considerable conceptual and/or empirical investigation. Rather, the suggestion is that we must be able to grasp or recognise how the world would need to be in order for perceptual experience to accurately represent it. When perceptually encountering an object that looks like a lemon, for example, it should be apparent to the subject—that is to say, it is cognitively available to them—that their experience is *as of a lemon*, or that the experience should lead them to form beliefs concerning lemons and not, say, potatoes or bars of soap. If the object turned out to be a potato or a ringer for a lemon, such as an identical looking lemon-shaped bar of soap, then this discrepancy would be something that is at least potentially discernible to the subject, perhaps by occasioning surprise or disbelief upon discovering the unexpected object.

We can characterise this condition upon p-representation as follows:

*Recognisability*: perceptual subjects must be capable of recognising the representational content of any given p-representation solely in virtue of having that very experience.

By this we mean that the subject must be able to recognise both *what* their perceptual experience represents to be the case, and *how* the world would have to be in order for their experience to be veridical; i.e. having some intuitive or implicit grasp of their experiences' accuracy or truth conditions. This leaves it open both *whether* they know that the relevant conditions obtain (something that cannot be required for perceptual experience alone), and *in what such knowing consists*.

The condition is motivated by epistemological considerations concerning *Face-value* and *Givenness* since if experience presents the world to the subject as being some particular way (*Objectivity*), then it must be possible to recognise what way that is on the basis of that experience (5.2.1). This marks out p-representation as occurring at the personal, rather than sub-personal, level, making experience on the representationalist model analogous to testimony. Experiences, we might say, testify or report to the subject how things are, with the contents of these reports corresponding to individual p-representational contents. Of course it is precisely this analogy with testimony that anti-representationalists are concerned to reject, since they deny that experiences have any such content.

For the time being, I will leave the sense of 'recognition' with which Travis is operating as largely intuitive, though this will require further clarification in due course (5.2). The relevant sense must allow for the possibility of subjects being capable of coming to know both the contents of their experiences and that their experience is representational. However, it need not be defined in terms of explicit knowledge. Rather, some form of tacit understanding or grasp of the conditions required for an experience's accuracy will suffice. These may be cashed out in terms of practical or cognitive abilities, i.e. *knowledge-how* rather than *knowledge-that*. In particular, such recognisability may (though need not) manifest itself in the phenomenology of experience, as reflected by its phenomenal character; e.g. in an object's *looking red* or as located at a particular point in egocentric space.

A notable aspect of the above condition is that the content of perceptual experience must be recognisable 'in virtue of the experience itself'. This is intended to rule out the possibility that such content is recognisable on the basis of prior or subsequent knowledge, expectations or behaviour, since if this were the case then it would be unclear in what sense this shows *experience* to be representational as opposed to that other thing. Similarly, it cannot be the case that one recognises the content of experience solely as a result of beliefs and judgements formed on the basis of it. This would serve to demonstrate that belief or judgement were representational, but not experience, since it would give no reason to attribute the representational content to the latter, other than perhaps as an explanation of how the former get their content, which is precisely the kind of error that anti-representationalists accuse their opponents of making. Furthermore, since such forms of autorepresentation entail that the subject already accepts their contents as true, *Givenness* would fail to obtain. Perceptual belief and judgement alone therefore appear to be incapable of

making the representational contents of perception (if there are any) recognisable in the relevant sense. Rather, Travis argues, there must be some special feature or aspect of perceptual experience in virtue of which its representational content is apparent, as discussed below (2.2.5).

The precise formulation of *Recognisability*, along with the precise sense of ‘recognition’ in this context, is central to Travis’s argument from looks (2.3.2), much of which rests upon it. Indeed, if a representationalist were to reject this condition outright, then this argument (though not some of Travis’s subsequent arguments) would fail to go through.<sup>12</sup> However, such a rejection is not without its costs, since the basic principle is closely connected not only with *Face-value* and *Givenness*, but with the connection between representational content and perceptual phenomenology (5.2.3). Indeed, it is a consequence of some forms of intentionalism that the elements of p-representation that figure in phenomenal character are in some sense ‘recognisable’ to the subject. Thus, to give up on *Recognisability* would entail a denial of some forms of intentionalism.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, without *Recognisability* it is difficult to see what work the notion of representation is supposed to be doing, except as a placeholder or term of art. Such ‘non-recognisable’ forms of p-representation would not constitute a familiar form of representation as such. If the notion of representation that representationalists employ is supposed to be the familiar one that we apply to maps, photographs, language, etc., it would present a serious issue if the content of perception turned out to be opaque to the experiencing subject. As Travis (2004: 86) puts it,

[T]hat we are represented to in experience is meant to be a familiar phenomenon; something we can tell is happening. It is not just events occurring in visual processing mechanisms of which we are all ignorant. It should not come to us as a complete surprise someday, to be sprung on us by future neurophysiologists, that we are thus represented to (uselessly, of course, since we were all ignorant of it).

Travis’s claim, then, is that p-representational content must be grounded in a subject’s ability to recognise what is represented to them in experience, which in turn grounds any subsequent judgements or beliefs made on the basis of it. Furthermore, there must be some principled way of determining in any particular case precisely what the content of a given experience is. If not, then we leave open the possibility that it is the contents of judgements or beliefs that fix the content of experience, rather than, as representationalists typically claim, the other way around.

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<sup>12</sup> I consider such a rejection in connection with Burge’s (2010) account of representational content in chapter 5.

<sup>13</sup> Intentionalists who hold a supervenience rather than identity thesis of phenomenal character can endorse the *Face-value* condition whilst rejecting *Recognisability* since not every difference in representational content need be reflected in perceptual phenomenology.

### 2.2.5. *Looks-indexing*

Having argued in favour of *Recognisability*, Travis goes on to ask what feature, or features, of experience could make p-representational contents recognisable in the relevant sense. In the case of visual perception, it seems plausible that this should be the way that things *look*. On this view, p-representational content is recognisable to the subject—or ‘indexed’ to use Travis’s expression—on the basis of how, in the relevant visual experience, things look to the subject.<sup>14</sup> Travis notes that the relevant sense of ‘looks’ should not be conflated with the contents of p-representations themselves, stating (ibid. 63):

I take it that it would be cheating if, say, ‘looks like things are thus and so’ turned out just to *mean* ‘things are represented to the perceiver as being thus and so’. Looks in that sense might *be* representational content; but they could not be that by which an experience is recognizable as having the representational content that it does.

Looks, therefore, are supposed to be what enables us to *recognise* the contents of experience, thereby making those contents available to the subject. We can summarise this condition as follows:

*Looks-indexing*: the content of any given p-representation must be recognisable to the subject solely in virtue of how, in the relevant experience, things perceptually seem to that subject.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to realise that *Looks-indexing* is a provisional and temporary assumption not to be confused with *Recognisability* itself (2.2.4). Rather, Travis makes this assumption on behalf of the representationalist as a means of explaining how *Recognisability* may be met, but it is ultimately dropped in the final section of Travis’s paper. This presents the representationalist with a number of options. First, they may wish to endorse both of these conditions and so specify a notion of ‘looks’ or appearances that satisfies them without falling prey to the arguments that Travis presses (2.3.3). This is the route that Siegel (2010), Schellenberg (2011a; 2011b) and others take, and which Travis claims is impossible to maintain, as I discuss in chapters 3 and 4. Alternatively, the representationalist may reject *Looks-indexing*, but retain or reformulate *Recognisability*, in which case the onus is upon them to specify an alternative way of satisfying the latter. This appears to be Byrne’s (2009) preferred option (chapter 3). Finally, they may reject *Recognisability* outright, yielding a form of representational content that is not available to the subject on the basis of reflection alone, as per Burge (2010). Further variations are possible by

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<sup>14</sup> Similar considerations presumably apply to each of the other sensory modalities.

<sup>15</sup> In general, where Travis uses the term ‘looks’ with specific reference to visual experience, I will prefer the more generic ‘seems’ or ‘appears’, which I take it also apply to each of the other sensory modalities.

weakening or strengthening the notion of ‘recognition’ that is employed by these conditions accordingly (5.2.2).

A corollary to Travis’s point about looks is that what enables us to *recognise* the content of perceptual experience need not be the same as what *fixes* or determines that content. Whilst the first requirement is cognitive or epistemic, the second is semantic, and so the two may come apart. Whilst Travis does not always clearly distinguish between these different aspects of perceptual experience, *Recognisability* is clearly concerned with the former. This leaves room for forms of representationalism in which what fixes the content of experience is distinct from whatever makes that content recognisable—one may be internally individuated and the other externally individuated, for example. The coherence and plausibility of such views will be addressed in chapter 6 where I argue that only those forms of representationalism that explain both content and recognisability in terms of a single common factor are likely to be capable of avoiding Travis’s arguments from looks and recognisability. These arguments may therefore be seen as providing constraints upon the forms of representationalism that are capable of satisfying some form of *Recognisability* condition.

#### 2.2.6. *P-representation*

Excluding *Looks-indexing*, the above conditions jointly characterise the form of representation that Travis takes representationalists to think is involved in perceptual experience, namely *p-representation*. These conditions are not intended to be exhaustive or definitional, but rather identify key theoretical commitments that are either explicitly or implicitly endorsed by many, though not all, representationalists. This in turn helps to differentiate p-representation from other forms of representation, such as those I reject in 1.2.3. Moreover, each of these conditions is individually necessary for p-representation insofar as it underpins the explanatory role that such representations play in representationalist accounts of perception. Without *Objectivity*, for example, perceptual experience could not form the basis for knowledge of objective aspects of the external world. Without *Face-value* it would be impossible to accept or reject the content of perceptual experience. Without *Givenness*, we would be incapable of judging or believing on the basis of experience. And without *Recognisability*, we would be unaware of being represented to at all, or be incapable of grasping on the basis of first-personal reflection or perceptual phenomenology what it is that our experiences represent.

To summarise, then, p-representation is a form of representation in which things are represented to the subject as being some particular way (*Objectivity* and *Face-value*). Moreover, it does not commit the subject to believing or judging that things *are* that way, since such contents may be either accepted or rejected (*Givenness*). Where such a judgement is made, its content may, according to some versions of representationalism, be identical to or else straightforwardly derivable from the content of the corresponding perceptual experience, though this is not required for Travis’s purposes. The

representational content of experience, however, must be discernible—e.g. knowable—on the basis of first-personal reflection upon the experience itself or perceptual phenomenology (*Recognisability*), though this does not require that subjects are necessarily able to articulate or ascertain the satisfaction of its accuracy conditions in practice. In the case of visual perception, and *mutatis mutandis* for each of the other sensory modalities, this plausibly occurs on the basis of how, in the relevant experience, things look (*Looks-indexing*), though again this condition is not essential to Travis's argument—indeed, he later gives reasons for rejecting it.

Travis aims to show that the above notion of p-representation is incoherent, and so unable to fulfil the explanatory role that representationalists assign to it. Consequently, given that some variant of this form of representation is defended by many leading representationalists, perception cannot on those accounts be representational. This argumentative strategy admits of several possible responses. First, representationalists may choose to deny the validity, or one or more of the premises, of Travis's arguments, as detailed in the following section. Second, they may deny that one or more of the above conditions are necessary for p-representation. Travis responds to the latter by stating that such representationalists are not his target (Travis 2004: 82, 86), observing that the first two conditions are taken directly from the work of prominent representationalists, including McDowell, Peacocke, Davies, Tye and McGinn (*ibid.* 86). However, it is arguable that such a denial would result in a notion of representation that is too weak to fulfil the representationalist's purpose in providing an adequate explanation of various perceptual phenomena, such as illusions, or the links between perceptual experience and judgement or belief. The notion of p-representation is therefore closely connected with the explanatory purposes of representationalism and its alleged benefits—purposes upon which Travis's arguments place strict limits.

The arguments in 'The Silence of the Senses' do not, however, rule out the possibility that perceptual experience might involve some other form of representation than p-representation, such as the causally covariant, information-theoretic notion identified in the previous chapter. I return to this question in chapter 5 when I consider Burge's rejection of *Recognisability*. For the time being, however, I will assume that, if successful, Travis's arguments only secure the weaker conclusion that perception does not constitutively involve p-representation, rather than ruling out any form of representation whatsoever. Arguably, such 'representations' do not warrant use of the term, at least in its familiar sense. Terminological quibbles aside, however, I will argue that Travis's arguments constitute a powerful case against many otherwise seemingly plausible accounts of perceptual representation, and so present a serious and important challenge to representationalism about experience in general.

### 2.3. The Case Against Representationalism

For present purposes, I will concentrate upon four main arguments that may be found in Travis's 'The Silence of the Senses' (Travis 2004). Each is directed against a particular motivation towards or kind of representationalism. Together, the arguments provide a case against representationalism. Probably the best known and widely discussed (though not always understood) argument is Travis's *argument from looks* (2.3.2), which aims to establish that it is impossible to ground p-representational content in visual appearances or how things look. This argument assumes *Looks-indexing*, and so is vulnerable to forms of representationalism that reject either this or the *Recognisability* condition outright. Such forms of representationalism are instead addressed by what I will call the *argument from recognisability* (2.3.3). Additional arguments are intended to show that the mere existence of perceptual illusions does not present any particular advantage to representationalism over anti-representationalism (2.3.1), and that representational content is incapable of providing the perceiver with unmediated awareness of an object (2.3.4), respectively.

#### 2.3.1. *The argument from misleading appearances*

The first and simplest of Travis's arguments concerns the significance of perceptual illusion in the debate about perceptual representation. Historically, Hume's argument from illusion and others like it have been powerful weapons in the representationalist's arsenal (cf. Smith 2002). The traditional argument from illusion purports to show that the objects of perception cannot be the external physical objects or events that we ordinarily take experience to involve, but must be mental entities such as sense impressions or 'ideas'. Although the resulting 'theory of ideas' has long since fallen into disrepute (cf. Reid 2002: II.ix, 136; Snowdon 1990), vestiges of it can arguably be found in the representationalist theories of perception that took its place. However, few representationalists take representations, as opposed to external objects, events and their properties, to be the objects of perceptual experience. Rather, representing is supposed to be the means by which external physical objects and events are perceived. Thus p-representation does not function as an epistemic or perceptual intermediary between the subject and the external world. Rather, representational content is intended to capture what is common to both perceptions and their phenomenally matching counterparts, such as hallucinations and illusions.

Travis's argument from misleading appearances does not engage directly with Hume's traditional argument. Instead, it seeks to counter the view that the phenomenon of perceptual illusion—i.e. experiences in which a subject 'misperceives' the state of the environment—provides any advantage to the representationalist view. Byrne (2009), for example, considers the existence of such illusions to be a positive motivation for endorsing representationalism, as considered in the next chapter (3.2.1)—a suggestion which Travis rejects. Typically, such representationalist arguments depend upon some version of

what M. G. F. Martin calls the *common kind assumption*, which he states as follows: ‘whatever fundamental kind of mental event occurs when one is veridically perceiving some scene can occur whether or not one is perceiving’ (Martin 2004: 40). This assumption, however, along with the *Common Content* condition that flows from it (2.2), need not be accepted by the anti-representationalist on the basis that perceptual illusion may be considered parasitic upon veridical perception, and not assimilable to it. Consequently, perceptual illusion and hallucination may require different forms of explanation to veridical perception.<sup>16</sup> Anti-representationalists, who reject the common kind assumption, therefore offer alternative accounts of illusion that may be evaluated upon their own merits.

This argumentative strategy is captured by Travis’s *argument from misleading appearances* as follows:

- MA1** Representationalism can explain the existence of perceptual illusions in terms of *misrepresentation*.
- MA2** Anti-representationalism can explain the existence of perceptual illusions in terms of *misleading* or *misinterpretation*.
- MA3** The mere existence of perceptual illusions provides does not constitute a reason to suppose veridical perceptions to be representational. (*From MA1 and MA2*)

MA1 grants that the representationalist is able to explain perceptual illusions in terms of inaccurate, i.e. non-veridical, representations. This explanation, however, is placed on a level with the anti-representationalist account in MA2. This generates the conclusion in MA3 that, since that both accounts are able to offer an explanation of perceptual illusion, the mere existence of illusory experience does not favour either view. In essence, the availability of an alternative anti-representationalist account of illusion is held to neutralise the representationalist’s alleged advantage in this regard.

Of course, it is open to either side to argue that their explanation is *better* than their opponent’s on grounds of consistency, parsimony, etc. This is precisely Byrne’s (2009) strategy, as discussed in the following chapter.<sup>17</sup> For the time being, however, it will suffice to note that there are explanations of illusion available to anti-representationalists that are perfectly consistent with their explanation of veridical perceptual experience, but that do not depend upon the notion of representation. Such explanations generally account for misleading perceptions in terms of *misinterpretation* or *misjudgements* that individual perceptual experiences indicate something that they do not. That is to say that under normal circumstances an appearance of some particular type *T* which

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<sup>16</sup> Although relationalist explanations of hallucination typically differ from that of veridical perception, the former may share the same explanatory structure as the latter, as described in 3.2.1.

<sup>17</sup> For the converse claim, see Brewer 2006: 90–91.

reliably indicates that things are some particular way  $P$  may easily be mistaken for a similar appearance  $T'$  that does not indicate  $P$ . Thus, by mistaking  $T'$  for  $T$ , one is inclined to judge  $P$  when in fact not- $P$ . For example, a navy-coloured jacket might appear black under fluorescent lighting, but blue in natural light. It is therefore easy to misjudge the former appearance as indicating that the jacket is black when in fact it is blue. Many such perceptual illusions may be explained in terms of their subjective similarities to experiences of objects or properties that, by custom, habit or inclination, we take them to resemble.

The main difference between the above explanation and the representationalist's relates to where one places the error. Representationalists typically take perceptual illusions to be errors of perception that furnish the subject with false or inaccurate representations—or rather misrepresentations. The resulting experiences are therefore in some sense erroneous. Anti-representationalists, on the other hand, typically regard perception as a success term, and so there can be no errors of perception as such.<sup>18</sup> Instead, illusions are cases in which we are *misled* by appearances, or fail to interpret them correctly, and thus the error is not one of experience *per se*, but of discrimination or judgement. In effect, whatever significance the representationalist places upon the notion of *misrepresentation*, the anti-representationalist attaches to whatever cognitive faculty 'downstream' of experience—judgement, discrimination, etc.—is responsible for misleading without any need to appeal to representation. The force of the representationalist's objection from illusion can thus be seen to rest upon their commitment to the common kind assumption and the representational nature of experience, thus rendering their argument inconclusive. The anti-representationalist, on the other hand, can appeal to subjective similarities between objects and their 'ringers' (relative to human discriminatory capacities) as the reason for which we can be misled by experience without claiming that experience is thereby erroneous. Naturally, there may be differences between the sorts of similarities that individual perceivers find misleading, since their perceptual sensitivities may differ, but such errors are not errors of perception in the strictest sense.

Travis's argument from misleading appearances addresses the phenomenon of perceptual illusions, but does little to explain the nature of hallucinations. These cases, in which no perceptual object—or at least none of the ordinary kind—is present, can be explained by representationalists in a similar manner to illusions, i.e. as cases of misrepresentation. It is unclear, however, that anti-representationalists need commit themselves to a substantive account of the nature of perceptual hallucinations other than that these constitute a form of perceptual experience that is easily mistaken for genuine perception. That is to say, hallucinations are *subjectively indistinguishable* from veridical perceptual experiences, but do not share the same categorial grounds. This position is defended by Martin (2004) as part of his 'phenomenal disjunctivism' (Byrne & Logue 2008: 68) as well as some representationalists, such as Williamson (2000) and McDowell (1994). The existence of hallucinations thus presents a further

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Brewer 2007: 169.

opportunity for representationalists to press their case, with the argument proceeding in a manner analogous to the question concerning illusion. This no doubt presents a serious challenge to anti-representationalism. However, if the disjunctivist is right, this challenge need not undermine their account of the central cases of perception, which are taken to have explanatory and conceptual priority. Such arguments reveal a difference in the methodologies of representationalists, who aim for the most general account of perceptual experience possible, including hallucinations and illusions, and anti-representationalists, who arguably offer a more parsimonious account of veridical perception upon which their accounts of illusion and hallucination are parasitic.

### 2.3.2. *The argument from looks*

The best known, but perhaps most misunderstood, of Travis's arguments purports to show that (i) the notion of p-representation plays no fundamental role in a philosophical account of perception, and (ii) the *Face-value* and *Looks-indexing* constraints that many representationalists place upon p-representation are inconsistent, and so that there can be no such form of representation. Byrne (2009: 14–15), for example, sets out Travis's argument in terms of providing an account of illusion, thereby portraying it as aiming to secure the weaker conclusion that representationalism lacks support, whilst Siegel (2010: 60–65) takes it to be primarily about the semantics of 'looks'. Travis, however, clearly takes himself to be arguing for the much stronger conclusion that 'perception is not [p-]representational' (Travis 2004: 57), and so 'is, in a crucial way, not an intentional phenomenon' (ibid. 93). The truth, I will argue (5.2.4), lies somewhere in between these two extremes.

Travis's argument from looks proceeds on the assumption that what makes the representational content of perceptual experiences recognisable to a subject must, by hypothesis, be the way that things in that experience appear, i.e. *Looks-indexing*. In the case of visual perception, this corresponds to *how things look to the subject*, raising the question of whether any notion of looks is capable of indexing representational content. As such, this argument does not rule out forms of representationalism that reject *Face-value*, *Recognisability* or *Looks-indexing*.<sup>19</sup> Rather, it aims to establish that p-representation cashed out in terms of mere appearances, i.e. looks, cannot perform the function that many representationalists assign to it, and so cannot constitute an adequate explanation of experience.

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<sup>19</sup> Rejections of the latter principle are dealt with by the argument from recognisability (2.3.3).

The argument may be summarised as follows:

- L1** The content of any given p-representation must be recognisable to the subject solely in virtue of how, in the relevant experience, things perceptually seem to that subject. (*Looks-indexing*)
- L2** If visual experiences were p-representational, then their contents would be indexed according to the way that things *look* [to the subject]. (*Corollary of L1*)
- L3** *Visual* (i.e. comparative) *looks* are unfit to index representational content since they are indeterminate between multiple contents, which would contravene *Face-value*.
- L4** *Thinkable* (i.e. epistemic) *looks* are unfit to index representational content since they cannot be determined solely on the basis of what is perceptually available to the subject in experience, which would contravene *Recognisability*.
- L5** No further notion of looks is capable of satisfying both *Face-value* and *Recognisability*.
- L6** The contents of visual experiences cannot be indexed according to the way that things look [to the subject]. (*From L3 to L5*)
- L7** Visual experiences are not p-representational. (*From L2 and L6*)<sup>20</sup>

The transition from L1 to L2 is justified by inference to the best explanation as the most plausible account of how visual experiences are able to satisfy *Recognisability*. Travis's notion of 'indexing' relates to whatever feature of perceptual experience is supposed to make its representational content recognisable to the subject. Thus, the content of any perceptual experience that is *looks-indexed* is recognisable in virtue of how, in it, things visually appear to the subject (2.2.5). L3 and L4 are concerned with the various notions of looks that might perform such perceptual indexing. Here, Travis identifies two distinct forms of looks, claiming that neither is capable of performing the required function. From this, along with considerations about the conflicting demands upon the notion of looks (L5), Travis draws the conclusion that visual experience (L6)—and by generalisation all forms of perception—cannot be p-representational (L7).

The argument from looks presents the representationalist with an apparent dilemma. They must either (a) elucidate a notion of 'looks' that is capable of indexing the relevant representational content, thereby rejecting one of L3, L4 or L5, or else (b) reject *Looks-indexing*, *Face-value* or *Recognisability*. Rejecting

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<sup>20</sup> Although the argument is presented in terms of visual perception, it is presumably intended to generalise to cover other perceptual modalities.

*Looks-indexing* places the onus upon the representationalist to find some other way of satisfying *Recognisability*, or else justify dropping this apparently plausible condition upon p-representation. (Travis has a separate argument against such views that I discuss in 2.3.3.) Rejecting *Face-value*, on the other hand, loses one of the supposed benefits of representationalism, namely that perception represents the world as being some particular way. To understand why the dilemma is pressing, however, it is necessary to gain a clear understanding of the notions of visual and thinkable looks that Travis considers,<sup>21</sup> along with the reasons why he considers it impossible that any further notion of looks could meet the representationalist's requirements.

The first notion of looks that Travis considers is what are more commonly called *comparative looks* (cf. Chisholm 1957: 45). Such looks involve some kind of explicit or implicit comparison with the visual appearance of another object, or objects, and are characterised in terms of what something 'looks like' in order to appear the way it does (Travis 2004: 69–70). Thus, they are *visual looks* (Travis forthcoming: §3). For convenience, I will abbreviate this as *looks<sub>v</sub>*. For example, if the object before me looks<sub>v</sub> like a lemon, then it has the characteristic look that lemons have—call this *looking lemonish*. Furthermore, since many things share that very same way of looking, anything that looks lemonish also looks like a wax imitation lemon, or (to the untrained eye under appropriate circumstances) like a yellowish lime, the front surface of a hollowed-out lemon, a lemon-shaped bar of soap, and so on. In fact, there are innumerable ways that something can look like a lemon. Thus, for all that things look<sub>v</sub> a particular way, there are any number of ways that the world might actually *be*, all of which share the same visual appearance.

Importantly, the corresponding resemblance relationships are symmetrical; if something looks<sub>v</sub> like a wax lemon then a wax lemon also looks<sub>v</sub> like it. Consequently, claims Travis, there can be nothing about an object's *looking<sub>v</sub> like p* that identifies the content of that experience as *representing p*; for example, that there is a lemon before me. Rather, the very same perceptual experience might equally be said to represent any (or all) of the numerous ways in which it can look<sub>v</sub> to me *just like there is* a lemon before me—that there is a wax lemon, for example. As per L3, comparative or visual looks fail to meet the *Face-value* condition (2.2.2), since they 'do not decide any particular representational content for any given experience to have' (Travis 2004: 69). Visual looks, in this sense, are equivocal.

The second notion of looks that Travis considers is what are generally called *epistemic looks* (cf. Chisholm 1957: 44). Whereas visual looks relate to resemblances between appearances, epistemic looks are 'very much a matter of what can be gathered from, or what is suggested by, the facts at hand, or those

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<sup>21</sup> Travis (2004) uses the terms 'looks like' and 'looks as if' in place of visible and thinkable looks, but this is apt to generate the impression that the argument concerns the semantic properties of certain linguistic forms rather than two roles that such appearances can play. I therefore adopt the terminology of Travis (forthcoming) in order to remain neutral about the nature of looks and their semantics, which are considered in greater depth in chapter 4.

visibly (audibly, etc.) on hand' (Travis 2004: 76). They are what might be called *thinkable looks* (Travis forthcoming), or *looks<sub>t</sub>* for short. Thinkable looks refer to a specific way that things are in order to look the way that they do. Thus, they are ideally suited to indexing p-representational contents like 'there is a lemon before me'. Indeed, thinkable looks just *are* those contents that perceptual experiences incline a perceiver to believe or judge under the relevant circumstances.<sup>22</sup> Whereas one might say, for example, that a particular painting *looks<sub>v</sub>* like a Vermeer despite our knowing that it was in fact painted by van Meegeren (an artist with an indistinguishable visual style), we would not normally say that it *looks<sub>t</sub>* as if it is a Vermeer since we already know that it is not (ibid. 75).<sup>23</sup>

It is doubtful, however, that the contents that are indexed by or identical to thinkable looks are recognisable to the subject solely on the basis of information that is perceptually available to them in experience. For example, if Amy sees what she takes to be a lemon in front of her, then there is a sense in which the relevant object looks<sub>t</sub> to her *as if* it is a lemon (which it is). But for all that things look that way, she might equally have taken the same object to be a lemon-shaped bar of soap had she had a subjectively indistinguishable experience of it in a different context—upon walking into a chemist's shop, for example. This is not due to any difference in the information that is *perceptually* available to the subject, but rather a matter of what she takes to be the case *on the basis of* that information. Plausibly, what is different about these two situations is not a matter of how things *look* in any perceptual sense, but of what the subject is inclined to *infer* from their total evidence base under the circumstances. Such inferences are a matter of judgement and not of experience, which conveys only how things appear. It is therefore unclear how one could differentiate solely in virtue of perceptual experience, as *Recognisability* requires, which of various otherwise indistinguishable possibilities are p-represented. Moreover, thinkable looks are a form of autorepresentation which, Travis argues, cannot be 'given' to the subject since its content is already accepted as true (2.2.3). Thus thinkable looks are in danger of collapsing into what Travis (2004: 67) calls mere 'indicating'. That is, as suggesting to a subject that, under the circumstances, *p* may be the case. But this cannot be what makes representational content recognisable for similar reasons. Thinkable looks cannot index p-representational content on the basis of how things perceptually seem to the subject since the information that distinguishes them is not

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<sup>22</sup> Travis (2004) associates thinkable looks with the English locution 'looks as if' in the indicative mood, as distinct from 'looks like', which is typically (though not always) comparative.

<sup>23</sup> The issue is complicated by the fact that several different locutions of 'looks'—including, on occasions 'looks like'—can be used to signify either comparative or epistemic looks. Travis (2004) claims that '*looks as though ... were ...*' in the subjunctive mood only ever expresses the former notion, whereas '*looks as if ... is ...*' in the indicative mood only expresses the latter. His argument, however, does not turn on this point, and the linguistic claim is dropped in Travis (forthcoming).

perceptually available to them, either in experience or otherwise, and thus *Recognisability* fails. Thinkable looks are not perceptual looks.

It is important to emphasise that Travis's argument from looks is not a merely semantic dispute about the meaning of 'looks', 'appearance', 'seems' and their cognates. As such, the point of the argument is not that there is no widely accepted meaning of 'looks' that individuates perceptual content. Rather, the intended point is that there *can be* no such notion of looks on the basis that the very idea of a univocal, objective and wholly perceptual 'look' is itself incoherent. Either (a) looks are visual, in which case they fail to pick out any specific way that the world must be in order for things to look that way, i.e. they are equivocal, or (b) looks 'index', or are identical to, thinkable contents about the subject's perceptual environment, in which case they are not wholly perceptual, since nothing that is perceptually available to (as opposed to knowable by) the subject could pick out such univocal content.

Having established the two horns of the dilemma that Travis presses, the question naturally arises as to whether some other notion of looks is able to index representational content in a way that both has face value and is perceptually available to the subject. As Travis (2004: 79–82) makes clear in his discussion of McDowell's notion of 'ostensible seeing', however, his answer to this question is emphatically negative. According to McDowell's disjunctive notion of looks—call this *looks<sub>d</sub>*—every possible state of affairs matching the relevant perceptible appearance is said to be represented. This either robs p-representation of its univocality, since experience does not represent things to be a determinate way, or, if the disjunction itself is the face value, it removes the possibility that such content can misrepresent, thus undermining standard representationalist explanation of perceptual illusion (2.3.1).

In essence, the need to satisfy *Recognisability* pushes towards visual looks, which contravene *Face-value*, whilst attempts to satisfy *Face-value* push towards thinkable looks, which contravene *Recognisability*. The requirements to establish both univocal representational content (*Face-value*) and to make that content recognisable solely in virtue of how things appear to the subject (*Looks-indexing*) thus work against each other in a way that is, according to Travis, fundamentally irreconcilable. Thus there cannot be any intermediate notion of looks or middle ground between these two alternatives, and so the idea of looks-indexed p-representation is incoherent.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, many of Travis's critics (e.g. Byrne 2009 and Schellenberg 2011b) take there to be a further 'non-comparative' notion of looks that shares the relevant features of visible and

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<sup>24</sup> One way around this would be to abandon the notion that p-representational concepts concern the subject's perceptual environment in favour of their being facts about the experiences of subjects (cf. Glüer 2009). But this robs representationalism of much of its explanatory power, since the resulting propositions are no longer capable of grounding objective knowledge or belief about external objects.

thinkable looks in order that both *Face-value* and *Looks-indexing* may both be met.<sup>25</sup> Such rejections of L5 are examined in greater detail in chapters 3 and 4.

An alternative response to Travis's argument from looks is to reject *Looks-indexing* in favour of the weaker *Recognisability* condition, or else to reject *Recognisability* outright. The former option places the onus upon the representationalist to explain how perceivers are able to recognise the contents of their perceptual experiences in a way that does not fall foul of Travis's argument from recognisability (2.3.3). It is, however, difficult to see how this can be done other than through *Looks-indexing*, at least in the case of visual perception. This response may be combined with a rejection of one or more of *Givenness*, *Common Content* or *Face-value*, each of which is independently plausible for reasons given above. The second option of rejecting or reformulating *Recognisability* is more radical, though once again raises the question of in what sense the resulting states would involve a form of *representation* as opposed to mere causal covariance. Nevertheless, if p-representational content is thought to be externally individuated, then one might not expect it to be recognisable—at least not in the standard sense—to the subject, depending upon how this condition is formulated. This possibility is examined in greater detail in chapters 5 and 6.

### 2.3.3. *The argument from recognisability*

The third of Travis's main arguments against representationalism appears in the final section of his paper.<sup>26</sup> This argument, which I will refer to as the *argument from recognisability*, is directed against those representationalists who reject *Looks-indexing* (L1 of the argument from looks) in favour of the weaker *Recognisability* condition. As noted above, Travis does not take his case against representationalism to depend upon *Looks-indexing* and, whilst the appropriate formulation of *Recognisability* is a matter of some delicacy, it seems at least superficially plausible that the content of p-representation might in some sense be recognisable directly from experience, as opposed to how things look (appear, seem, etc.) in it. Perhaps, as Travis puts it, 'we can just tell how things are thus represented to us; there is no saying precisely how we can tell' (Travis 2004: 84). In other words, even if there were no rule-based algorithm describing how we are able to recognise the content of perceptual experiences—on the basis of looks, for example—we nevertheless possess some innate or acquired capacity to do so. Travis raises two questions for such views: (i) precisely *which contents* do such experiences have, where the explanation for this must give some principled reason for thinking that one answer to this question can be correct here over another, and (ii) what is the relation between our being represented to in this way and our seeing (hearing, tasting, etc.) the things we

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<sup>25</sup> Byrne (2009) claims to reject *Looks-indexing*, but it is unclear that he takes it to play the role that is described here (3.2.1).

<sup>26</sup> Mislabeled section 4 (actually section 5) in Travis (2004: 82–93), or section 6 in Travis (forthcoming).

do, since if there is no such relation, then representing would be nothing but ‘a (very annoying) wheel idling’ (ibid. 86)?

In relation to the first of these questions, Travis presents the following argument:

- R1** Perceptual subjects must be capable of recognising the representational content of any given p-representation solely in virtue of having that very experience. (*Recognisability*)
- R2** The notion of representation that is involved in perceptual experience should be one that is familiar to us.
- R3** The contents of p-representations cannot be recognisable by their (external) objects since, according to the principle of intentionality, there may be no such objects.
- R4** The contents of p-representations cannot be recognisable by what the subject takes to be the case, since for perceptual takings to be part of experience would contravene *Givenness*.
- R5** The contents of p-representations cannot be recognisable by what they indicate, or are taken to do so, since *indicating* and *expecting* are not wholly perceptual, which would contravene *Recognisability*.
- R6** P-representational content cannot be recognisable by what experience is like (i.e. its phenomenal character), since this is indeterminate between multiple contents, which would contravene *Face-value*.
- R7** No other feature of p-representation is capable of satisfying all of the above constraints.
- R8** We cannot recognise the representational nature and content of p-representation solely in virtue of having that very experience. (*From R7*)
- R9** Perceptual experiences are not p-representational. (*From R1 and R8*)

The structure of the above argument closely mirrors that of the argument from looks (2.3.2), with *Looks-indexing* (L1) replaced by *Recognisability* (R1), and R5 and R6 corresponding to L4 and L3, respectively. Additional premises (R3 and R4) deal with the recognition of p-representational content via its external (i.e. intentional) objects and the notion of indication discussed above (2.3.1, 1.2.3). In addition to drawing upon all four necessary conditions for p-representation (2.3.1–2.3.4), the argument also assumes what I have called the *principle of intentionality* (2.2)—a consequence of the representationalist’s

explanation of illusion in terms of misrepresentation (2.3.1). Rejecting this would therefore undermine both the relevant explanation of illusion and R3, yielding an externalist form of content disjunctivism in which the external objects of experience individuate its content. However, this still presents the difficulty of explaining precisely how such content may be recognised on the basis of its objects, as discussed in chapter 6.

Travis motivates R2 on the basis that '[i]t should not come as a complete surprise [to us] that we are thus represented to' (Travis 2004: 86). This ties in with the justification of *Recognisability* as a consequence of *Face-value* and *Givenness*, since it is the subject of experience, as opposed to some sub-personal mechanism, that is supposed to be presented with representational content. The relevant notion of representing is therefore supposed to be something that is already clear, or else graspable on the basis of reflection, perhaps of a philosophical nature, upon ordinary experience. This restricts the range of possible answers to the question of what feature, or features, of experience make its contents recognisable to the subject—or, alternatively, to what makes it the case that there is a correct answer to what the content of a given experience is—to a relatively small number of candidates. These are then considered and rejected by Travis in R3 through R6 as follows:

- (R3) If the objects of perceptual experience (i.e. concrete external objects and their properties) were what made experiential content recognisable, then it would only be possible to satisfy *Recognisability* if these were proper parts of experience. However, the representationalist explanation of illusion in terms of misrepresentation means that one can have a type-identical experience in the absence of the relevant objects. Thus they cannot be what explains the corresponding content's recognisability, since it would still remain to be explained what makes the illusory experience's content recognisable, and where such an explanation would render the original explanation superfluous.<sup>27</sup>
- (R4) The feature of experience that makes p-representational content recognisable cannot be that the subject takes that content to be true since, according to *Givenness*, p-representation does not involve taking anything to be the case. Rather, such content is 'given' to the subject; i.e. p-representation is allrepresentation, not autorepresentation (2.2.3). If this were not the case, it would reverse the order of explanation between perceptual content and judgement or belief, since subjects are supposed to make such judgements on the basis of perceptual experience, and not the other way round, generating a potential circularity in the justification of perceptual belief. Consequently, recognisability cannot depend on the subject's taking or judging things to be the case.

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<sup>27</sup> This criticism parallels the representationalist's argument from illusion. It differs in its dialectical force, however, due to the representationalist's endorsement of the principle of intentionality, whereas the anti-representationalist is committed to no such principle.

- (R5) If p-representational content cannot be recognised on the basis of what the subject takes to be the case (R4), then perhaps the relevant feature is a matter of *indicating*. This would make p-representation akin to thinkable looks (2.3.2) which indicate what the subject would be justified in believing under the circumstances, but can still be accepted or rejected as per *Givenness*. The problem with this suggestion is that, like thinkable looks, such indications cannot be recognised solely on the basis of what is given in experience, as *Recognisability* demands, since they are not wholly perceptual, but rely on the subject's additional background knowledge or the context of the experience. Therefore the relevant feature of p-representation cannot be indication.
- (R6) Finally, p-representational content is not recognisable on the basis of 'what experience is like', i.e. its discernible phenomenal character, because perceptual phenomenology alone fails to identify any univocal way that the world might objectively be. This parallels Travis's argument against visual looks (2.3.2) as the locus for univocal content in L3 of the argument from looks. If what experience 'is like' were to represent every state of affairs matching the phenomenology of that experience, then '[t]oo many things would be represented as so at once', making p-representation 'incoherent, thus not intelligibly representation' (Travis 2004: 87); i.e. it would have massively disjunctive contents. Since phenomenal character contravenes *Face-value*, it cannot be what fixes representational content, nor can it be what makes such content recognisable.<sup>28</sup>

Having ruled out the obvious candidates for the recognition of p-representational contents solely on the basis of experience, and in the absence of any other plausible options, Travis concludes that p-representation simply has no such feature (R7). Consequently, subjects cannot recognise p-representational contents solely in virtue of having the relevant perceptual experiences, and so those experiences cannot be p-representational (R9).

Much as Travis's argument from looks aims to characterise p-representation as an intermediate notion between visual and thinkable looks, the argument from recognisability aims to characterise it as intermediate between *taking something to be the case* (i.e. autorepresentation) and *indicating*. In both cases the problem, according to Travis, is that there is and can be no such intermediary. Just as McDowell's attempt to combine the two notions of looks into a single notion of 'ostensible seeing' collapses (Travis 2004: 81), the idea that experience represents something *to us* on the basis of what experience makes perceptually available is either incoherent or superfluous. It is incoherent because, on the one hand, the need for univocal face value pushes us towards

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<sup>28</sup> The type of content that perceptual phenomenology does give rise to, namely *phenomenal content*, cannot be considered univocal since it does not identify any particular way for things to objectively be. Rather, it individuates how things are with the subject, irrespective of the external world. For further argument on this point, see 3.2.3.

forms of autorepresentation that contravene *Givenness*. On the other hand, the notion of indicating is essentially context-dependent and so cannot be solely a matter of what is perceptually available to the subject in experience. Furthermore, if p-representation were ‘a mere re-rehearsing of what experience has otherwise made plain’ (ibid. 88), then there would be no further role for it to play, and so such representation would be otiose (see 2.3.4). In order to play the relevant explanatory role, p-representation must be what conveys the contents of experience to the subject, which, by Travis’s lights, it cannot do. The present argument may therefore be regarded as a stronger and more general form of the argument from looks, whose structure it entails.

The above argument leaves it open to the representationalist to avoid its conclusion by denying one of Travis’s conditions upon p-representation, such as *Recognisability*, or by proposing some other method or notion of recognition that is capable of respecting these conditions. To deny *Givenness* would result in a doxastic account of perceptual content, with all the problems that this entails.<sup>29</sup> Denying the principle of intentionality undermines the representationalist’s account of illusion, which relies upon the notion that perception is an intentional phenomenon and so the relevant representational elements can occur in the absence of the objects or properties that it represents (2.3.1). A similar problem occurs if the representationalist denies that the relevant representing should be something that is familiar to us (R2). In both cases, it is no longer clear what work the role of *representation* is supposed to do in the explanation of perceptual experience, except perhaps as a placeholder for some technical notion quite unlike the ordinary use of this term. *Face-value* is, as we have seen, a prerequisite for many representationalist accounts of experience, including some that allow for disjunctive content (2.2.2). None of these responses is therefore without its problems.

Finally, the formulation and necessity of *Recognisability* itself may be called into question. For example, if what is meant by *recognise* the content of experience is *to be able to know* what is represented therein, then it is possible to give an externalist account of knowledge that satisfies this condition without contravening R2 (6.3.2). Such a move towards externalism, however, may end up entailing much the sort of relation between subject and object that anti-representationalists argue is necessary for perceptual experience, and so constitutes a kind of hybrid position. Any view that denies *Recognisability* outright entails rejecting the link between representation and phenomenal character altogether, and thus rejects intentionalism. These issues are taken up in detail in chapters 5 and 6.

#### 2.3.4. *The argument from unmediated awareness*

Travis’s fourth and final argument against representationalism addresses the second of the above questions concerning the relation between the role of p-representation and perceptual states like seeing, hearing, tasting, and so on. The

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Pappas 1976.

argument falls into two distinct parts. The first part aims to show that if experience involved p-representation, then this representation must be the sole source of perceptual information available to the subject. That is, in the case of veridical perception, representation should not be an unnecessary ‘wheel idling’ (Travis 2004: 86). The second part of the argument concludes that any awareness of an object in virtue of p-representation would at best be *mediate* awareness. Such awareness is comparable to testimony, and is constituted by the representation of content plus the satisfaction of ‘certain quite substantial contingencies’ (ibid. 89), such as believing the content to be true, the obtaining of the relevant correctness conditions, the reliability of the source, and so on. However, many representationalists think that perception delivers *unmediated* awareness. *Seeing the pig* constitutes a form of awareness of the pig that *being told there is a pig* does not—at least not until the various contingent conditions are satisfied, and perhaps not even then. What remains mysterious is how a state (i.e. p-representation) one can be in without the presence of its intentional objects—in hallucinations, for example—can play an explanatory role in the awareness of those objects in the ‘good’ case. Rather, whatever is doing the explanatory work must be something over and above p-representation, thereby rendering its content if not unnecessary then at least lacking in explanatory value.

The first part of this argument can be summarised as follows:

- U1** P-representation is either (a) a separate source of perceptual information to seeing<sup>30</sup> or (b) constitutes one’s perceptual awareness.
- U2** If p-representation were a separate source of perceptual awareness to seeing, then it would be unnecessary for the awareness of objects *simpliciter*.
- U3** We have no phenomenological evidence for the existence of multiple sources of perceptual information in visual experience.
- U4** P-representation and seeing are not separate sources of perceptual information.

Travis’s rejects the ‘two-source’ model of perceptual awareness on the basis that if p-representation and seeing were separate sources of information, the latter of which was sufficient for perceptual awareness, then p-representation would be effectively redundant (U2). (The relevant notion of ‘source’ here is proximal, not distal, and so is more akin to an informational conduit than a causal origin.) Therefore p-representation and seeing are not separate sources of perceptual information (U3), and so p-representation must be constitutive of the perceptual awareness of objects, as per U1(b).

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<sup>30</sup> The same applies to hearing, tasting, and so on for each available sense modality.

Having argued for a ‘one-source’ model of perceptual awareness, Travis aims to establish that p-representation can only ever furnish us with ‘mediated’, as opposed to ‘unmediated’, awareness of objects. He argues this on the basis of the following principle or test (Travis 2004: 89):

As a rule, awareness of something else plus satisfaction of surrounding conditions cannot add up to that awareness of [the presence of *o*] which we have in seeing [*o*] (to be there)—in my terms, unmediated awareness. Or, more exactly, if *X* is something there might be even without *Y*, then awareness of *X* (and whatever accompanies it *per se* in a particular case) cannot qualify as unmediated awareness of *Y*—the sort one might have in seeing *Y*.

In familiar forms of representation, such as testimony, it may be represented to the subject that *X*. However, since such representations can occur even though *not-X*—e.g. in the case of false testimony—such representation cannot constitute unmediated awareness due to the presence of a representational intermediary, in this case a report. According to Travis, what goes for testimony goes for perception since, as we have seen, the representationalist also allows that representational content may be present without its corresponding intentional objects. Thus, awareness of a particular content cannot constitute unmediated awareness of an object since the same state can occur in the absence of that object.

We can formalise the second part of the argument as follows:

- U5     Subjectively indistinguishable veridical and non-veridical perceptual experiences share a common representational content. (*Common Content*)
- U6     In non-veridical experience, p-representation cannot yield unmediated awareness of intentional objects, since there may be no such objects.
- U7     The same representational content cannot explain the unmediated awareness of objects in some cases, but not in others.
- U8     P-representational content cannot yield unmediated awareness of an object in veridical perception. (*From U5, U6 and U7*)

This yields a kind of reverse argument from illusion that combines representationalist’s account of illusion (U5) with a ‘base case’ (U6) and ‘generalising’ or ‘spreading step’ (U7) to force the conclusion that p-representational content cannot yield the unmediated awareness of objects (U8) even in the ‘good’ case (cf. Snowdon *op. cit.*). More schematically, if a given representational content does not constitute unmediated awareness in non-veridical experience, then it cannot constitute unmediated awareness in veridical

perception either.<sup>31</sup> Since many representationalists hold that such representations, or their constituent elements, can also occur in the absence of that which they represent—indeed, this is often supposed to be one of the strengths of representationalism—then the argument from unmediated awareness, if successful, would render perceptual awareness mediate in a similar way to testimony.

It is important to note that the term ‘mediated awareness’ does not imply that one is aware of the intermediary; i.e. it is not indirect or secondary epistemic perception in Dretske’s sense (1969: 79). Rather, the claim is that this is not the kind of awareness that we take ourselves to have in perceptual experience. Perceptual awareness cannot, according to the present view, be factorized into p-representation plus the satisfaction of some additional surrounding conditions such as taking something to be the case, factivity, reliability, entitlement, and so on (Travis 2004: 89). This claim has important epistemological consequences since if to *see x* is to have *unmediated awareness of x* or to *have one’s cognitive responses shaped by x’s presence*, then ‘no substantial entitlement is needed ... to take there to be [x]’ (Travis 2004: 90). Unmediated awareness of objects is therefore uniquely suited to yielding knowledge of the world in a way that mediate, that is to say *representational*, awareness is not—at least not without the satisfaction of a host of as-yet-unspecified, and quite possibly unspecifiable, further conditions.

The argument from unmediated awareness is completed by the following premises:

- U9 Visual experience (seeing) is a source of information that yields unmediated awareness of objects.
- U10 Visual experience is not p-representation. (*From U4, U8 and U9*)

In summary, and generalising to cover other sense modalities, if p-representation were our sole source of perceptual information but cannot deliver unmediated awareness of objects, then perceptual experience cannot be p-representational.

As with the historical argument from illusion (2.3.1), Travis’s argument from unmediated awareness may be challenged at several key points. Why, for example, should the representationalist accept that the same p-representational content cannot yield unmediated awareness in some cases and not in others (U7)? On the face of it, this principle seems intuitive, but if p-representation were ‘narrow’ in the sense of being internally individuated, whilst the mental state of awareness were ‘wide’ or externally individuated, then the same narrow content could be present in both cases without ruling out that it could also feature in the explanation of unmediated awareness in the veridical, but not the non-veridical case. Similarly at the level of content, some but not all representational elements may be common between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ cases,

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<sup>31</sup> Note that the relevant content may be only part of the full p-representation, thus leaving room for the kind of response to the argument discussed in 5.3.2.

generating a form of content disjunctivism or indexicality. This is perfectly consistent with *Common Content* and would explain the immediate awareness of objects in terms of those representational elements or contents that are present in the ‘good’ case, but not the ‘bad’.

Such responses, however, suggest there must be more to unmediated awareness than perceptually experiencing an appropriately caused p-representation of an object. This ‘something more’ is arguably precisely the relation between subject and object that anti-representationalists claim is fundamental to perceptual experience, and which appears to be omitted from the representationalist model. This in turn suggests that representationalism gives at best a partial characterisation of perceptual experience with much of the explanatory work being done by the relational element. This suggestion is taken up further in chapters 6 and 7, which explore the possibility that representationalism and relationalism may in some sense be two sides of the same coin.

#### 2.4. Conclusion

Travis’s case against representationalism consists of a series of arguments, each of which targets the view that perceptual experience constitutively involves a particular form of representation—namely *p-representation*. Such representations meet the conditions of *Content*, *Face-value*, *Givenness* and *Recognisability* set out above, each of which is individually necessary for p-representation. In responding to Travis, the representationalist must therefore either challenge the soundness of these arguments or else provide an alternative notion of representation that rejects one or more of these conditions upon p-representation whilst maintaining the distinctive thesis that perceptual experience may be characterised in essentially representational terms, i.e. REP. If Travis is right, then perceptual experience cannot simply be a matter of a perceiver’s being in a particular representational state, but rather constitutively depends upon the subject’s relation to the objects they perceive, i.e. REL. On this view, the notion of p-representation omits the very aspect of perception, namely ‘openness to the world’, that explains its ability to make an objective world available to us in conscious thought and experience.

The following chapters examine a range of responses to Travis’s anti-representationalism. These range from positing a third, ‘non-comparative’ notion of looks (chapters 3 and 4) to rejecting *Recognisability* (chapter 5) or positing an alternative mechanism for its satisfaction (chapter 6). Even if Travis arguments were successful, however, this would not show that there is *no* notion of representation that is applicable to perception. Rather, Travis’s claim is that such a notion would be (a) unrecognisable to us as *representation*; i.e. it would be a form of ‘quasi-representation’ that shares some of the properties of p-representation but, for example, does not show up in conscious perceptual experience; or (b) unable to support many of the claims that representationalists typically make for their theories—as a means of explaining phenomenal

character (i.e. intentionalism) or what is common to both experience and judgement, for example.

The challenge for representationalists, then, is to elucidate the representational 'language' of the senses without thereby committing to the existence of the kind of perceptual relation that many anti-representationalists, typically relationalists, take to be essential to perceptual experience. If it is the relationality, and not the representational content of experience, that accords perception its special role within the philosophy and epistemology of mind, then representation simply drops out of the picture since the senses would, as Travis claims, be 'silent'.

## 3. The Sound of Silence

*Three arguments from perceptual appearances*

### 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I examine three arguments in favour of perceptual experience having p-representational content. Although each is presented in connection with a particular philosopher in the literature—namely, Alex Byrne (2009), Susanna Siegel (2010) and Susanna Schellenberg (2011b)—they all exemplify a common approach or assumption concerning experience. That is, they take the nature or phenomenology of perceptual appearances to be decisive in establishing the existence of representational content. Furthermore, despite ostensibly responding to Travis (2004), each of these arguments fails to engage with central aspects of the case against representationalism by underestimating its force and generality. Consequently, these arguments fail to address the central issues that Travis raises, rendering them unsuccessful as responses to anti-representationalism or in establishing the existence of p-representational content. Whilst this does not rule out the possibility that experience may indeed have representational content, or that certain forms of relationalism about experience may be compatible with this view—as Siegel and Schellenberg, for example, claim—to establish this, a better way of adjudicating between the relevant positions will need to be found.

### 3.2. An Argument from Non-Comparative Looks

The first argument in favour of representationalism I wish to consider involves a third notion of looks—namely, *non-comparative* or *phenomenal looks*—which, unlike Travis's visible and thinkable looks, is supposedly capable of grounding representational content. A recent exponent of this approach is Alex Byrne (2009), who argues in favour of non-comparative looks (3.2.2). Byrne's principal criticism of Travis's anti-representationalism is that it fails to provide an adequate account of perceptual illusions, such as the Müller-Lyer figure (ibid. 445). Representationalism, on the other hand, is tailor-made to provide such an

explanation in terms of the notion of *misrepresentation*, as previously discussed in chapter 2. However, Byrne's argument on this point begs the question by characterising anti-representationalism as involving a 'factive propositional attitude' (ibid. 437) when the existence of any such attitude in experience is precisely what anti-representationalists like Travis deny (3.2.1).

Furthermore, I argue that Byrne fails to elucidate a coherent non-comparative notion of looks, arguably committing him to a form of phenomenal content that is unable to support the standard representationalist account of illusion since it entails that any experience that has the relevant content is necessarily veridical simply in virtue of being experienced (3.2.3). If so, Byrne's own account of experience suffers from precisely the difficulty that he levels at Travis since it is incapable of explaining how the relevant perceptual content is able to misrepresent in the case of perceptual illusion. Given that, according to Byrne, this was supposed to be one of the main benefits of representationalism about perceptual experience, and the reason for which he rejects Travis's anti-representationalism, this renders his response to Travis seriously flawed, or at least incomplete. Thus I argue that the attempt to ground representational content in 'non-comparative' looks fails to establish representationalism (3.2.4).

### 3.2.1. 'Zeeing' and the problem of illusion

Byrne begins his argument by spelling out the thesis to which Travis is opposed, which he refers to as *the Content View*.<sup>1</sup> After rejecting an initial formulation of this thesis on the basis that it involves a 'special philosophical sense' (ibid. 433) of perceptual experience that Byrne rejects, he settles on the following characterisation of the view (ibid. 437):

CV' Perception constitutively involves a propositional attitude rather like the *non*-factive attitude of believing.

According to this thesis—a form of representationalism—whenever one perceives, one is in a contentful representational state that does not entail the truth of its contents.<sup>2</sup> Thus 'perceiving' is akin to 'believing' or 'hoping', and unlike 'knowing', which is generally taken to be factive. From this, we can infer that Byrne endorses Travis's *Objectivity* condition, since propositional attitudes 'represent things as being so', and are therefore assessable for truth or accuracy (2.2.1).

In order for there to be some particular way that things are represented as being, however, this content must have a single face-value content, and so CV' may also be taken to entail *Face-value*. Whether Byrne endorses *Givenness* is less clear, since his analogy with belief might be taken to suggest that the relevant propositional attitude entails a level of commitment compatible with

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<sup>1</sup> Not to be confused with Siegel's use of this term (3.3.1).

<sup>2</sup> Byrne's use of the term 'propositional attitude' is intended to be neutral between conceptual and non-conceptual content, and so CV' should not be taken to entail a purely conceptual view of perceptual content (ibid.).

perception being autorepresentation, or *representation-by*. However, as Travis argues, perception cannot be autorepresentation since only committed allorepresentation—i.e. *representation-to*—can have a face value (2.2.3). I will therefore assume for the sake of argument that Byrne also endorses *Givenness*, though nothing in what follows turns on this. Finally, I argue below that Byrne endorses a form of *Looks-indexing*, which in turn entails *Recognisability*, albeit under a different notion of looks than the ones Travis considers (3.2.3). As such, the content of a perceptual state must be accessible to the subject solely in virtue of their being in that very state. From this, we can conclude that the content of the propositional attitude to which Byrne refers is a form of p-representation, and thus a potential target of Travis’s argument from looks (2.3.2).

In order to determine whether CV’ is true, it will be necessary to compare it with the corresponding anti-representationalist position from some suitably neutral standpoint. Byrne’s attempt to do this centres upon his analysis of perceptual illusion in terms of the propositional attitudes of ‘exing’ and ‘zeeing’ (Byrne 2009: 437).

Byrne’s positive argument for representationalism takes the form of an inference to the best explanation. The idea is to show that there are theoretical considerations that count in favour of CV’—a claim which Byrne takes Travis to deny—thereby providing a counter-argument to Travis’s argument from misleading appearances (2.3.1). He begins by characterising anti-representationalism in terms of a factive attitude—‘zeeing’—which is somewhat akin to knowing (*ibid.*). According to this view, perceptual illusion may be explained in terms of misinterpreting one’s ‘zeeing that *p*’ as indicating *q*, and thus arriving at a false conclusion on the basis of one’s perceptual experience. Since zeeing is factive, zeeing that *p* logically entails *p*, and so any error that occurs must be one of interpretation or judgement, rather than of perceptual experience *per se*. This is compatible with Brewer’s (1999: 169) maxim that ‘[e]rror, strictly speaking ... is never an essential feature of experience itself’ on the basis that one can only perceive, or ‘zee’, what is actually there. Byrne characterises representationalism, on the other hand, in terms of CV’, which claims that perception constitutively involves a *non*-factive attitude—‘exing’, intended to suggest ‘experiencing’—somewhat akin to believing (Byrne 2009: 437). On this view, perceptual illusions occur just in case a subject ‘exes that *p*’ when in fact not-*p*; i.e. it is the content of the perceptual state that is in error rather than the subject’s interpretation of it. Byrne argues that this explanation of illusion is simpler than the anti-representationalist’s and so should be preferred upon grounds of parsimony.

Byrne’s formulation of the dispute is misguided in several respects. Firstly, anti-representationalists not only deny that perception constitutively involves a non-factive propositional attitude, but that it involves any propositional attitude at all. Indeed, this is precisely the conclusion that Travis’s arguments aim to establish. Since the factive attitude of zeeing is as much a contentful, and therefore representational, state as exing, these arguments would count as much against the former as it as they do against Byrne’s representationalism. The

characterisation of anti-representationalism as constitutively involving a factive propositional attitude is therefore both beside the mark and question-begging. The point here is not whether the attitude involved in perception is factive or non-factive, as Byrne appears to suggest, but whether it involves *any propositional attitude at all*. Consequently, an argument against zeeing is not an argument against anti-representationalism, because anti-representationalism involves no such attitude.

As we saw in chapter 2, anti-representationalists typically explain perceptual illusions in terms of *misleading* or misinterpretation of perceptual experience (2.3.1). It is therefore instructive to compare the explanatory structure of genuine and illusory perceptual experiences on the resulting account. In the case of perception, a subject is presented with an object *o* which she judges to be *F*. Since *o* is in fact *F*, the experience is veridical and may subsequently form the basis for a judgement to this effect. In the illusory case, on the other hand, the subject is similarly presented with an object *o* that she judges to be *F*. However, in this case *o* is not *F*, and so the judgement is incorrect. Again, this is not a matter of ‘zeeing’ *o* to be one way and then judging it to be another, as Byrne describes it, but of mistaking the look of *o* under the relevant circumstances as indicating that it is *F* when it is not. In neither case does any representation—accurate or otherwise—form a part of the experience. Instead, representation only comes into play at the level of judgement and belief. Put this way, the anti-representationalist account of illusion can be seen to be no more complex than their account of perception—or, for that matter, than Byrne’s own representational account. The only significant difference lies in where one places the ‘error’. For Byrne, such errors lie in the subject’s representational state, which fails to accurately reflect how things are in the world. For the anti-representationalist it lies with whatever faculty is responsible for interpreting perceptual experience, i.e. belief- or judgement-formation. Byrne’s assertion that the representationalist account of illusion is simpler and more parsimonious is therefore false.

A further point worth noting is that even if Byrne’s characterisation were correct, it is unclear why this should constitute a problem for the anti-representationalist. Whilst parsimony is undoubtedly a virtue of philosophical or other theories, it is not the final arbiter of truth. Given that many anti-representationalists take illusory or hallucinatory experiences to be parasitic upon perception, rather than the central cases with which a theory of perception should be concerned, it would be considered no defect if their theory were to handle the former in a different and potentially more complex way than the latter (although, as shown above, this is not necessarily the case).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, for anti-representationalists who take ‘perception’ to be a success verb, illusions and hallucinations are not, strictly speaking forms of perception at all, but rather experiences that can *easily be mistaken for perception*. Provided that a theory of perception is compatible with the existence of illusions and hallucinations—a

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<sup>3</sup> Disjunctivists, for example, characterise illusions and/or hallucinations in terms of their subjective indistinguishability from veridical perceptual experiences (Martin 2004: 72).

fact that all parties accept—it is not mandatory that such cases be explained in precisely the same manner as genuine perceptions (though they may be). It is therefore difficult to see why Byrne takes this to be a decisive factor in the debate, especially if anti-representationalism were, as some of its proponents suggest (e.g. Brewer 2006; 2008), able to offer a more plausible account of veridical perception.

If Byrne's aim is to show that the existence of perceptual illusion offers more support to *CV'* than it does to anti-representationalism then it fails because, without begging the question against the latter, he has not demonstrated that this is the case. As Travis points out, this motivation for supporting representationalism is neutralised by the availability of an alternative explanation for such phenomena in the form of the misinterpretation of perceptual appearances (2.3.1). Admittedly, this approach, which dates back to Berkeley and Reid, is not without its problems, but these do not appear to be Byrne's target. Furthermore, even if the anti-representationalist explanation of illusion were more complex than that offered by representationalism, then this cannot be taken to settle the matter. Thus, whilst the availability of a simple account of the nature of illusions might be taken as a motivation for endorsing representationalism, it cannot be the decisive factor in the present debate. Rather, it is one issue among many that must be taken into consideration when evaluating a theory of perception.

### 3.2.2. *Non-comparative looks*

The remainder of Byrne's response to Travis focuses upon the various notions of looks that Travis employs in connection with the 'indexing' or recognition of perceptual content. In particular, Byrne rejects premise L5 of Travis's argument from looks, claiming that there is a third notion of looks that is capable of meeting both *Face-value* and *Looks-indexing*, thereby defusing Travis's dilemma. Indeed, he claims that the need for such a notion is apparent from Travis's (2004: 69–70) own definition of visible looks ('looking like'), which is as follows:

[S]omething looks thus-and-so, or like such-and-such, where it looks the way such-and-such, or things which are (were) thus-and-so, does (would, might) look.

Unpacking the somewhat convoluted grammar of this passage, it is apparent that 'looks' appears in both the *explanandum* ('looks thus-and-so, or like such-and-such') and *explanans* ('looks the way ... does'). The latter form of looks must therefore be distinct from the former or else Travis's definition would be circular. Byrne takes this to show that, even by Travis's lights, a third notion of

looks is required—a notion which, following Chisholm (1957), he calls *non-comparative looks*.<sup>4</sup>

Byrne describes non-comparative looks, or ‘looks<sub>nc</sub>’ (Byrne 2009: 443), as a kind of ‘*Gestalt*’ (ibid.) for which the subject possesses some innate or learned recognitional capacity (cf. Chisholm 1957; Jackson 1977). Thus red things look<sub>nc</sub> *reddish*, cows look<sub>nc</sub> *cowish*, old things look<sub>nc</sub> *oldish*, and so on, where in each case the *explanans* picks out a non-comparative look that is typically possessed by things of the relevant kind. Furthermore, Byrne contends that looks<sub>nc</sub> are explanatorily prior to both looks<sub>v</sub> and looks<sub>i</sub>, thereby avoiding the alleged circularity in Travis’s account.

Breckenridge (2007) makes a similar proposal, characterising looks as properties of perceptual events (‘lookings’) that correspond to the manner in which things, according to them, look. However, the resulting ‘adverbial’ account (ibid. 4) suffers from the same problem as Travis’s visible looks, since such ‘ways of looking’ would be incapable of indexing content that is any more finely grained than those very looks. For example, many things look<sub>v</sub> *like* a lemon, only some of which have the property of *being* a lemon. Either each of these either counts as the same way of looking, or it counts as a different way of looking. If each counts as the same way of looking—*looking lemonish*, as it were—then this way of looking cannot index the proposition that something *is* a lemon, since, despite having this look, the object might equally well be said to exhibit the appearance of a lemon-shaped bar of soap or innumerable other things. Thus *Face-value* cannot be met. Conversely, if each of these possibilities is to count as a different way of looking—the look of a lemon, the look of a lemon-shaped bar of soap, and so on—then such looks are epistemic, and so not discernible on the basis of perceptual information alone since they are perceptually indistinguishable. Thus *Looks-indexing* cannot be met. We are back with Travis’s original dilemma. Consequently, if looks<sub>nc</sub> are supposed to solve this problem, then they cannot be adverbial ways of looking.

Unfortunately, whilst Byrne’s overall strategy is clear, he fails to provide an adequate account of just what he takes looks<sub>nc</sub> to be, and how they are supposed to individuate the sort of content that representationalists posit—namely, p-representation. In the absence of such an account, ‘non-comparative looks’ becomes a mere placeholder for some notion of looks that both has univocal face-value and is recognisable, as per McDowell’s ‘ostensible seeing’ (2.3.2). However, such a stipulation does not solve the problem that Travis raises, but merely restates it since it remains unclear how the alleged looks could be something that is perceptually given in experience.

Byrne goes on to reject the notion that content is ‘looks-indexed’, concluding (Byrne 2009: 444):

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, Travis’s notion of visible looks can be explained in terms of, for example, visually relevant similarities, and so does not require an additional sense of ‘looks’ (cf. Brewer 2011: §5.3; Martin 2010; 4.2.3).

The upshot is that Travis is in one way right. Perceptual content, if there is such a thing, is not ‘looks-indexed’, at least as that notion has been explained here. But Travis is wrong to conclude that our ordinary talk provides no support for [representationalism].

Of course, Travis argues for no such conclusion. Rather, as described in chapter 2, he argues that the very notion of p-representation is incoherent. Furthermore, it is unclear that Byrne really does oppose *Looks-indexing* as Travis formulates it. Rather, he takes this term to mean that there is some sense of the word ‘looks’ that is ‘best understood as implicitly reporting the content of the exing attitude’ (Byrne 2009: 439). Whilst it is true that there may be no such sense, this does not undermine *Looks-indexing*, which relates to the recognisability of perceptual content and not its expression in everyday language.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Byrne goes on to defend looks<sub>nc</sub> as constitutive of p-representational content (ibid 443). Despite the above denial, then, I take it that Byrne does endorse a form of *Looks-indexing*, at least for the particular notion of looks he describes—i.e. looks<sub>nc</sub>—even if it has no common expression in everyday language.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2.3. *Phenomenal content*

Byrne claims that, given its role in explaining illusion, we should ‘expect perceptual content to be relatively thin’ (Byrne 2009: 449; 450). By ‘thin’, Byrne means that p-representational content would not contain cognitively sophisticated concepts like *lemons*, *pigs* or *Vermeers*, but instead relates to more ‘primitive’ sensory concepts, such as *yellow* or *square*. This contrasts with theorists like Siegel (2010), who argue that experience has ‘rich’ content that involves precisely such natural-kind properties. On Byrne’s view, the propositional content arising from non-comparative looks would, like Jackson’s ‘phenomenal looks’ (Jackson 1977: 33), ‘concern properties like shape, motion, colour, shading, orientation and the like, not properties like *being tired*, *belonging to Sarah* or *being a lemon*’ (Byrne 2009: 449). The difficulty for this view, however, arises when we try to spell out precisely *which* properties are represented in perceptual experience.

Representationalists typically claim that the contents of perceptual experience concern, amongst other things, the appearance-independent properties of objects, such as *being yellow*, *being round*, and so on. On this view, that objects *look yellow* or *look round*, etc. to a subject is supposed to be explained in terms of the subject’s *representing them to be* yellow, round, etc. That is, an object *o* appearing to be *F* to subject *S* is explained in terms of *S*’s representing that *o is F*, in accordance with Travis’s *Objectivity* condition (2.2.1). Seeming or appearing is therefore a function of the propositional attitude under which the relevant content is entertained—‘exing’ in Byrne’s terminology (3.2.1)—as opposed to something that features explicitly in the content of experience itself.

<sup>5</sup> Byrne himself seems happy to identify looks<sub>nc</sub> as a sense of ‘looks’ (ibid.).

<sup>6</sup> A more detailed analysis of the semantics of ‘looks’ is given in chapter 4.

What Byrne and others appear to overlook, however, is that the argument from looks applies equally to so-called perceptual primitives like *being round* and *being yellow* as it does to cognitively sophisticated ones like *being a lemon* or *being a Vermeer*. This leaves such views open to the following form of objection: it is not *S*'s propositional attitude towards the representational content of experience which makes it the case that *o* appears *F*—*being yellow*, for example—to *S*, but rather the properties that are represented in that content; i.e. they are *appearance properties*. In order for the representationalist explanation of illusion to go through, every case in which *o* appears *F* to *S* must involve the same content regardless of whether or not *o* actually *is F*. Only in this way can the relevant content be said to misrepresent. However, according to the present objection, if non-comparative looks index anything, it is *how things appear* to a subject and not *how things are in the world*. That is to say, the content that *S*'s perceptual experience makes recognisable is not that *o is F*, but rather that *o appears F*. Thus, instead of appearances being a matter of the subject's representing that *p* under a particular propositional attitude, they become embedded into the contents of the relevant *p*-representations, yielding what I will call *phenomenal content*.

Why should we think that non-comparative looks index properties of the subject's experience, rather than those of the external objects that give rise to them? After all, it is part of the representationalist's view that things appear to be, for example, yellow by representing them to *be* yellow, not by representing them to *look* yellow. The problem stems from the nature of looks-indexing and the need for the relevant content to be recognisable to the subject. If what is supposed to make the relevant content recognisable is the way that things look<sub>nc</sub>, then this must be (as one might expect) common to both epistemically 'good' and 'bad' cases. A subject who undergoes a perceptual illusion is just as aware of experiencing a yellow non-comparative 'look' as one who sees a ripe lemon under normal lighting—they are, according to Byrne, experiencing the same phenomenal look. The point that the objection presses is: what is it about such looks, which are common to both good and bad cases, that makes the content *o is yellow* recognisable, as opposed to *o looks yellow*? Since both cases involve the same phenomenal look, then why should we think of the look as favouring one case—e.g. (the object's being) yellow—over the other, i.e. that it (merely) looks yellow)?

The above point is precisely the one that Travis presses against visual, or comparative, looks. Given all that Byrne has said about non-comparative looks, it is as yet unclear how they could index propositions concerning the way the world objectively is since there is no determinate state of affairs that must obtain in order for things to look the way that they do. Something that looks yellow, for example, could just as well indicate a white object illuminated by yellow light as it does something being yellow. That is, there is no specific way that a given object must be in order for it to look the way that it does, and thus nothing objective to represent, except perhaps a disposition to cause a certain type of experience. Moreover, the presence of any given non-comparative look

co-varies not with *o*'s *being* F, but with *o*'s *looking* F. Thus, if  $\text{looks}_{nc}$  index some content, i.e. make it recognisable to the subject, then it should concern whatever property of experience corresponds to this look, and not the properties of the external objects that cause it. What is required here, and what Byrne's account fails to provide, is an explanation of how the appearance-independent properties of objects such as *being yellow* come to figure in the contents of perceptual experience at all. The representation of such objective properties cannot simply be taken for granted by the representationalist since this is precisely what is at issue in Travis's argument from looks.

At first blush, representing that objects *look thus-and-so* rather than *being thus-and-so*, may seem unproblematic, at least for Byrne who denies that perceptual content need play any strong epistemic role (Byrne 2009: 450). However, if non-comparative looks, and therefore p-representations, relate only to the subjective appearances of objects (how they look) rather than their mind-independent properties (how they are), then it becomes impossible for the resulting content to misrepresent. An object *o* that looks yellow to *S*, for example, cannot fail to have the property of looking yellow to *S* under those particular circumstances, quite independently of whether it *is* yellow or not. This difficulty arises from the fact that *being yellow* and *looking yellow* can be regarded as two distinct properties, one of which relates to the objects of experience and the other to experience itself. The fact that the English locutions that describe these properties both happen to include the word 'yellow' is a contingent feature of surface grammar that does not itself ground any deep philosophical connection between the two. Consequently, it is easy to overlook the fact that, for all that Byrne has said, *there is nothing to connect looking yellow with being yellow*—they are, to all intents and purposes, quite separate and distinct properties.

Byrne effectively concedes this when he states that 'perceptual content, if there is such a thing, goes with the way things look when they look<sub>nc</sub> F, which need not include Fness' (Byrne 2009: 443). Just as yellow objects do not always look yellow, non-yellow objects can sometimes look yellow—when viewed under yellow light, for example. Thus something can *look yellow* without *being yellow*, and *vice versa*.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, since *being yellow* is a monadic property of objects, whereas *looking yellow to S* is a relational property whose *relata* include both subject and object, the two properties cannot be numerically identical. Rather, they must be connected in some other manner. The objection to Byrne's account is that it fails to specify what this connection is, thus rendering it at the very least incomplete, and at worst incoherent since in any experience in which things seem to *S* to be F, it is true that they seem this way to *S*, and so perceptual experiences effectively become their own truthmakers.

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<sup>7</sup> Lest the metaphysics of colour be thought to present a particular problem in this regard, compare the case of circular objects, which can sometimes exhibit a 'non-comparative' elliptical look when viewed at an angle. This is not to say that circular objects *look to be elliptical* when seen at an angle. Rather, they *look like ellipses do* when seen face-on such that they might, under certain circumstances, be mistaken for an ellipse on the basis of this shared visible look.

The form of objection sketched above does not deny that representational contents may be individuated by something other than looks. Rather, it shows that p-representational contents that are indexed—that is to say, made recognisable—by looks<sub>nc</sub> alone cannot privilege the representation of objective properties, i.e. *being F*, over phenomenal properties, i.e. (merely) *looking F*. Consequently, the resulting p-representations cannot misrepresent; they constitute phenomenal content. This counts against the view set out in Byrne (2009) to the extent that it supports *Looks-indexing*, linguistic objections notwithstanding. It is particularly pressing given that the ability to account for illusion is the reason Byrne gives for favouring representationalism over Travis's anti-representationism (3.2.1). If, on the other hand, Byrne rejects *Looks-indexing*, the problem is circumvented, but this leaves him without an account of p-representation since the notion of non-comparative looks would then be explanatorily inert. The objection therefore counts against any theory that takes p-representational content to be grounded in non-comparative looks. This includes both Siegel (2010) and Schellenberg (2011b), who explicitly cite Byrne (2009) as a proponent of this form of content, and whose arguments I examine in further detail below.

#### 3.2.4. Responses

Having established a potential objection to the non-comparative looks based view, I will now consider some responses that a proponent of such a view might give to the above argument, along with the reasons why they are unsatisfactory.

The most plausible line of defence is perhaps that the semantics of p-representational content is quite independent of an account of how such content is recognised by the subject. The former determines how content is fixed or individuated, whilst the latter explains how it is accessible to the subject. For example, one might adopt a counterfactual (Dretske 1994), informational (Fodor 1987) or teleosemantic (Millikan 1993) account according to which the contents of perceptual experience refers to the mind-independent properties of objects and not their looks. On this view, what makes it the case that a subject represents, for example, the presence of a lemon, as opposed to something that merely *looks* like a lemon, is explained in terms of something external to experience itself, such as the evolutionarily selected ability to represent lemons as a source of nutrition.

The problem with this approach, however, as Travis points out, is that it fails to explain how such content is recognisable to the subject. According to the *Recognisability* condition, the representational content of experience—i.e. what would need to be the case in order for that content to be veridical—is supposed to be recognisable to the subject in virtue of having that very experience (2.2.4). This is just part of what it means to be represented to, i.e. *Givenness*. However, if the accuracy conditions of p-representations depend upon evolutionary contingencies, counterfactual possibilities or informational links with the environment, it is difficult (though not impossible—see 5.3) to see how this condition can be satisfied. More generally, if what makes such contents

recognisable differs from what fixes that content, it remains to be explained how the former is able to track the latter. Travis aims to drive a wedge between these two requirements by arguing that whatever makes content recognisable (e.g. non-comparative looks) will dictate the kind of content that one can thereby recognise (i.e. phenomenal content) instead of the kinds of contents that representationalists typically claim experiences to have. I will return to this point in chapters 5 and 6.

An alternative response that Byrne might (and indeed does) give is that for something to look yellow is just for it to ‘*look the way that yellow things are*’.<sup>8</sup> This might be taken to mean one of two things, the first of which is trivially true and the second of which is question-begging. If ‘the way that yellow things are’ is taken to mean the property that, as a matter of necessity, all yellow things have in common—namely, their yellowness—then the point is trivial, since it is hardly explanatory to say that ‘to look yellow just is to look yellow’. Alternatively, if Byrne intends for his maxim to establish some kind of connection between *looking yellow* and *being yellow*, as his argument requires, then *being yellow* must itself be a way of *looking yellow*. To the extent that this is true—something that is far from clear since things that are yellow need not look it—then this is presumably just *one* of the ways in which things can look yellow, since many non-yellow things also look yellow under appropriate circumstances: a white piece of chalk in yellow light, for example. In order for the relevant experiences to represent *being yellow* rather than *being white in yellow light*, there must be something that privileges the former content over the latter. This cannot simply be the fact that one is true and the other false in any given experience, since the content of experience being satisfied is supposed to determine whether or not that experience is veridical, and not the other way round. Thus Byrne’s response either falls under the previous point concerning the recognisability of perceptual content, or else assumes the very thing it is supposed to explain—namely that to *look yellow* is to represent something as *being yellow*. I therefore conclude that the response is unsuccessful and that non-comparative looks, or looks<sub>nc</sub>, like visible looks, are equivocal and so unfit to index representational content.

### 3.3. An Argument from Visual Appearances

The second argument for representationalism I will consider is Susanna Siegel’s ‘Argument from Appearing’ (Siegel 2010: 44). Like Byrne, Siegel takes Travis to be making a ‘semantic objection’ (ibid. 59) against the claim that looks report the content of visual experiences. However, instead of focusing upon the kind of ‘non-comparative’ looks that Byrne describes, Siegel presents an argument for the view that all experiences have representational content—a position which she, like Byrne (3.3.1), calls *the Content View*, or CV for short. According to Siegel, however, even proponents of relationalism about experience are

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<sup>8</sup> Alex Byrne in conversation at the SNNP *Emotion and Perception Workshop*, University of Glasgow, October 2010.

committed to CV. If correct, this would mean that representationalism and relationalism are not competing theses, as is often assumed, but compatible. By arguing that perceptual experiences have accuracy conditions regardless of which account of experience one adopts, Siegel aims to establish CV as common ground between representational and relational accounts of experience, thereby altering the terms of the debate.

In this section I assesses whether Siegel's Argument from Appearing is successful in establishing her claim that proponents of relationalism are committed to CV. I argue that her account begs the question against relationalism at more than one point—particularly in the way she characterises the phenomenology of visual experience as involving the presentation of properties, where this is conceived of in terms of *property-types* and not *property-instances* (3.3.2). Consequently, the Argument from Appearing fails to provide any reason for thinking that relationalism entails CV, though neither does this rule out their compatibility. Thus, whilst there may be arguments that can adjudicate between or demonstrate the compatibility of relationalism and CV, this is not one of them. Possible rejoinders to these objections are discussed in 3.3.3.

### 3.3.1. *Siegel's Content View*

In her book *The Contents of Visual Experience*, Susanna Siegel aims to alter the terms of the present debate by arguing that what she calls *the Content View* (CV) applies equally to both representational and relational accounts of experience, i.e. REP and REL (1.2.4). According to Siegel (2010: 28), for an experience to have content is just for it to be capable of accuracy or inaccuracy according to a set of accuracy conditions that are conveyed to the subject of that experience. The accuracy conditions for a visual experience as of a red circular object, such as one might experience upon seeing a tomato, for example, would include (amongst other things) there being a circular red object—e.g. a tomato—at the relevant egocentrically defined spatial location. If the object were not red, or were in a different location from where it was perceived to be, then this content would be inaccurate, and therefore non-veridical (cf. 1.2.3). Nevertheless, the same experience may correctly predicate other aspects of the object—for example its shape. Thus CV can account for the sense in which an experience can be 'more' or 'less' accurate according to how much or how little of its content is veridical (ibid. 32).

According to Siegel, content may be conveyed to a subject in one of three ways (ibid. 51). First, it may become, or be systematically related to, the content of an explicit belief—'*there is a red tomato*', for example—that it is natural for the subject to form as a result of having had the relevant perceptual experience. Second, experiential content may guide conscious bodily action, such as reaching out to grasp an object in the appropriate manner. Third, the content of experience may be consciously available to the subject through the faculty of introspection. In each case, however, the content of the experience is in some sense 'conveyed' to the subject in thought or action, and not a merely formal or

theoretical feature of experience as described from a third-personal point of view. This is in keeping with Travis's *Recognisability* condition, though it is unclear why first two cases should be taken as the evidence of representational content of experience, rather than of belief or action, since such evidence would also be compatible with anti-representationalist accounts of experience. Nevertheless, the issue for the CV theorist will be to explain both how and why such conveying is possible.<sup>9</sup>

Contents, for Siegel, 'are a kind of accuracy condition' (ibid. 30). Thus, she argues, if it can be shown that perceptual experiences have the right kind of accuracy conditions, i.e. those that are conveyed to the subject in experience, then it will have been shown that experiences have contents. This is exactly what the Argument from Appearing aims to achieve (3.3.2). This argument is itself a refinement of a simpler argument, called the 'Argument from Accuracy' (Siegel 2010: 34), which is as follows:

- C1 All experiences are accurate or inaccurate.
- C2 If all experiences are accurate or inaccurate, then all experiences have accuracy conditions.
- C3 All experiences have accuracy conditions.

The Argument from Accuracy is unsatisfactory because, as Siegel herself admits, it fails to secure the right kind of accuracy conditions for experience. For any given experience *e*, there exists a trivial accuracy condition, namely that *e is accurate if and only if e is accurate*. Such accuracy conditions correspond to the application of the predicate '*x is veridical*' and are not conveyed to the subject via experience, which was one of the requirements for establishing the existence of content, and therefore CV. The problem is that the application of a predicate—in this case *accuracy*—does not itself entail the existence of content. If it did, then the application of any predicate, such as *being blue* or *being tall* would also entail the existence of content (cf. ibid. 30). Such trivial accuracy conditions, however, are unable to differentiate between the contents of one experience and another, since all experiences would have precisely the same veridicality condition—namely, that the experience is accurate (blue, tall, etc.) if and only if it is accurate (blue, tall, ...)—and so the same 'content'. Consequently, we cannot conclude from the mere existence of accuracy conditions that experiences have contents, since C1 might be true solely in virtue of such conditions and yet CV be false since the relevant conditions are not conveyed to the subject via experience.

The Argument from Accuracy fails to establish the desired conclusion that all experiences have content (i.e. CV) as it is unable to yield the kind of content—namely, *representational* content—that CV requires. It therefore needs to be

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<sup>9</sup> Not all representationalists accept that perceptual representations need be conveyed to the subject. Burge (2010), for example, rejects this in favour of non-conscious representational content (5.2.4).

refined not only to rule out such trivial accuracy conditions, but to explain both *why* experiences are assessable for accuracy in the first place, and *how* these conditions are conveyed to the subject (ibid. 44). Siegel's Argument from Appearing attempts to remedy these flaws.

### 3.3.2. *The Argument from Appearing*

Siegel's argument begins with a supposedly uncontentious premise concerning the phenomenology of visual experience. This is followed by a series of steps which aim to derive the existence of accuracy conditions that are conveyed to the subject, and so content. The idea is to show that advocates of REL, who accept that we perceptually experience the properties of objects, are thereby committed to experience having accuracy conditions that are conveyed by that experience, and so content that is discernible to the subject. To do this, the argument must derive CV from suitably neutral assumptions concerning the nature of perceptual experience that are acceptable to proponents of REP and REL alike. If successful, this would establish CV as common ground between the representational and relational accounts, thus redefining the terms of the debate concerning the nature of perceptual experience. I will argue that the argument fails to do this.

Though Siegel's articulation of the argument is somewhat complex, its general structure is reasonably straightforward, proceeding from the presence of visual properties in experience to the existence of representational content and the Content View. Although I will mainly be concerned here with only the first three premises, the entire argument is reproduced below for completeness (Siegel 2010: 45; minor formatting changes only).

- A1** All visual perceptual experiences present clusters of properties as being instantiated.
- A2** If an experience *e* presents a cluster of properties F as being instantiated, then:
  - A2b* Necessarily: things are the way *e* presents them only if property-cluster F is instantiated.
- A3** If necessarily: things are the way *e* presents them only if property-cluster F is instantiated, then:
  - A3b* *e* has a set of accuracy conditions C, conveyed to the subject of *e*, such that: C is satisfied in a world only if there is something that has F in that world.
- A4** If *e* has a set of accuracy conditions C, conveyed to the subject of *e*, such that *e* is accurate only if C, then:
  - A4b* *e* has a set of accuracy conditions C\*, conveyed to the subject of *e*, such that *e* is accurate iff C\*.
- A5** All visual perceptual experiences have contents. (CV)

The first thing to note about this argument is the formulation of its initial premise. Based on phenomenological reflection upon how visual experience seems to us, experiences are said to ‘present clusters of properties as being instantiated’. What precisely does this claim amount to, and what grounds does Siegel offer for accepting it? Perceptual experience, it can be agreed, presents objects. In most, if not all, cases those objects are perceived as possessing particular properties: colour, shape, spatial location, and so forth. Moreover, it is plausible that the function of experience is to make external objects and their properties available to the subject in a way that enables them to form appropriate beliefs, judgements, intentions, carry out actions, and so on. As Siegel (*ibid.* 46) points out, objects are never presented in experience as bare particulars, shorn of all their properties. This certainly constitutes grounds for thinking that both objects and their properties—themselves, at least on some views of what it is to be a property, aspects of objects—are presented in experience. When we see a red tomato, we see both the tomato (an object) and its redness (a property). Indeed, one might hold that it is only because we see the tomato’s shape, location, and so on that we can be said to see the tomato, even though seeing each of these individual properties may be neither necessary nor sufficient for seeing tomatoes in general. Does this demonstrate that perceptual experience presents properties ‘as being instantiated’? It is not clear that it does.

Firstly, it is not at all obvious what A1 is supposed to mean. Siegel notes that this premise admits of both *de re* and *de dicto* readings. According to the *de re* reading, which is the intended one, ‘for each visual perceptual experience, there are some properties (colour, relative location, etc.) such that the experience presents those properties as instantiated’ (*ibid.* 47). On the *de dicto* reading, ‘there need be no specific properties such that [each experience] presents them as instantiated’ (*ibid.*). However, this fails to explain what it is for a property to be ‘presented as instantiated’. Given that the argument is supposed to be neutral between REP and REL, it cannot be that for a property to be presented in this way is for experience to have a predicational structure, since it is a feature of relationalism that experience need have no such structure. More importantly, given the vanishingly small distance between having a predicational structure and having representational content, this would render A1 objectionable on grounds of circularity. Since experience having representational content is supposed to be the conclusion of Siegel’s argument and not one of its premises, we must therefore assume that A1 cannot mean (though it may entail) that experiences have predicational structure.

A second possibility is that ‘as being instantiated’ is supposed to indicate that perceptual experience is in some sense *committal*. That is, that the experience of a red circular patch is not neutral concerning the way the world is, in the manner of a supposition or imagining, but that it carries some kind of *prima facie* epistemic force or authority. Of course, perceptual experience is not committal in the same manner as judgement or belief, since we can doubt that things are the way that they appear—when we experience a familiar visual

illusion, such as the Müller-Lyer, for example.<sup>10</sup> That is to say, p-representation is not autorepresentation (2.2.3). Rather, the intended distinction is supposed to be something like the difference between merely *entertaining* some association between an object and a property and the sense in which perceptual experience might be thought of as *reporting* the way that things are, making it analogous to a kind of testimony. This analogy with testimony, however, is problematic, since if perceptual experience is a kind of report then it trivially has representational content—namely, what is reported—and so the argument would again assume that experience was representational from the outset. Indeed, whether perceptual experience *is* in the relevant sense analogous to testimony is precisely what is at issue between proponents of REP and REL, since the suggestion that experience has face-value content is exactly what many relationalists, including Travis, deny.

There is, however, one sense of ‘presentation’ in which relationalists can agree that experience presents properties. This is the sense in which instances of properties such as redness, roundness, egocentric location, and so on, are presented in (veridical) perception. This is not the same as the claim that these properties are *represented* in experience, since relationalists also hold that experience cannot be exhaustively characterised in these terms. Nevertheless, if objects and their properties are *relata* or constituents of perceptual experiences, as REL claims, then it makes sense to say that they are presented to the subject in experience. If ‘presented as being instantiated’ just means for instances of those properties to be *presented in experience*, then it is unobjectionable, since this claim is neutral between REP and REL. If, on the other hand, to be presented in this way is to be *predicated* of an object, or to have propositional structure, then A1 must be rejected as begging the question against REL. I will therefore assume the following reading of A1, this being the one that is compatible with both relational and representational models of experience, upon which I will proceed to evaluate the remainder of the argument accordingly:

**A1’** All visual perception involves the presentation of clusters of properties in experience.

### 3.3.3. *Property-types and property-instances*

The subsequent premises of Siegel’s Argument from Appearing are supposed to constitute independently plausible claims about the notions of *instantiation*, *accuracy conditions* and *content*. A2 makes the transition from the presentation of properties in experience to a notion of accuracy that is based upon whether those properties are instantiated. Roughly: things are the way that a visual perceptual experience presents them as being only if the property-clusters that it presents are actually instantiated. A3 moves from this to accuracy conditions that are conveyed to the subject, claiming that *if* things are the way that a visual

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<sup>10</sup> For relationalists like Travis, this locution is misleading since they hold that there is no such way that perceptual experience portrays the world as being (2.3.2).

perceptual experience presents them as being only if the property-clusters that it presents are instantiated—i.e. A2b—*then* that experience has accuracy conditions that are conveyed to the subject. Finally, A4 makes the transition from accuracy conditions to content. Assuming Siegel’s definition of content as a kind of accuracy condition that is conveyed to the subject in experience, as is required for the validity of the argument, this step is relatively trivial.

To evaluate each of the above claims, we must consider the ways in which properties may be presented in experience, which will differ between representational and relational views. According to the representationalist, properties are presented in experience by being *represented to the subject*. Since such representations can be either true or false, there is a clear sense in which the relevant properties are either instantiated or not, according to whether they are possessed by the object or objects in question. Thus the *representation of a property* and the *instantiation of that property* are separate and distinct entities. The former constitutes part of the representational content of the subject’s mental state, and is thus mental. The latter (or absence thereof) is some aspect of the external world to which that representation is answerable, and is thus non-mental.<sup>11</sup> Under REL, however, the relevant property-instances (or those aspects of an external object which correspond to the instantiation of its properties) are *directly present in experience*. On this picture, there is no difference between the property as presented in experience and its instantiation in the world—they are one and the same thing. This makes A2 trivially true on the relational view for all veridical perceptions, since such experiences necessarily involve the presentation of property-instances and not of property-representations or types as is the case for the representational view.

The problem for Siegel’s argument is that it trades upon an equivocation between these two senses of ‘presenting properties’. An advocate of REL will accept the reading of A1’ according to which visual perceptual experiences present property-instances since on their view objects and their properties are themselves constituents of experience. The sense upon which the presentation of properties would deliver accuracy conditions that are conveyed to the subject, however, is the representationalist reading. To assume such a reading from the outset would beg the question in favour of CV, since this assumes that experience has a propositional structure, and so need not be endorsed by the proponent of REL.

Furthermore, on the relational reading of A1’, only instantiated properties, i.e. *property-instances*, are presented in the relationalist’s sense of ‘presentation’. Thus A2 comes out as necessarily and trivially true for all veridical visual perceptions, since all of the properties that are (according to REL) presented in experience are instantiated, since only property-instances can be presented in this way. On the relationalist reading of A2, then, A2b may be taken to mean:

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<sup>11</sup> On a nominalist account of properties, for a property to be instantiated just is for the relevant objects to fall within the extension of the predicate that is represented. Siegel (2010: 58) also claims that a similar modification to the theory may be made to accommodate trope theory, though I dispute this modification below (3.3.4).

**A2b'** Necessarily: things are the way *e* presents them only if property-cluster F consists of property-instances.

which, in the case of veridical experience, is always true. However, on the corresponding representationalist reading, A2b means:

**A2b''** Necessarily: things are the way *e* presents them only if the property-types in property-cluster F are instantiated by the relevant object(s).

But *being a property-instance* in A2b' and *being instantiated by an object* in A2b'' are two quite different concepts; the former signifies that a particular falls under a general metaphysical kind—i.e. the category of instantiated properties—whilst the latter indicates the satisfaction of a predicate by an object. Indeed, it is only due to a play on words that A2 can be taken to encompass both readings. The term 'instantiated' as it appears in A2 is therefore also equivocal. This presents a problem for Siegel's argument because A3 only obtains if we assume the representational reading of A1 and A2, i.e. A2b'', which take 'properties' to mean *property-types*. But on a non-question begging reading of the argument, the relationalist will take 'properties' to mean *property-instances*, in which case A2 is trivially true and A3 is false, since such accuracy conditions are *not* conveyed to the subject by experience (see below). This renders the Argument from Appearing invalid either due to (a) circularity, if the question-begging reading of A1 is assumed, or (b) equivocation over the meaning of 'presenting properties'.

Equivocation aside, however, there is a more fundamental problem with the above reading of Siegel's argument. If the relevant property-instances are only 'instantiated' in the metaphysical and not the representational sense, then the argument fails to deliver the kind of accuracy conditions that CV requires. Recall that contents, for Siegel, are a kind of accuracy condition that is conveyed to the subject. But whether perceived instantiations of properties are in fact property-instances (as opposed to being subjectively indistinguishable from presentations of property-instances—see 3.3.4) is *not* conveyed to the subject in experience. For this to be the case, perceptual experiences would, according to the relationalist interpretation of Siegel's argument, have to pronounce upon whether they were veridical or not—something that both sides agree they do not.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the only kind of accuracy conditions that the above reading of the argument entails are of the trivial kind, the likes of which Siegel rejects in her Argument from Accuracy (3.3.1). Without a representational understanding of 'presenting properties' and 'instantiation', the Argument from Appearing fails to deliver or explain the link between the phenomenology of

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<sup>12</sup> Even those theorists who take perceptual contents to be presented *as if* they are veridical would not endorse this stronger claim since non-veridical experiences are subjectively indistinguishable from the corresponding veridical experiences.

perceptual experience and its content, and so fails to show why an advocate of REL should endorse CV.

It is important to understand precisely why the presentation of property-instances, as opposed to property-types, cannot deliver the required accuracy conditions. If, as relationalists claim, all that experience delivers is a collection of objects and/or property-instances without thereby representing those entities, then it would be impossible from a first-personal perspective to discern what the accuracy conditions for that experience were. This is not to deny that such an experience *has* accuracy conditions. But, as Siegel's Argument from Accuracy shows, the mere existence of accuracy conditions is not sufficient for content. In this case, the resulting accuracy conditions will be of the form: *experience e is accurate if and only if e presents those particular* (i.e. numerically identical) *objects and/or properties*. Such conditions, which correspond to the experience's identity conditions, are not conveyed to the subject in experience, and thus do not constitute content in Siegel's terms. Without a specification of the types that each individual property-instance must fall under, there is no way of deriving accuracy conditions of the form 'o is red', as would be required to establish CV. Thus the only accuracy conditions that the relationalist need admit that experiences have are its identity conditions, which are insufficient to establish the existence of content as they are not conveyed to the subject in experience. Thus A3 is false.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the relational reading of A1' is only true for veridical perception since, according to REL, non-veridical experiences do not present property-instances. Rather, such experiences are subjectively indistinguishable from experiences in which properties-instances are presented. Indeed, for disjunctivists such as Martin (2004) this may be the only positive characterisation we can give of them. Presumably, however, Siegel does not intend for 'visual perceptual experiences' to include only veridical perception, but also non-veridical experiences, such as hallucinations and illusions.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, when we take these into account, the proposed reading of A1 breaks down since under REL, non-veridical experiences cannot be straightforwardly characterised in terms of the presentation of the properties of objects on the grounds that there may be no such objects. This is not necessarily a problem for REL, which supports other ways of accounting for illusions (e.g. Martin op. cit; Brewer 2008), but makes it impossible to evaluate Siegel's argument according to A1'. We must therefore either reject this reading of A1, or reject A2 as false under the relational account since it only holds for veridical perception.

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<sup>13</sup> One might object that for every *property-instance* that is presented in experience, there must be some corresponding *property-type* of which it is an instance. I consider this objection below (3.3.4).

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, she explicitly states in her defence of A1 that '[t]hese considerations about the kind of visual phenomenology involved in seeing ordinary objects ... apply equally to cases of *merely seeming to see* objects' (Siegel 2010: 48, my italics).

The problem for the Argument from Appearing at this point may be stated in the form of a dilemma. If we confine the argument to veridical perceptual experience (this being the set of experiences for which A1' holds), then the argument only succeeds in showing that perceptual experiences have the kind of trivial accuracy conditions that indicate whether they are veridical or not. This is precisely the reason for which Siegel rejected the Argument from Accuracy, since such accuracy conditions fail to explain how or why experiences should convey the kind of propositional contents to the subject that CV requires (3.3.1). If, on the other hand, we do not confine the argument to veridical perceptual experience, as appears to be Siegel's intention, then it is unclear how A1 can be understood in a way that is neutral between Siegel and her opponents without begging the question against REL. This renders the argument circular, and therefore ineffectual. As it stands, then, the Argument from Appearing is unconvincing because it fails to connect with the very view it is designed to engage—namely, REL. Nor, it seems, is this dilemma easily resolvable without substantial reformulation of the argument.

#### 3.3.4. *Responses*

Having established the structure of, and some problems with, Siegel's Argument from Appearing, I now wish to consider a number of possible rejoinders on behalf of the Content View. I will argue that none of these is satisfactory, and consequently that Siegel's argument should be rejected.

The first kind of response concerns the nature of CV itself. As formulated above, CV is a claim about the presence of content in visual experience. However, or so the response goes, this need not be understood as *representational* content. Rather, the mere presentation of property-instances itself constitutes a form of content, and so Siegel's argument goes through even on a relationalist understanding of perceptual experience. Whilst it is certainly the case that philosophers have used the term 'content' in widely differing ways—McDowell (2008) being a case in point—Siegel quite clearly ties the notion of content to the existence of accuracy conditions that are conveyed to the subject. Since such accuracy conditions are tantamount to representational content as it is here conceived, the issue is not merely terminological. On the above reading, the Argument from Appearing fails to demonstrate the existence of such accuracy conditions, and so fails to establish CV, regardless of the notion of content that Siegel takes herself to be employing. Furthermore, Siegel's characterisation of CV meets each of the conditions—including *Face-value*—that Travis sets out for p-representation (2.2), and so is a legitimate target for Travis's arguments against representationalism. Plausibly, Siegel's content *is* just representational content, and the initial response is misplaced.

A second worry is that Siegel's argument is based upon the phenomenology of vision and so metaphysical concerns about the nature of experience are beside the point. Whilst I do not wish to claim that representationalists and relationalists experience differing visual phenomenology, there remains the issue of how we are to understand the claims that Siegel is making, particularly in A1

of her Argument from Appearing. That theorists from both camps can sign up to the same form of words is not sufficient to make the argument valid if, as I have argued, it relies upon an equivocation over the meaning of ‘presenting properties’, which is ambiguous between *presenting property-instances* and *representing property-types*. Thus my objection is not that these two views of perceptual experience deliver different verdicts about ‘what vision is like’, phenomenologically speaking. Rather, my claim is that, to the extent that Siegel’s phenomenological claim can be considered neutral between these two views, it fails to establish what she thinks it does. Moreover, if ‘properties’ is understood in the way that is required for the argument to go through, then its initial premise can be rejected by the relationalist as question-begging. References to the metaphysics of experience are merely intended to make this fact conspicuous, rather than biasing the argument one way or the other.<sup>15</sup>

A more substantive response on behalf of Siegel at this point would be to reformulate A1 using a disjunctive sense of ‘presenting properties’ that accommodates both veridical and non-veridical experiences—call this *presents\**. For something to present\* F as being instantiated is just for it to present F as being instantiated or to be subjectively indistinguishable from an experience that presents F as being instantiated. Making the appropriate substitutions, this results in the following reading of A1:

**A1\*** All visual perceptual experiences present clusters of properties as being instantiated or as subjectively indistinguishable from experiences that present clusters of properties as being instantiated.

Whilst this premise is true even under REL, according to which ‘present[ing] clusters of properties as being instantiated’ would be interpreted to mean *presenting a series of property-instances*, this generates problems later on in the argument. If we take the consequent of A2 and antecedent of A3, for example, to mean:

**A2b\*** Necessarily: things are the way *e* presents\* them only if property-cluster F is instantiated.

then according to the disjunctive reading of *presents\**, A2b\* will be true for both veridical and non-veridical experiences, as expected. It does not follow from this, however, that the resulting accuracy conditions will be conveyed to the subject. This would only be the case if some set of property-types were presented to the subject in experience, as occurs on the representationalist view. The proponent of REL, on the other hand, need not be committed to this, which

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<sup>15</sup> A related objection is that my objection to Siegel draws upon a particular understanding of the metaphysics of properties. However, this is arguably more of a problem for Siegel, who employs the notion of ‘property-clusters’ without adequately specifying what she means by this, leaving room for a level of ambiguity upon which, I claim, her argument depends.

goes beyond the claim that there are some sets of property-instances that, if presented, would be subjectively indistinguishable from the corresponding non-veridical experience. This is not the same as saying that any *specific* property-types are presented in non-veridical experiences, since there could be an innumerable number of experiences of properties-instances that were subjectively indistinguishable from that experience, none of which would qualify as *the* content of the experience. This is just another form of the dilemma that Travis presses. In any case, the argument still conflates the representational and relational senses of ‘presentation’, making A3 false on the disjunctive reading of A1 given above.

A fourth response on behalf of the representationalist is that even if we accept that property-instances and not property-types are presented in experience, as per the relationalist account, for every property-instance presented there must be some corresponding property-type of which it is an instance that is thereby also present in experience. That is, one cannot have a property-instance that is not an instance of some determinate type, and it is these types, not their instances, that give rise to the experience’s accuracy conditions. Siegel hints at this when she states that ‘[i]t is hard to see how ... accuracy conditions could fail to be conveyed to the subject in whatever way the properties they derive from are’ (Siegel 2010: 53) as well as in her trope formulation of the argument (below). This response is appealing because it acknowledges the relationalist account of experience whilst allowing Siegel to argue that such experience nevertheless has accuracy conditions and therefore content.

The objection, however, now becomes one of *which* property-types are represented in experience. According to Travis’s argument from looks (2.3.2), there is simply no good answer to this question since there are a multitude of properties that match any given visual appearance. The constraints upon what would constitute an answer are the familiar ones of *Recognisability*, *Givenness* and perceptual availability to the subject, thereby reinstating Travis’s dilemma. Unless relevant property-type is discernible to the subject, the corresponding accuracy condition cannot be said to be conveyed to the subject, and thus fails to establish the existence of content in Siegel’s terms (3.3.1). Even if it is discernible to the subject, then this cannot be solely on the basis of what is perceptually available to them, but rather must draw upon what they are inclined to believe or judge. This reintroduces circularity worries about the explanatory role of experience with respect to judgement and belief, since p-representation is *representation-to* and not *representation-by* (2.2.3). This appears to be the route that Siegel herself favours (*ibid.*), but does not constitute a reason to suppose that *experience*, as opposed to belief, judgement or action, has content. It is therefore unclear that the original objection can be circumvented in this way.

The final counter-argument that I wish to consider is that my objection to Siegel commits the relationalist to the existence of tropes. Relationalism about perception, as I have described it, involves the presentation in experience of property-instances where such instances are either concrete individuals (i.e.

tropes) or aspects of external objects. Thus, what is presented when visually experiencing a red tomato is not the abstract universal *redness*, but rather *the redness of that tomato*, where this is distinct from the redness of other objects, including other tomatoes that are of precisely the same colour. The existence of tropes is contentious and so not necessarily something the relationalist would want to commit herself to, and certainly not on the basis of visual phenomenology alone. Thus, so the counter-argument goes, the objection stands or falls with the existence of tropes. Moreover, Siegel claims that her argument ‘could easily be reformulated to accommodate this position’ (Siegel 2010: 48) simply by substituting ‘clusters of properties’ for ‘cluster of F-tropes’, where F indicates the relevant trope types.

Taking the latter point first, this way of stating the argument in terms of trope types begs the question discussed above of precisely *which* types are presented in experience. The point about invoking tropes from the relationalist perspective is that they show how particulars need not be presented as falling under *any* particular type. To assume that they are presented in this way without further argument is not a response to this objection. Indeed, if we take ‘a cluster of F-tropes’ in the reformulated A3 to mean a *cluster of those very tropes*—i.e. a token- rather than type-identical experience—we arrive back at the original objection since the resulting accuracy conditions will be none other than the identity conditions for that very experience.<sup>16</sup> Such identity conditions are not conveyed to the subject in experience, and so the argument fails to establish CV.

On the former more substantive point, the trope-like formulation of the relationalist objection is merely intended to make explicit the commitment to a representationalist conception of properties and property-types that is required to make Siegel’s argument valid. Unfortunately for Siegel, this also undermines any possible dialectical force that it might have against anti-representationalism, which is its intended target. Another way of making the same point would be to claim that only *objects*, including those aspects of them that instantiate properties, are presented in experience. Such a formulation would be neutral with respect to the existence of tropes, but presses the same objection that objects need not be presented under a particular property-type in order for them to feature in perceptual experience. The presence of visual properties such as *redness, roundness, being over here*, and so on would then be explained in terms of our perceptual sensitivity to certain types of stimuli, but without the relevant types figuring at the level of perceptual experience. That such types may show up in the content of judgements and beliefs is not, on the relationalist picture,

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. ‘A trope version of [A3] would look like this:

If necessarily: things are the way *E* presents them only if a cluster of *F-tropes* is instantiated, then:

*E* has a set of accuracy conditions *C*, conveyed to the subject of *E*, such that:

*C* is satisfied in a world only if there is something that has a cluster of *F-tropes* in that world.’ (Siegel *ibid.* 58, fn. 29).

reason to attribute contents to experiences proper. Thus the relationalist need not commit herself to trope theory in order to make the relevant objection.

### 3.4. An Argument from Perceptual Seeming

The final argument in favour of representationalism that I wish to consider is Susanna Schellenberg's 'Master Argument' (Schellenberg 2011b). Like Siegel's Argument from Appearing (3.3), the Master Argument aims to derive the conclusion that perceptual experience has representational content that is assessable for truth or accuracy, this time from a supposedly neutral notion of perceptual awareness or 'seeming'. As with Siegel's argument, however, the relevant notions turn out to be far from neutral, instead being biased in favour of representationalism, thus rendering the argument circular and so unpersuasive.

#### 3.4.1. *Schellenberg's Master Argument*

The first part of Schellenberg's argument, given below, is intended to establish the existence of content. This is followed by a second line of argument for the view that such content necessarily has accuracy conditions.<sup>17</sup> Assuming that by 'content' Schellenberg means representational content, the latter part of the argument is relatively uncontroversial since all parties can agree that perception has 'content' in the sense of the objects and/or properties that are in fact perceived. I will therefore restrict most of the following discussion to the part of the argument given in Schellenberg (2011b: 6).

- M1 If a subject is perceptually related to the world (and not suffering from blindsight etc.), then she is aware of the world.
- M2 If a subject is aware of the world, then the world seems a certain way to her.
- M3 If the world seems a certain way to her, then she has an experience with content C, where C corresponds to the way the world seems to her.
- M4 If a subject is perceptually related to the world (and not suffering from blindsight etc.), then she has an experience with content C, where C corresponds to the way the world seems to her.

Taking each of the above premises in turn, M1 is intended to be something upon which all perceptual theorists can agree. Bracketing concerns with the formulation of this premise in terms of the subject's relation to and awareness of 'the world', as opposed to the objects and properties in it, this premise may therefore be endorsed by Schellenberg's opponents. Schellenberg goes on to

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<sup>17</sup> This contrasts with Siegel's Argument from Appearing (3.3.2), which takes the order of precedence to be the other way around.

claim that '[o]n the face of it, the fact that a subject is aware of the world entails that the world seems a certain way to her' and that 'there is no obvious reason why [pure] relationists should not accept [M2]' (ibid. 8). However, again bracketing similar concerns about the precise formulation of these claims, it is far from clear that this is the case. The problem lies with an ambiguity in the word 'seems'.

There are two relevant readings of 'seems' in M2, neither of which appears capable of delivering the intended result. The first corresponds to the relatively uncontentious claim:

**M2'** If a subject is aware of the world, then her experience has a certain phenomenal character.

That is to say that for every perceptual experience, there is something it is like to have that experience (1.2.2)—the particular *reddish* and *roundish* character of the experience that one typically has upon seeing a ripe tomato, for example. This reading does secure a notion of representational content (C), but it is a form of phenomenal content that corresponds to the phenomenal character of perceptual experience—call this  $C_p$ —and not to the non-appearance properties of perceptual objects—call this  $C_o$ .<sup>18</sup> As I argued in relation to non-comparative looks (3.2.2), this notion of content does not secure any specific way that the world would need to be in order for an experience to be veridical. Rather, it delivers a 'thin' notion of phenomenal content that is indeterminate between innumerable ways that the world might be.

This objection constitutes what Schellenberg, following Travis, terms the *indeterminacy objection* (ibid. 18). According to the objection, the accuracy conditions for  $C_p$  relate to properties of the subject's experience and not the objective properties of the objects perceived. If the objection holds, then premise 5 in the second part of Schellenberg's argument is no longer coherent (Schellenberg 2011b: 6):

**M5** The world is either the way it seems to [the subject] or it is different from the way it seems to her.

since the accuracy conditions for  $C_p$  do not relate to the world in any objective sense, but rather to *the subject's experience of it*. Consequently, these conditions cannot fail to obtain even in non-veridical cases (3.2.2). Thus, on the reading of 'seems' given in M2', Schellenberg's Master Argument only succeeds in establishing that *phenomenal content* has accuracy conditions, and not that experience has any objective representational content.

No doubt many representationalists would reject the above objection on the basis that the truthmakers for phenomenal content are not supposed to be

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<sup>18</sup> According to some theories of phenomenal character, such as Naïve Realism, these amount to the same thing. But this is a substantive claim that cannot simply be assumed from the outset.

experiences, but objective states of the world. Thus, even though such content may be individuated by the subjective phenomenal character of perceptual experience, it is still answerable to how things objectively are in the world for the satisfaction of its truth or accuracy conditions. However, this again raises the problem of precisely which contents experiences have. If they are supposed to have objective content, then the representationalist must show why they have *those* particular objective contents as opposed to any other which shares an indistinguishable perceptible appearance; i.e. Travis's indeterminacy objection. If they are supposed to be satisfied by any perceptible objects that yield the same subjective phenomenal character then it is no longer clear how the relevant accuracy conditions can be specified independently of the subject's experience. If they cannot, then the accuracy conditions for any given perceptual experience *e* are just that the world is such as to give rise to an experience whose phenomenal character is subjectively indistinguishable from *e*. However, this cannot be the right way of specifying such content given that any experience could, under appropriate circumstances, give rise to such an experience—for example, if the subject had taken a hallucinogenic drug that predisposes her to hallucinate that P on the basis of seeing objects for which not-P. In order to circumvent this kind of objection, some kind of normative constraint must be introduced, such as whether such objects routinely give rise to P-experiences (cf. Siegel 2010: 57). The problem remains, however, as to how the phenomenal properties of experiences—*reddishness*, *roundishness*, and so on—can be met by some particular state of the world without simply assuming the point at issue; namely, that the relevant experiences have objective accuracy conditions.

Although more could be said about the above issue, it is clear that the subjective phenomenal reading of 'seems' is not what Schellenberg has in mind. Rather, the relevant seemings are supposed to specify some objective state of the world (Schellenberg 2011b: 10). This suggests that M2 should instead be interpreted as follows:

**M2''** If a subject is aware of the world, then there is some determinate and univocal way that the world seems to her to be.

The trouble with this interpretation of M2 is that it is unacceptable to any anti-representationalist who, like Travis, denies that perceptual experiences have a univocal face value—that is to say, a way that the world, in the relevant sense seems to be (2.2.2). On this reading of 'seems', M2'' assumes precisely this principle from the outset. Thus, Schellenberg's argument that experience has representational content assumes that her opponent's position is false. This seriously undermines her argument against any anti-representationalist who denies *Face-value*, for whom this reading of M2 will be unacceptable. Given that Travis (2004) is such a representationalist, this renders Schellenberg's Master Argument ineffectual against his position.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This is not, of course, to say that Schellenberg's conclusion is false. Rather, the Master Argument is dialectically ineffective against Travis's anti-representationalism.

Schellenberg goes on to discuss this ‘*seems-content link*’ (Schellenberg 2011b: 10) that is presupposed by M3 at some length. She concludes that the link holds in at least the case of non-comparative looks, and possibly also in the case of visual and thinkable looks if one rejects Travis’s argument from looks.<sup>20</sup> However, as we saw above, the link does *not* hold in the case of non-comparative looks, which turn out to be as indeterminate between various ways that the world might be as Travis’s visual looks. Furthermore, Schellenberg’s grounds for rejecting Travis’s argument, which she takes from Byrne (2009), are problematic since Byrne appears to reject the very ‘seems-content’ link (i.e. *Looks-indexing*, 2.2.5) to which Schellenberg appeals on the basis of non-comparative looks. This undermines Schellenberg’s claim that her Master Argument succeeds in establishing a form of objective perceptual representation, since it is precisely this link that secures the necessary reading of ‘seems’ in M2 without which the move to M3 is blocked. However, even if, as I argued above, Byrne does endorse a version of *Looks-indexing*, this would only secure the existence of ‘thin’ phenomenal content, which is insufficient for the representationalist’s purpose. Thus, while the Master Argument may, according to the phenomenal reading of ‘seems’, be successful in establishing the notion of phenomenal content, it is unsuccessful in establishing the existence of objective representational content in perceptual experience.

Furthermore, it is unclear from the above argument exactly what the argumentative force of M1 through M3 is supposed to be. There does not appear to be any *logical* reason to accept M2 on the basis of M1, or M3 on the basis of M2. After all, it is hardly part of our pre-theoretical intuitions that perceptual awareness entails the world’s seeming to be some particular way, or that such seeming entails representational content. Indeed, these are precisely the points that are at issue in Travis’s argument from looks. Rather, these premises appear to be intended as a kind of ‘intuition pump’ that facilitates a slide from ‘awareness’ in M1 to ‘content’ in M3. From there, it is possible to derive the conclusion for which Schellenberg is aiming in M4 and beyond.

Alternatively, perhaps Schellenberg intends for her argument to allude or ‘point’, in a more metaphorical sense, to some notion of content entailed by the notion of perceptual awareness. However, far from being the innocent moves that Schellenberg appears to suggest, M2 and M3 are highly contentious and, in the case of M2, potentially question-begging from the anti-representationalist’s perspective.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore possible for the anti-representationalist to simply reject M2 on the basis that the required ‘way of seeming’—for example, epistemic seeming—is unavailable to the subject on the basis of perceptual experience alone, thus preventing Schellenberg’s Master Argument from getting off the ground.

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<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the relevant readings of ‘seems’ are precisely those that are dealt with in Travis’s argument from looks (2.3.2).

<sup>21</sup> Schellenberg herself assumes that M3 will be the point at which anti-representationalists seek to resist the argument, whereas M2 is clearly more objectionable by Travis’s lights.

### 3.5. Conclusion

I have argued that, in the face of Travis's arguments against representationalism, none of the above approaches is successful in establishing that perceptual experience has representational content. Byrne's 'non-comparative' looks only establish the existence of phenomenal content, i.e. content whose accuracy conditions vary with experience itself, rather than with the objects and properties towards which it is directed. Such content fails to meet Travis's *Objectivity* condition and cannot be used to ground claims to objective knowledge or belief as it is necessarily veridical. Siegel's Argument from Appearing suffers from a similar flaw as her Argument from Accuracy, since it fails to distinguish between the notion of accuracy conditions as a predicate and accuracy conditions as content (cf. Martin forthcoming b). Furthermore, it conflates a familiar fact about looks or appearances—namely that they may be paradigmatic of certain types of objects and their properties—with a contentious philosophical claim about the structure of perceptual experience, namely that it presents properties 'as being instantiated', where this is taken to presuppose a distinction between property-types and their instances. Consequently, the argument fails to have any dialectical force, being instead a 'dramatic expression of conviction'<sup>22</sup> that merely asserts what representationalists already believe—i.e. that perceptual experience has representational content—without showing why anyone who does not already hold this view need be committed to it. Finally, Schellenberg's Master Argument relies upon an equally question-begging notion of perceptual seeming, which presupposes exactly the contents whose existence it was supposed to demonstrate. As such, each of these arguments must be rejected as a means by which representationalism may be established from a neutral starting point.

More generally, each of the above arguments can be seen as an instance of a tempting line of thought: namely, that the existence of accuracy or veridicality conditions, and therefore of representational content, can be derived from the mere existence of perceptual appearances. Unfortunately for the representationalist, as I argue in the following chapter, mere appearances—or 'looks'—are neutral between representational and relational views of experience, and so cannot be taken to settle the debate one way or the other. Whilst none of this rules out the possibility that experience may indeed have representational content, demonstrating that it does so turns out to be a difficult philosophical problem that is not easily resolved by an appeal to appearances. For all that the arguments presented above show, Travis may yet be right that the senses are indeed 'silent', as he seeks to demonstrate.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> This phrase was suggested to me by Mark Kalderon (2011).

<sup>23</sup> Parts of this chapter have benefited from invaluable feedback and discussion on presentations given at the Universities of Oxford, Warwick, Columbia and Essex, including comments from Johannes Roessler and Anna Marmodoro.

## 4. Looks

### *A deflationary analysis*

#### 4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I suggested that Byrne's (2009) account of perceptual experience may commit him to a form of content, i.e. *phenomenal content*, that is incapable of meeting his own objection to Travis—namely, the need to provide a satisfactory account of perceptual illusion. In doing so, I identified two possible strategies by which this problem could be overcome whilst providing a satisfactory response to Travis's argument from looks (2.3.2): (i) by identifying a genuinely non-comparative notion of looks that supports both *Face-value* and *Looks-indexing*, and (ii) by defending an externalist account of how subjects are able to gain first-personal knowledge of the contents of their experiences. The first of these strategies is examined below whilst the second is discussed in chapter 6. Moreover, I argue that considerations concerning the nature and semantics of 'looks' are insufficient to establish the existence of p-representation. Thus, representationalists require an alternative motivation for their position.

According to *Looks-indexing*, p-representational contents must be recognisable to the subject in virtue of how, according to the relevant experiences, things appear—or in the case of visual perception, *how things look* (2.2.4). In order to refute Travis's argument from looks without abandoning the notion of p-representation, the representationalist must therefore either (a) elucidate an alternative notion of looks that satisfies *Face-value*, but is not reducible to either visible or thinkable looks, neither of which is capable of indexing representational content on the basis of what is perceptually available to the subject (2.3.2), or (b) reject *Looks-indexing* (or the weaker *Recognisability* condition) outright, in which case Travis's other arguments will apply—specifically, the argument from recognisability (2.3.3) and the argument from unmediated awareness (2.3.4), responses to which are examined in chapters 5 and 6.

The first part of this chapter examines various notions and analyses of looks in order to establish whether there is a notion of ‘non-comparative’ or phenomenal looks that is capable of making representational contents recognisable (4.2). The second part of the chapter examines the prospects for an alternative ‘deflationary’ analysis of our everyday looks talk in purely comparative terms (4.3). By neutralising the challenge from looks-based accounts of visual experience, such an analysis would render the notion of non-comparative looks effectively redundant, closing off a possible line of response to Travis by the representationalist about perceptual experience. This in turn forces the representationalist to find an alternative way of justifying their position (4.4).

## 4.2. The Varieties of Looks

Much of the terminology surrounding the various notions of looks originates with Chisholm (1957), who first proposed the distinction between *epistemic*, *comparative* and *non-comparative* looks. These roughly, though not always precisely, correspond to what I have been calling *thinkable*, *visible* and *phenomenal* looks, respectively. I now wish to present a more nuanced account of these distinctions that differentiates between the evidential and non-evidential senses of ‘looks’ (4.2.1), comparative and non-comparative analyses of ‘looks’ (4.2.2), and the relation between looks and the phenomenal character of experience (4.2.4). I then consider whether the phenomenal use of ‘looks’ may itself be analysed in comparative terms, thus rendering it unsuitable for indexing the representational content of perception (4.2.6). Finally I conclude that, even if Jackson (1977) and Brogaard’s (forthcoming) arguments are successful in establishing a distinctive phenomenal usage of ‘looks’, this use is nevertheless insufficient for the representationalist’s purpose, thus making room for the essentially comparative or ‘deflationary’ analysis presented in 4.3.

Before I proceed to examine these various notions, it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, the *semantic analysis* of ‘looks’, ‘seems’, ‘appears’ and their cognates and, on the other, the metaphysics of appearances and phenomenal character. In this chapter I concentrate mainly upon the former. In 4.3, however, I will argue that the availability of alternative analyses of ‘looks’ effectively blocks the use of such semantic analyses to draw conclusions about the metaphysics of experience concerning the existence and nature of representational content. Given the weight that some of the recent literature places upon the semantics of ‘looks’, and the misreading of Travis (2004) as making a narrow point about the meaning of ‘looks’ rather than about experience more generally, there is good reason to be interested in the semantic question in its own right. However, even if this were to suggest the existence of the kind of ‘non-comparative’ looks that Byrne and others describe, I argue below that it would be of little consequence to the argument over representationalism and, as such, the debate should be conducted upon other more fertile grounds.

#### 4.2.1. Evidential and non-evidential looks

The distinction between epistemic and comparative looks originates with Chisholm in connection with the *evidential use* of appearance expressions (Chisholm 1957: 44). However, as Chisholm also points out (*ibid.* 47), these two varieties of looks are closely related in that many sentences may be used to express either or both senses. For example,

- (1) The ball looks red to *S*

can mean either that the subject, *S*, has ‘adequate evidence’ (*ibid.* 44) for the proposition that the ball *is* red (the epistemic use, or ‘thinkable looks’) or that, in respect of its colour, the ball visually appears to *S* the way that red things do (the comparative use, or ‘visible looks’). Indeed, that the ball in some respect visually resembles red things may itself constitute *S*’s evidence for the ball’s being red. In this case, the comparative reading of (1) is also being used evidentially, demonstrating that these two uses of ‘looks’ need not be mutually exclusive.

‘Looks’ can also be used in non-perceptual contexts, as in ‘It looks as if the government will be re-elected’ (Jackson 1977: 31). Such uses are clearly evidential, but need not be limited to just visual evidence as in the case of perceptual looks.<sup>1</sup> The existence of the non-perceptual use, however, suggests a useful test for multiple senses of ‘looks’. As Brogaard (*forthcoming*: 18) points out, words may exhibit two distinct forms of ambiguity: (i) *lexical ambiguity*, as in the case of ‘bank’, which can mean either the edge of a river or a financial institution; and (ii) *polysemy*, as with ‘fine’ which has multiple related meanings, as in ‘a fine restaurant’ or ‘finely shaped features’ (*ibid.*). The former reflects a mere accident of syntax where two distinct concepts just happen to share the same spelling, though may be tokened by different words in other languages. The latter is ‘systematic’ in that the various meanings are semantically, and not just syntactically, related (*ibid.*). By mixing different uses of ‘looks’ within a single sentence we can identify whether this term is systematically ambiguous and what its various senses are.<sup>2</sup>

For example, if one were reading a newspaper under green light, then the sentence

- (2) It looks as if the government will be re-elected and the paper is green

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<sup>1</sup> I take it that looks are a kind of appearance that, excluding non-perceptual uses, are visual in nature, just as tastes, smells, sounds, and so on, are forms of appearances to the other senses. In what follows, I will treat ‘looks’ and ‘visual appearances’ as synonymous.

<sup>2</sup> Lexical ambiguity can be ruled out because there are many languages in which each of the uses of the English ‘looks’ may also be expressed using a single term (*ibid.* 19).

will have an infelicitous reading on which ‘it looks as if’ has wide scope and so a single instance of ‘looks’ is used to convey both perceptual and non-perceptual meanings. Similarly,

- (3) It looks like the train is late and over there

has an erroneous reading on which ‘over there’ is used to demonstratively identify the relevant object (the train). (Its legitimate reading is one on which both conjuncts employ the evidential use of ‘looks’, as when reading the platform number and expected time of arrival from a departures board, for example.) The infelicity of such sentences suggests that there are (at least) two senses of ‘looks’, which I will refer to as its *evidential* and *non-evidential* senses, respectively.

The evidential sense of ‘looks’ relates to what one’s total evidence base indicates to be the case, and so corresponds with Travis’s notion of ‘thinkable looks’ (2.3.2). For example, ‘seeing Luc and Pia’s flat strewn with broken crockery’ might, under certain circumstances, be taken to indicate that they have had a tiff (Travis 2004: 67). The evidential sense can be further subdivided into *perceptual* and *non-perceptual* uses, the former of which includes visual, auditory, tactile, and other sensory evidence. When ‘look’ is used in this sense, (1) means that, according to the visual or other perceptual evidence available to *S*, the ball looks *to be* red, giving epistemic support to the proposition

- (4) The ball is red

This may be contrasted with the non-evidential sense of ‘looks’, according to which (1) is intended to be neutral as to whether the ball is red or not. On this reading, (1) merely states how the ball *appears* to *S* without any commitment as to how it actually *is*. This is what we might refer to as a *mere look*. Indeed, one could hold that the ball both non-evidentially looks red but that it is purple without contradiction. The non-evidential sense thus provides no epistemic support for (4) and is what a subject might retreat to when challenged about, or given reason to doubt the veridicality of, their experience. Upon discovering that the ball is not in fact red, for example, one might continue to assert that it *looks* red, meaning that it could easily be mistaken for such.

#### 4.2.2. Comparative and non-comparative looks

Common locutions of the evidential sense of ‘looks’ include ‘looks as if’—for example, ‘it looks as if it will rain’—and some cases of ‘looks like’, such as ‘it looks like [it will] rain’. More commonly, however, ‘looks like’ introduces the comparative use of looks. The comparative use also has two forms: *explicitly comparative* and *implicitly comparative*. The former invites an explicit comparison between the appearances of two or more objects, as in

- (5) Charles looks like the prime minister

Here, the visual appearance of one object (Charles) is being compared with the appearance of another (the prime minister). Moreover, (5) has both *comparative evidential* and *comparative non-evidential* readings, which may be paraphrased as follows:

(5') The [visual] evidence indicates that Charles is the prime minister

(5'') The look of Charles is similar to the look of the prime minister

The latter of which may be analysed as

(5\*)  $\exists x \exists y (\text{look}(x) \wedge (\text{has}(\text{Charles}, x) \wedge (\text{look}(y) \wedge (\text{has}(\text{The Prime Minister}, y) \wedge \text{SIM}(x, y))))))$

Note that (5\*) need not predicate the same look of both objects. Instead, it posits a *visually relevant similarity* between the two (4.3). However, in cases where two objects share precisely the same look, we can simplify this to:

(5\*\*\*)  $\exists x \exists y \exists s (\text{look}(s) \wedge (\text{has}(x, s) \wedge \text{has}(y, s)))^3$

The above analyses bring out two important features of comparative looks. First, they do not specify *how a thing has to be* in order to be the way it looks, merely that it shares some relevant feature, or features, with another object or look. Thus, the value of *s* in (5\*\*\*) is not fixed by the semantic properties of (5), but rather relies upon various contextual factors, including the subject's prior knowledge or perceptual abilities, to establish what the relevant similarity is. It is therefore a substantive question just what the referents or bearers of comparative looks are. Second, comparative looks are *symmetrical* in that the referents of (5') or (5'') can be reversed without altering the statements' truth values. This has important implications for the debate about looks-indexing, since if *x* comparatively looks like *y* then *y* also comparatively looks like *x*. Consequently, as Travis argues, comparative looks alone cannot make a specific univocal face-value content recognisable to the subject, since it is ambiguous whether it is *x* or *y* that is being represented. To that extent, a look that *x* is equally a look that *y*. An essentially comparative analysis of 'looks' is therefore unacceptable to any representationalist who accepts *Looks-indexing* since it is incompatible with the relevant content having a univocal face value, as per premise L3 of Travis's argument from looks (2.3.2).

An *implicitly comparative* looks report, on the other hand, is one that does not exhibit the surface structure of (5)—i.e. ' $\varphi$  looks like  $\psi$ '—but which is best understood in terms a comparison with some other object or look. For example,

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Brogaard 2010: 6. For simplicity, I assume that 'the prime minister' is a singular referring term. Such an assumption is not required for a comparative analysis of 'looks' and may be replaced with a suitable account of definite descriptions; e.g. Russell (1905).

(6) Johan looks Scandinavian

might plausibly be given an analysis of the form:

$$(6^*) \quad \exists s (\text{look}(s) \wedge (\text{has}(\text{Johan}, s) \wedge \text{has}(\varphi, s)))$$

where  $\varphi$  is some real or imagined individual of characteristically Scandinavian appearance.<sup>4</sup> As with explicitly comparative looks reports, implicitly comparative reports can have both evidential and non-evidential senses. More importantly for present purposes, as with explicitly comparative looks, implicitly comparative looks are symmetrical and so similarly incapable of indexing univocal representational content. One might object to this on the basis that  $\varphi$  has a specific privileged role, and so in the above example is capable of indexing the univocal content *being Scandinavian*. However, if  $\varphi$  is simply an exemplar of the relevant predicate then, assuming that (6\*) is true,  $\varphi$  equally looks like Johan, comparatively speaking, as Johan looks like  $\varphi$ . That we don't typically speak in this way is arguably more a matter of convention given our linguistic interests, than anything of deep metaphysical significance.

#### 4.2.3. Senses, uses and the regress argument

The above considerations raise the question of whether everyday non-evidential comparative looks reports that are not explicitly comparative are implicitly comparative. If this were the case, then such looks would be unable to index the kind of univocal representational contents that representationalism requires. In order to resist this charge, the representationalist must provide a non-comparative analysis of 'looks' that cannot be expressed in terms of an equivalent comparative looks report since, if such an equivalence were to hold, then 'looks' cannot index univocal content and Travis's argument goes through. Conversely, if looks can be given an irreducibly non-comparative analysis, then premise L3 of Travis's argument from looks is false since it is possible to meet *Looks-indexing* without contravening *Face-value*. I consider the case for and against such an equivalence throughout the rest of this chapter.

The fact that both comparative and non-comparative looks can be evidential or non-evidential suggests that either (a) the comparative and non-comparative uses of 'looks' are not distinct senses, or (b) there are (at least) four senses of 'looks' corresponding to each of the possible combinations of evidential or non-evidential versus comparative or non-comparative looks. To resolve this question, we can carry out a similar test for the existence of comparative and non-comparative senses of 'looks' as for the evidential and non-evidential senses. For example,

(7) The bread looks burnt and like a brick

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<sup>4</sup> For an account of 'looks' that rejects the comparative analysis of (6), see Byrne (2009).

seems perfectly felicitous, as does its evidential analogue:

- (8) The president looks as if he will be re-elected and govern differently to his predecessor

As Brogaard (forthcoming: 21) points out, the acceptability of sentences like (7) may also be explained by providing a comparative analysis of both conjuncts. That is, there may be a reading of this sentence such that its first conjunct, which is not explicitly comparative, is analysed as:

- (7\*)  $\exists s (\text{look}(s) \wedge (\text{has}(\text{The Bread}, s) \wedge \text{SIM}(\text{Burnt}, s)))$

This would remove any potential ambiguity by making both looks comparative. A similar analysis, however, cannot be given for (8), since ‘being re-elected’ is clearly non-comparative. This suggests that the comparative element of ‘looks’ is a feature of its *analysis* or *use*, rather than a distinct sense in its own right. If this is correct, then the presence of an explicit or implicit comparative element should be considered an attribute of particular *looks reports*, rather than part of the meaning of ‘looks’ itself (cf. *ibid.*).

One argument that is sometimes given for the primacy of the non-comparative notions of looks over the comparative notion (e.g. by Byrne 2009: 441 and Brogaard forthcoming: 22) is that the existence of the former is presupposed by the latter. Call this the *regress argument*. According to this argument, comparative analyses like (7\*) presuppose that there is *some way that things look*—*s* in the above example—that grounds the truth or falsity of comparative looks reports. On pain of circularity, such looks cannot themselves be comparative, and must instead be some other, more primitive form of looks, namely *non-comparative looks*.

The regress argument, however, is too quick. There is nothing to say that *s* in the above analysis must exclusively be a look, or if it is, that such looks must be analysed non-comparatively. All that is required to avoid the alleged regress is that *s* must not itself be the *same* comparative look, or some precursor of it, that is being analysed. This leaves considerable scope for such analyses to quantify over, for example, the external objects of perception or their properties (4.3). Furthermore, any look that grounds the truth of a comparative looks report may itself be comparative in nature. For example, if phenomenal looks turned out to be analysable in terms of visually relevant similarities between objects, then those similarities would ground the truth of the corresponding comparative looks reports. Since the notion of similarity is itself comparative, then looks of this kind would be irreducibly comparative as they cannot be expressed in terms of any more primitive non-comparative notion. Thus Byrne and Brogaard’s regress argument against the primacy of comparative looks fails to go through.

#### 4.2.4. Phenomenal and non-phenomenal looks

Having identified the existence of evidential, non-evidential, comparative and non-comparative looks reports, and the various combinations thereof, there remains the further question of which, if any, of these is used to give phenomenological reports. That is, are there uses of sentences like (1)—‘The ball looks red to *S*’—that report the phenomenal character of *S*’s perceptual experience, or are such sentences essentially descriptive of objects in the world? The prospects of a looks-indexed account of perceptual content will turn upon the answer to this question. Moreover, if any use of ‘looks’ is capable of indexing univocal perceptual content, then it will be the non-comparative use since, as we have seen, comparative looks are symmetric and so equivocal. A potential candidate for such a non-comparative use is Jackson’s ‘phenomenological’ or ‘phenomenal’ use, which he describes as follows (Jackson 1977: 33):

The phenomenal use is characterized by being explicitly tied to terms for color, shape, and/or distance: ‘It looks *blue* to me’, ‘It looks *triangular*’, ‘The tree looks closer *than* the house’, ‘The top line looks *longer than* the bottom line’, ‘There looks to be a *red square* in the middle of the white wall’, and so on. That is, instead of terms like ‘cow’, ‘house’, ‘happy’, we have, in the phenomenal use, terms like ‘red’, ‘square’, and ‘longer than’.

If this is correct, then sentences like

(9) It looks red and very old

should have an infelicitous reading since only ‘red’ and not ‘very old’ has an obviously phenomenal use.<sup>5</sup> However, this does not appear to be the case. This apparent discrepancy can be explained either in terms of the corresponding comparative reading

(9’) It looks the way that red things look and the way that very old things look

‘obscuring’ the erroneous reading (Byrne 2009: 442), or by the phenomenal reading itself being analysable in comparative terms—a possibility that Jackson rejects for reasons I examine in the following section. For present purposes, however, it will suffice to clarify precisely what Jackson’s phenomenal use is intended to capture, and why one might be tempted to posit it as a means of indexing representational content.

Perhaps the strongest argument for the existence of distinctly phenomenal looks comes from the following scenario described by Jackson (1977: 36). A ‘super-achromatic-color-sorter’ (Martin 2010: 192)—call her Mona—is

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Thau 2002: 230. Byrne (*op. cit.*), following Jackson, claims that even predicates like ‘old’ have a suitable non-comparative reading.

entirely colour blind and sees only monochromatic degrees of luminosity without any polychromatic colour. Consequently, Mona has none of the visual phenomenology that we normally associate with seeing colours, or else she has very different visual phenomenology corresponding to her monochromatic experiences. Mona's ability to discriminate luminance levels, however, is sufficiently acute that she can sort objects into categories by their colour—red, green, and so on—despite being unable to 'see' these colour in the conventional sense. Red objects, for example, appear to Mona as a particular shade of grey, or as having some unique surface reflectance property that differs from green and other coloured objects. Thus, by stipulation, all of Mona's talk and behaviour concerning colour precisely matches those of a normally sighted subject. Furthermore, since red-looking objects look to Mona the way that red things normally look to her—that is to say, as a particular shade of grey—then they can be said to comparatively 'look red' to her. There is a sense, however, in which we want to say that *nothing* looks red to Mona, since she lacks the relevant phenomenology. This sense, argues Jackson, corresponds to the phenomenal use of 'looks'.

Despite its intuitive appeal, one might be tempted to doubt the coherence of the SORTER scenario. The term 'red' covers a wide variety of perceptible shades across an even wider range of environmental conditions, and it is implausible that an achromatic perceiver like Mona could differentiate unfamiliar red objects from similarly varying shades of other hues based upon their luminance and reflectance properties alone. Moreover, even if there were some uniquely identifying property of red appearances other than their subjective colour, it seems that such a perceiver would be tracking a different property of objects to the one picked out by normally sighted perceivers by the predicate *is red*, i.e. their colour. This is borne out by the counterfactual conditionals that hold for Mona, which include monochromatic-illusory cases in which objects merely *appear* to her to be red in virtue of possessing the relevant luminosity or reflectance profile, but which would not appear red to a normally colour-sighted perceiver.

Even if we grant the coherence of SORTER, however, there is a further question concerning the connection between an object's looking some particular way and the phenomenal character of that experience. Like many other views, representationalism typically holds that the properties of the objects of experience are distinct from the properties of experience itself (cf. 3.3.3). Whilst an object of experience can, for example, be square in the ordinary sense, an experience of that object can only be described as 'square' insofar as it represents something as being square. Thus, the experience is not itself square, but rather exhibits the phenomenal correlate of squareness—call this *square\**. Now, the connection between being square and *square\** is either contingent or necessary. If it is contingent, then there must be some further explanation as to why *square\** represents being square as opposed to some other property, such as being red. But even if this connection were to hold necessarily, then there is still a further question as to why an experience with a certain phenomenal character,

i.e. *square\**, should attribute the property of being square to some external object, given that, for all that has been said so far, the two are quite separate and distinct properties.

Naïve Realists are able to avoid this objection by asserting the identity of these two properties since, for them, to experience something to be square is simply to be presented with its squareness. Sense-datum theorists make a similar manoeuvre but at the level of mental objects. The question for the representationalist, then, is to explain beyond mere causal covariance why a particular quality of experience should be taken to represent a given objective property.

To illustrate by way of an example, if (1) were analysed as

(1') The ball phenomenally looks *red\** to *S*

then would be unclear how a property of experience—namely, *red\**—can be attributed to a physical object (the ball) since only experiences and not objects can be *red\**. At this point, the representationalist has a number of options. First, (1') may be read as saying that *S* has an experience of phenomenal redness (i.e. *red\**) that is, or appears to be, *caused by* the ball. Here, the connection between red and *red\** is contingent since, in a different perceiver, the same object might have caused an experience with a different phenomenal character, such as *blue\** or *pain*. This would make the correlation between red and *red\** a mere accident of grammar, since the only connection between the two properties is a contingent causal one. Consequently, on this view the claim that

(10) Things which are red look red

would, on the comparative use of 'looks', not be a necessary truth, but an 'empirical generalization' (Chisholm 1957: 51). Such a claim would be equivalent to:

(10') Things which are red phenomenally look *red\** in *k*

where *k* is the relevant set of conditions for seeing red things.

Another option would be to say that *S* represents the ball as looking red by having an experience of *red\**. That is, experiences with a *red\** phenomenal character are *intrinsically representational*. The question of whether there are any intrinsically representational phenomenal characters lies outside the scope of this chapter. However, the suggestion seems to parallel at the level of properties, rather than objects, the representationalist notion that one experiences objects by representing them to be some particular way, and so is in keeping with the general tenor of the representationalist's account.

Finally, *red\** might be understood as a kind of *narrow content* that supervenes upon the properties of experience, but not its external objects. In this case, phenomenal looks provide a way of capturing the aspect of perceptual

experience according to which things *appear* to be some particular way to the perceiver without entailing that they actually *are* that way—surely the essence of the notion of ‘looks’.

Although Jackson’s SORTER scenario does not provide us with any positive characterisation of, for example, *red\**, his intention, along with that of Chisholm (ibid.), seems to be to posit a use of ‘looks’ that is applicable only to experiences that have a certain phenomenal character. Since Mona’s experience lacks this character, nothing phenomenally looks red to her, despite red things having the relevant comparative look. It remains to be shown, however, that there is any connection between the proposed phenomenal use and our everyday looks talk. I argue below (4.3) that such talk can be explained equally well, if not better, without any reference to phenomenal looks. If this is correct, then the phenomenal use of ‘looks’, in so far as such a use exists, may be a distinctly philosophical one to which we only need appeal in order to describe various apparently logical possibilities, such as SORTER or inverted spectrum scenarios. Thus, even if there is a distinctly phenomenal use of ‘looks’, this in itself does not necessarily support the truth of representationalism (4.2.6).<sup>6</sup>

A further account of ‘non-comparative’ looks offered by Byrne (2009: 444) seeks to extend Jackson’s notion of phenomenal looks to include more complex looks, such as looking old, cow-ish or Scandinavian. However, it does this by combining multiple phenomenal looks involving colour, shape and distance terms into more complex visual *Gestalten* which are recognisable on the basis of the relevant phenomenally basic looks. This renders Byrne’s phenomenally non-basic non-comparative looks a form of linguistic shorthand for more complex combinations of phenomenally basic looks. As such, they are only as capable of indexing representational perceptual contents as the phenomenally basic looks that form their building blocks. I will therefore not give an extended treatment of them here since any argument against the latter will count equally against the former.

#### 4.2.5. *Non-comparative phenomenal looks*

Having established the threefold distinction between evidential, comparative and phenomenal looks, I will now evaluate the arguments offered by Jackson and Brogaard in favour of the existence of non-comparative phenomenal looks. Both Byrne and Schellenberg, amongst others, claim that a non-comparative use of ‘looks’ may be used to ground the content of perceptual experience. Jackson (1977) presents several arguments that appear to support this, claiming that the phenomenal use is irreducible to either comparative or epistemic looks.

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that the proposed equivalence between phenomenal and comparative looks in this scenario is only supposed to hold between *looks to a subject*. That is, there is nothing to say that looking red to Mona necessarily means the same as looking red to Mary (Jackson 1982) or any other perceiver. This in turn suggests that the flaw in the comparative analysis of phenomenal looks, if there is one, lies not in its comparative nature, but in its subject specificity. This suggestion is taken up by the alternative analyses of ‘looks’ described in 4.3, which primarily deal with objective looks, of which subject-specific looks turn out to be a special case.

However, as I argue below, these arguments are unconvincing, and the resulting non-comparative looks too thin to support the kind of representational contents that Byrne and others propose, as Byrne (2009: 444) himself admits. Furthermore, the availability of alternative comparative analyses of phenomenal looks removes the need to appeal to this notion in accounting for most, if not all, of our everyday looks talk, thereby neutralising the force of Byrne and Schellenberg's arguments (4.3). Note that my intention in this section is not to offer arguments against Jackson's own sense-datum account of perceptual experience, which he takes to be supported by the existence of phenomenal looks. Rather, I aim to refute the use of Jackson and Brogaard's arguments in favour of the existence of phenomenal looks as a means of supporting representationalism.

Jackson aims to establish that statements of the form:

- (11)  $x$  phenomenally looks F to S

are not systematically equivalent to statements of the form:

- (12)  $x$  comparatively looks the way things that are F normally look to S in  $k$

where  $k$  is a specification of normal, ideal, current or some other kind of circumstances (Jackson 1977: 34). That is to say, Jackson rejects any equivalence between the phenomenal and implicitly comparative (or indeed evidential) uses of 'looks'.<sup>7</sup> Jackson's objections to this equivalence are twofold. First, he presents a number of apparent counterexamples which purport to show that (11) may be true when (12) is false, or *vice versa*. Second, he argues that there is no relevant set of circumstances,  $k$ , such that the alleged equivalence always holds. I will address each of these objections in turn.

Jackson's first objection to the equivalence between (11) and (12) is that something can look F to S even when nothing is F. Such cases, he argues, render (12) false despite (11) being true, since nothing can normally look the way to S that things that are F do if there are no such things. For all we know, argues Jackson, this may be the case in our own world with respect to certain narrowly defined colour properties, which may never be instantiated despite the appearance of being so, as in the case of Hume's 'missing shade of blue' (ibid. 35).

Jackson anticipates the obvious response to this objection, which is to replace (12) with the subjunctive conditional:

- (13)  $x$  comparatively looks the way things that are F would normally look to S in  $k$

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<sup>7</sup> Jackson also rejects accounting for non-comparative looks in term of the sensory states that they typically evoke (ibid.). However, since this argument is of a similar form, I will not deal with it separately here.

Thus, even if no actual things are *F*, things can look the way that *F*s would (under *k* to *S*) were such object to exist. According to Jackson (1977: 35), the problem with such an analysis is that

[T]o say that [*x*] looks red to me is to say something about how things *actually are*, it is not to say anything about how things *would be* if the world were different.

However, this response is based upon a misconception. How things would appear to *S* were she, *per impossibile*, to experience some red object *is* a fact about the actual world since it concerns the constitution and perceptual capacities of *S*. That this may be explained in terms of a modal notion seems beside the point.

To illustrate this, consider Jackson's DEMON scenario. This involves 'a Cartesian evil demon who hates red things but tolerates non-red things looking red on odd occasions' (ibid.). The demon's dislike of red things is such that he prevents any such things from coming into existence. Furthermore, if even a single red thing were to come into existence, the demon would destroy the entire world along with everything in it. Consequently, nothing in this world can look the way that red things normally do, as per (13), since if any red thing were to come into existence then the entire world would cease to exist.

Call the demon-world *w* and the closest possible world in which there are red things *w'*. Contrary to Jackson's claim, the existence of an evil demon at *w* does not make (13) false; only the absence of red things in *w'* could do that. But since *w'* is the closest possible world in which there *are* red things, then (13) cannot be false unless *no* possible world contains red things. Given that our own world does contain red things, then (13) cannot fail to be true whenever (11) obtains. Thus Jackson's counterexample to the proposed equivalence fails.

The above response to Jackson might be considered uncharitable on the basis that his objection to (13) is less about semantics than the very idea that how things look in this world can be answerable to merely possible states of affairs rather than what is actually the case. After all, in the demon world, *w*, some things 'look red' to *S* despite there being nothing in that world that *is* red, and so nothing that such looks may be compared with. However, this objection is question-begging since it presupposes that we antecedently know what phenomenal looks are—or at least what they are *not*—within the context of an analysis of phenomenal looks. This suggestion cannot be given any weight unless some concrete reason to reject it is provided. Unfortunately, beyond the autobiographical statement that Jackson himself finds the view to be implausible, he says little to back up this claim, and so we must reject this objection for the time being.

A similar issue is raised by another scenario described by Jackson (1977: 35). This involves a subject—call him Frank—who is unusually sensitive to red light such that he is dazzled by anything that is red. On occasion, however, some non-red things—for example, white walls at sunset—*look* red to Frank, although nothing which *is* red looks this way due to his dazzlement. To a large

extent, this scenario relies for its apparent plausibility upon the value of  $k$  in the above formulation. For example, though red things may dazzle Frank where  $k$  is ‘full sunlight’, the same objects would presumably look red to him under suitably low conditions of illumination. If not, and no red objects look red to Frank, as Jackson seems to suggest, then it is debatable to what extent anything can be said to look red to Frank, since he is presumably incapable of perceiving the relevant colour. At best, any looks that Frank might perceive under such circumstances would be akin to a kind of optical illusion in which certain conditions cause a phenomenally red experience in Frank. However, Jackson gives us no reason to suppose that this experience would in any way correspond to other perceivers’ experiences of red, i.e. *red\** (4.2.4), since it is entirely unconnected with the perception of any red object. To simply assume such a correspondence from the outset would be question-begging, since the existence of such phenomenal looks is precisely the point at issue, rendering the argument circular. Conversely, the comparative analysis of (11), i.e. (12), quite plausibly suggests that the phenomenal character of Frank’s experience would not be *red\**, but whatever property is shared by all the objects that look red to him—call this  $F^*$ . Since any object that looks  $F^*$  to Frank also looks the way that objects with the relevant property (whatever that might be) normally look in  $k$ , the proposed equivalence between (11) and (13) continues to hold without exception, and so Jackson’s scenario fails constitute a convincing counterexample to the comparative analysis.

The problem with the above scenarios is that each attempts to divorce the phenomenon of *looking red* from things *being red*. This may be plausible for philosophers like Jackson who take there to be a distinctly phenomenal sense of ‘looks’ such that one can have an experience of phenomenal redness (*red\**) quite independently of one’s capacity for seeing red things. However, this assumption is of dubious coherence, and potentially objectionable to any theorist who rejects the separation of phenomenal and comparative looks—or indeed the separation between the perceived properties of objects and the phenomenal character of experience. Thus the very plausibility of the alleged counterexamples that Jackson describes depends on the assumption that phenomenal looks (e.g. *looking red\**) are distinct from comparative looks (*looking like a red thing*)—the very claim they are being used to demonstrate—and so must be rejected on grounds of circularity.

Having established that none of the above scenarios are wholly convincing, this leads us to Jackson’s second objection concerning the specification of the conditions  $k$  required by (12) or (13), which he puts as follows (Jackson 1977: 36, with appropriate modifications to the numbering):

In everyday chat about color, we take reasonably bright daylight as normal circumstances, but this quite obviously will not do in (12). (11) does not mean anything like

(14)  $x$  looks the way things that are  $F$  normally look to  $S$  in daylight.

Jackson proceeds to consider several possible candidates for such ‘normal circumstances’ and finds each of them wanting. His discussion, however, conflates two different aspects of (12): (i) the specification of the relevant comparison conditions,  $k$ , and (ii) the meaning of the term ‘normally’. Jackson appears to take the value of  $k$  to be ‘normal circumstances’, which in most cases (according to Jackson) means in full daylight. However, in Chisholm’s original analysis of comparative looks, there is no suggestion that  $k$  must remain fixed across all experiences, or that it should represent normal conditions. Rather, as Chisholm (1957: 45–46) is at pains to point out,  $k$  is indexical and may vary according to context. This is hardly surprising given the context-dependence of other implicitly comparative expressions; e.g. ‘that animal is small [for an elephant]’. Jackson’s assumption that  $k$  may generally be taken to be ‘reasonably bright daylight’ in everyday discourse, even if true, is therefore irrelevant to the evaluation of (13) in the scenarios he describes. Indeed, the circumstances under which (11) is true need not bear any obvious relation to the corresponding value of  $k$  in (13).

Take the case of Frank. If this scenario is coherent, and I have argued that there is reason to doubt this, an object’s looking red to Frank can be analysed not in terms of (14), but as

- (15)  $x$  looks the way things that are  $F$  [would] normally look to Frank in conditions of low illumination

where  $F$  is ‘red’. As I suggested above, if (15) is never true, then it would be questionable to what extent Frank is capable of seeing red at all. Conversely, if (15) is true under some set of conditions  $k$ , then (11) will be equivalent to (15) irrespective of the conditions under which non-red things look red to Frank. Thus  $k$  specifies the conditions under which Frank *sees red things*, not things that merely appear to be red.

Allowing  $k$  to vary according to context removes much of the force of Jackson’s objection, but raises the further question of whether there is any principled, non-arbitrary way of determining the relevant conditions. After all, if we are free to choose whichever value of  $k$  makes (12) or (13) true in each individual case, then the above response begins to appear dangerously *ad hoc*. It is plausible, however, that for many subjects most of the time, (11) does mean the same as (13) when  $k$  specifies present conditions; i.e. the conditions under which  $x$  is seen. The divergence of Jackson’s and other scenarios from this norm is explicable purely in terms of the unusual nature of the subject or situation concerned, which thereby cause a different set of conditions to apply. Thus, for all that Jackson has said, there appears to be no reason to suppose that phenomenal looks reports cannot be analysed in comparative terms, calling into question the need for non-comparative phenomenal looks.

#### 4.2.6. Phenomenal content

I have argued that the evidential, comparative and phenomenal uses of looks, far from being mutually exclusive, represent orthogonal aspects of the analysis of looks reports (cf. Brogaard forthcoming: 21). As such, Jackson, Brogaard and Byrne's arguments for the primacy and irreducibility of phenomenal looks may be seen as attempts to establish the existence of non-evidential non-comparative analyses of phenomenal looks. However, each involves a number of questionable assumptions, most notably Jackson (1977), who assumes that relevant conditions for perceiving appearances must remain fixed across all uses of 'looks' as opposed to varying with context—a natural consequence of any comparative analysis of looks. Indeed, the only one of the above arguments that offers any support to the proposed non-comparative analysis is Jackson's SORTER scenario, which is itself of dubious coherence, raising serious issues concerning how phenomenal properties relate to the objects of experience. As noted above, this is not a problem for Jackson himself, who is a sense datum theorist, but it presents a serious obstacle to those representationalists who wish to adopt Jackson's account of looks whilst rejecting his conclusion, i.e. the sense datum theory. Even if we grant the coherence of non-comparative phenomenal looks reports, however, it remains to be seen whether such a use is capable of indexing objective representational content. If it is not, as I argue is the case, then Jackson's argument offers no support to the representationalist.

In order to index perceptual content, in Travis's terms, a perceptual appearance must make exactly one such content recognisable to the subject, as per *Looks-indexing* (2.2.5). This is the case because it is a necessary condition for autorepresentation (i.e. representing-to) that the content of any given experience be recognisable to the subject (2.2.4). Furthermore, in order to support a representationalist account of illusion, such contents must also be capable of misrepresentation—that is, of being false or non-veridical—this being one of the supposed benefits of representationalism (2.3.1). Now, if the proposed non-comparative phenomenal use of 'looks' relates to the presence of a given phenomenal character in experience—for example, *red\**—as opposed to a specific property of an object—i.e. *being red*—then neither of these requirements can be met. To see why this is the case, consider the following proposition as it applies to Mona, the super-achromatic colour sorter (4.2.4):

(16) The ball phenomenally looks *red\** to Mona

As it stands, (16) is false since, *ex hypothesi*, nothing looks phenomenally red to Mona as her experience lacks the relevant phenomenal character. This is true despite the corresponding comparative reading

(17) The ball comparatively looks the way that red things [would] do to Mona under relevant circumstances

being true, and regardless of whether the ball in question is red or not. Conversely, for (16) to be true, Mona would need to experience *red\**, in which case the content would be veridical. Furthermore, (16) is true of ordinary perceivers in all cases where the ball *appears* red, regardless of whether it is red or not. Thus, the only content that (16) can make recognisable to the subject on the basis of phenomenal looks-indexing is not that the ball *is* red, but that it (merely) *looks* red; i.e. that the subject's experience has a particular phenomenal character, just as Jackson suggests. There are two problems with this view from the representationalist's perspective.

First, the proposed content attributes a property to the subject's *experience*, not to the *objects of experience*, or in the case of (16), the ball. If the representational contents of experience were of this kind, then they would fail to predicate anything of external objects since it is only the phenomenal character of the experience that would be represented. This is an even weaker notion of representation than Byrne's 'relatively thin' content, since it does not yield the content that *the ball is red*, but rather that *the ball* (merely) *looks red*. On this view, what makes (16) true would be something like:

(18) Mona's experiencing the ball involves phenomenal redness [*red\**]

Alternatively, if—by the application of an externalist theory of perceptual content, for example—(16) is supposed to represent the ball's *being* red, then it remains to be explained how (16) could make *that* content recognisable given that phenomenal looks are equivocal between the ball's *being red* and its (merely) *looking red*, not to mention the multitude of ways in which something can look to be red; e.g. by shining a red light on it.

Note that simply insisting, perhaps on the basis of an externalist theory of content, that Mona's experience represents *being red* and not her experience involving *red\** does not constitute an adequate response to the objection. The present argument concerns the content that Mona's experience makes *recognisable* to her, rather than what content her experience can be described as possessing from some independent third-personal point of view.<sup>8</sup> If the recognisability of experiential content is based upon phenomenal looks, themselves features of experience, then it remains entirely opaque how this could make content that is about the *objects* of experience available to the subject. At best, this approach yields phenomenal content (3.2.3) whilst failing to say anything about the objective world outside of experience.

Second, and equally problematic for the representationalist, is that the resulting content is unable to support the standard account of perceptual illusion. Given that a subject's experience involves phenomenal redness (i.e. *red\**) if and only if something looks phenomenally red to them, then (16) can only falsely represent in cases where the ball is represented as phenomenally looking red, i.e. (16), but where Mona's experience lacks the relevant

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<sup>8</sup> Appeals to externalist accounts of self-knowledge, e.g. Burge (1979), on the other hand, insofar as these bear upon *Looks-indexing*, are relevant, and are dealt with in chapter 6.

phenomenal character, i.e. (18), is false. This form of illusion, if indeed it is coherent, is not *perceptual* but *cognitive*, since it describes a case in which the subject is mistaken about the nature of her own experience.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, if the possibility of such illusions is rejected, as I believe it should be, then the resulting content, i.e. (16), can never be said to misrepresent, since the subject only ever represents something as phenomenally looking *red\** when they are experiencing a red phenomenal character, and so the content is necessarily veridical. Thus the content of (16) becomes its own truthmaker. Note that even if the possibility of misrepresentation is allowed for, it is not of a kind that would enable the representationalist to explain the existence of perceptual illusions, since at no point is any object represented as *being red*; merely that it looks so.

Putting both of these points together, and in the absence of any convincing counter-argument, we can conclude that non-comparative phenomenal looks, as described, are unfit to index the representational content of perceptual experience. That is not to say that we cannot describe the phenomenal character of experience in representational terms. Rather, in providing a response to Travis's argument from looks, such representational content (a) can only make the phenomenal character of experience recognisable and not the properties of external objects, and (b) fails to provide an adequate explanation of perceptual illusion. Indeed, this is precisely the notion of phenomenal content that was rejected in the previous chapter in connection with Byrne's account of non-comparative looks (3.2.3), and which Byrne (2009: 443) himself admits to be unsuitable for indexing the content of perceptual experiences. Thus, even if SORTER is taken to justify the existence of some form of non-comparative phenomenal looks—and it is far from clear that it should be—such looks cannot index the kind of content that many representationalists take perceptual experiences to have. This is not a problem for Jackson (1977: ch. 3), who argues that phenomenal looks justify the existence of sense data rather than representational content. It is, however, a problem for Byrne, Schellenberg and any other representationalist who wishes to ground their notion of p-representational content upon it.

### 4.3. Parsimony about Appearances

Having established the difficulties with both Jackson's phenomenal looks and Byrne's 'non-comparative' looks for indexing representational content, I will now turn to an alternative analysis of 'looks'. According to this essentially comparative account, looks statements are grounded in primitive *visually relevant similarities* between objects, and not in additional appearance or phenomenal properties. It is therefore a *deflationary* analysis as it holds comparative, and not phenomenal, looks to be explanatorily more basic. Furthermore, this account treats both objective and subject-relative looks—i.e.

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<sup>9</sup> This is not the situation of Mona, to whom objects do not even phenomenally look red (compare: a subject representing the ball as being red when it is not).

‘looks *F*’ and ‘looks *F* to *S*’, respectively—as points on a single continuum (4.3.4). It is therefore not only more parsimonious (4.3.1), but also more powerful than Byrne and Jackson’s non-comparative accounts (4.3.2). Finally, I consider a potentially objectionable feature of the parsimonious account, along with how this might be resolved (4.3.3).

Since this deflationary analysis is essentially comparative, it cannot support the indexing of representational content by looks in the way that representationism requires. Instead, it remains strictly neutral on the question of whether experience has representational content. The availability of such an account, however, suggests that representationalists should not seek to motivate their view via the semantics or metaphysics of ‘looks’ since, in the absence of a stronger argument than those considered above, there is no reason to suppose that a non-comparative account of looks must apply. Rather, one could equally adopt a comparative analysis of ‘looks’, thereby, in conjunction with Travis’s argument from looks, neutralising the force of the representationalist’s argument.

#### 4.3.1. A deflationary analysis

One of the most thorough and detailed treatments of comparative looks in the recent literature comes from M. G. F. Martin, who claims that many of the cases of what Jackson takes to be paradigmatically ‘phenomenal talk’ are implicitly comparative (Martin 2010: 162). The central claim of his account is captured by the following principle, which Martin (*ibid.* 197) labels *Parsimony*:

*Parsimony*: looks statements are made true just by properties of objects that we need to appeal to in order to explain the truth of sentences that are not explicitly looks sentences.

According to *Parsimony*, there is no need to posit an additional phenomenal use of ‘looks’ or appearance properties to explain the meaning of looks statements. Instead, such statements are made true or false by an object’s ordinary appearance-independent properties, such as their shape or colour. In effect, the proponent of *Parsimony* claims that the role that was played by phenomenal properties above (4.2.4) can equally well be played by those appearance-independent properties that give rise to the relevant looks; i.e. the intrinsic properties of shape, size, colour, and so on, that we ordinarily take physical objects to have independently of how they look. Consequently, there is no need to appeal to additional appearance properties or non-comparative looks in order to analyse many—or indeed most—everyday looks statements.

Although Martin’s account of the semantics of ‘looks’ is characteristically subtle and complex, his central thesis is relatively straightforward and may be divided into two lemmas. First, instead of an object’s look (or looks) being some property distinct from its intrinsic properties, it is simply the product of its visually relevant similarities to other objects. For example, the *ball’s looking red* is just a matter of one object (the ball) bearing a certain visually relevant

similarity—i.e. its apparent colour—to the characteristic appearance of red things, regardless of whether it is red or not. On this view, looks are merely a way of quantifying over similarities between the multitude of ways that objects can appear to us.

The second lemma is that what grounds the explanation of these visually relevant similarities is the mind-independent properties of the objects themselves—shape, colour, and so on—along with our perceptual sensitivities to them. What makes a property visually relevant is the way that it perceptually affects us through the sensory modality of vision, with the same applying *mutatis mutandis* for each of the other senses. Thus it is us and our sensory faculties that determine the similarities that we find visually salient, rather than anything peculiar to the objects of perception and their properties. Nevertheless, the objective properties of those objects are what ground such similarity relations. Consequently, according to *Parsimony*, our sensory faculties are capable of perceiving intrinsic properties of objects, including their shape, colour, and so on, along with similarities between these properties, without the need to posit additional appearance-dependent properties.

According to *Parsimony*, then, sentences like (1)—‘The ball looks red [to S]’—means that a certain object (the ball) visually strikes *S* in a way that is characteristic of red things relative to a certain set of contextually defined conditions. Things ‘look red’ because they strike us in the way that is characteristic of objects that *are* red; i.e. it is the way that red things (typically, under circumstances that are conducive to perception) look. Whilst this requires that there be various ways in which things can visually strike us, i.e. phenomenal characters, these are not looks *per se*. Rather, it is the *similarities between objects* that ground the truth of looks statements. Since the account is based upon similarities, this yields the following comparative analysis of sentences like (1):

$$(19) \quad \exists s (\text{has}(x, s) \wedge (\text{look}(s) \wedge \varphi(s)))$$

where  $x$  is some physical object (e.g. the ball) and  $\varphi$  is a function that identifies the relevant ‘way of looking’, such as *looking red* (Martin 2010: 172). This also leaves open what kind of entities  $s$  and  $\varphi$  pick out, each of which I address in turn below.

Taking the function first, as we have already established,  $\varphi$  cannot itself be ‘red’ since (1) does not mean that the ball *is* red, or that the relevant look is red (looks do not themselves have colours; they are *of* colours), merely that it *appears* that way. According to Jackson’s phenomenal account of looks,  $\varphi$  would take the value *red\**, or more generally  $\Psi^*$ , where this term identifies the phenomenal counterpart of  $\Psi$ , the precise method of establishing which is unclear. Instead of specifying ways of looking in terms of some property, however—phenomenal or otherwise—Martin takes  $\varphi$  to be a *similarity function*, or SIM for short. This function takes a predicate (‘is red’) and a look ( $s$ ), and obtains if and only if the latter is relevantly similar to those objects that

satisfy the predicate. For example, if  $s$  is a reddish look, then  $\text{SIM}(\text{'is red'}, s)$  will be true. An additional *getting-the-characteristic* function, or  $C$  for short, is then required to map what Martin calls the ‘complement adjectival phrase’ (ibid.) of the looks predicate—in this case ‘red’—to the property of objects that is characteristic of that look under circumstances  $k$ . Thus,  $C(\text{red}, \text{look}, k)$  would return the property that is characteristic of things that look red under the relevant circumstances—namely *being red*.<sup>10</sup>

Putting all the above elements together yields the following analysis:

$$(20) \quad \exists s (\text{has}(x, s) \wedge (\text{look}(s) \wedge \text{SIM}(C(\psi, \text{look}, k), s)))$$

Thus (1) may be analysed as  $x$  (the ball) having a look that is relevantly similar to the look of things that are red (this being the property characteristic of things that have this look) under circumstances  $k$ , where  $\psi$  is the adjectival-phrase complement of ‘looks’ in (1), i.e. ‘red’. The apparent complexity of the analysis masks the underlying simplicity of the sense in which things that *look red* look like (a comparative notion) the red things, thus corresponding to Travis’s notion of a visible look (2.3.2).

Before moving on to examine the consequences of *Parsimony*, it is important to note that (20) is intended as a logical, and not psychological, analysis of the semantics of ‘looks’. There is no suggestion that the process outlined above parallels some sequence of psychological events that we go through when evaluating looks statements, though in some cases it may do. Rather, it is intended to explain the underlying semantic structure of such statements in a way that reveals their essentially comparative nature, as distinct from the phenomenal analysis offered by Jackson and others (4.2).

What Martin’s deflationary analysis shows is that both similarity judgements, in the form of  $\text{SIM}$ , and the properties that are characteristic of a given look,  $C$ , are central to the meaning of looks statements. Thus, it is not that there is any intrinsic connection between an object’s looking red and being red, but rather that being red is (under certain circumstances) a visually relevant characteristic of things that look red. This need not render judgements like (1) inferential or epistemically indirect since subjects may become expert at recognising such properties without the need to perform any such inference. However, such linguistic competence only becomes possible once one knows what red things ‘look like’ in the sense that one associates the appearance-independent property of *being red* with the phenomenal character that one experiences upon seeing red objects.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Note that in many everyday cases the correspondence need not be trivial. A reddish look may, under certain lighting conditions, be characteristic of white objects, or someone who ‘looks pregnant’ may have the property of being a particular shape (Martin 2010: 173).

<sup>11</sup> As before, if the metaphysics of colour are thought to be problematic in this regard, consider the analogous case of shape.

4.3.2. *What's in a look?*

In certain respects, Martin's deflationary analysis of 'looks' is not dissimilar to Byrne's 'non-comparative' looks (4.2.5). Both make reference to distinct properties, or sets of properties, that relate to a given look. However, whereas Byrne claims that such a set of phenomenal characters just *is* the look, according to *Parsimony*, looks are constituted by *similarities between properties*, and not those properties themselves. Thus, according to the parsimonious account, such looks are implicitly comparative. This does not yet explain, however, what kind of entities *s* and the results of the C function in the above analysis are. Indeed, it is possible that these are precisely the kind of phenomenal looks that Jackson and Byrne posit. On such a view, the visually salient similarities that SIM picks out would be between the bundle of phenomenal properties that the subject is experiencing and the bundle of phenomenal properties returned by C that is characteristic of the look in question; e.g. *looking red*. On this interpretation, Martin's analysis would entail the existence of non-comparative looks. (I argue below that this view is incorrect, and so there is no such entailment.) In the case of complex looks, the main point of difference between Martin and Byrne is that to 'look red' is not to non-comparatively look *red\**, but to look relevantly similar to the characteristic look of red things, where a 'look' is something like a Kantian sensory manifold. This difference may seem somewhat obscure, but there is a further point that is central to Martin's account.

In contrast to Jackson, Martin argues that the sentence

(21) The spread looks splendid<sup>12</sup>

is ambiguous between the following readings:

(21') There is a splendid look that the meal has

(21'') The meal has a look that is relevantly similar to the look of splendid things

Or, to put this more formally (Martin 2010: 185):

(21\*)  $\exists s (\text{has}(\text{the meal}, s) \wedge (\text{look}(s) \wedge \text{splendid}(s)))$

(21'')  $\exists s (\text{has}(\text{the meal}, s) \wedge (\text{look}(s) \wedge \text{SIM}(\text{C}(\text{splendid}, \text{look}, k), s)))$

According to (21'), it is *the look of the meal* that is splendid. In (21''), *the meal itself* has a look that is relevantly similar to that of meals that are splendid. Conversely, however, Martin argues that comparable sentences involving shape or colour terms contain no such ambiguity. That is, (13) does not admit of the readings

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<sup>12</sup> Martin uses the term 'spread' to mean a large and impressive meal.

(13') There is a red look that the ball has

(13'') The ball has a look that is relevantly similar to the look of red things

Instead, according to *Parsimony*, the two readings effectively collapse into (13'') since to have a red look just is to have a look which is relevantly similar to the look of red things. Unlike 'splendid', which conceivably applies to both looks and objects, a look is not the sort of thing that can itself be red; in (13'), for example. Rather, it is the look *of* something red.<sup>13</sup>

*Parsimony* entails that quantification over the looks of objects does not require those objects to possess any particular properties other than looking that way; i.e. there need not be any red thing that is seen in order for something to look red. This runs counter to Jackson's account, which posits the existence of precisely such entities—namely, sense data. But if looks are not phenomenal properties of experiences or objects, then what are they? Martin's answer is at once simple and surprising: they are the ordinary appearance-independent properties of objects.

The second aspect of *Parsimony*, then, is that it identifies the phenomenal character of looks with the appearance-independent properties of objects: being red, being square, and so on. On this view, the properties of which one is aware in perceptual experience are not the phenomenal correlates of an object's appearance-independent properties, but those very properties themselves. When one sees the red ball, for example, one experiences or is aware of the redness *of that very object*, and not merely some phenomenal aspect of an experience caused by the object. Thus, instead of a duality between the world of 'external' objects and their appearance-independent properties and an 'internal' world of experience and its phenomenal properties, *Parsimony* entails—at least in the case of colour, shape and distance perception—that we experience the appearance-independent properties of external objects themselves. Furthermore, in the case of objects that merely look red, it explains why there need be no red thing present. In such cases, the red look of an object is explained by its qualitative similarity, as determined by the similarity function SIM, to things that are red. This may, though need not, cause one to mistakenly judge on the basis of this look that something *is* red when it is not. Thus in the case of mere looks and perceptual illusions, nothing in the subject's experience need instantiate the properties that are perceived. Rather, one is confronted with an appearance that is relevantly similar to the characteristic look of some other object, causing one's thoughts and actions to be guided accordingly.

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<sup>13</sup> More accurately, it has a look that is relevantly similar to the look of red things, since the inference from:

$$\exists x (\text{experiencing}(S, x) \wedge \text{looks}_{\text{red}}(x))$$

to

$$\exists x (\text{experiencing}(S, x) \wedge \text{red}(x))$$

is fallacious.

In summary, then, Jackson identifies a class of non-comparative or ‘phenomenal’ looks that he takes to underpin the meaning of comparative looks statements. This, along with the wider range of non-comparative looks—including Byrne’s *Gestalten*, which arise from combining multiple phenomenal looks—may indeed be used to ground a limited notion of representational content. However, the resulting content lacks the objective import that p-representation requires. Martin, on the other hand, argues that although non-comparative uses of ‘looks’ may exist, they are not themselves looks. Rather, looks arise from salient similarities between the experiences of objects that possess the relevant property, and in some cases those that don’t.

Moreover, one can become visually aware of an object’s properties through direct perceptual experience of them such that the experienced properties of the object are themselves constituents of that experience. This removes the need to posit additional entities or properties that correspond to an object’s looks, instead locating looks in the similarities between those properties of objects in the world that subjects find visually salient. As such, to experience an F-look need not be to experience F-ness *per se*, but rather receives the disjunctive analysis of *either* experiencing F-ness *or* some other property, the experience of which bears visually relevant similarities to it. Thus, a stick that is half-immersed in water is not itself bent, nor does it have a ‘bent look’ in the sense of possessing an appearance property of ‘bentness’. It merely looks, in certain respects and from particular angles, like bent sticks do. Similarly, a white wall illuminated by red light does not present the subject with the look of a red wall *per se*, but rather with a look that one might, under certain circumstances, mistake for a red wall due to the similarity between the two experiences, and so on.<sup>14</sup> Such an explanation of perceptual illusion is consistent with Travis’s argument from misleading appearances (2.3.1).

#### 4.3.3. *The problem of conflicting appearances*

Perhaps the most serious problem for the parsimonious account is one that Martin (2010: 219–22) himself considers. It is not unusual in philosophical discussions of perception to appeal to cases in which the appearance of an object is altered whilst its intrinsic properties remain unchanged. Hume famously used just such a case to argue that the direct objects of perception cannot be external physical objects, which ‘suffer no alteration’ despite changes in their appearances, but must instead be ideas or impressions in the mind (Hume 1999: XII.i, 201). This was later refuted by Reid (1997: VI.xxii, 186), whose response has since been taken up by Snowdon (1990) and others. However, this problem of conflicting or incompatible appearances also presents a problem for *Parsimony*. If judgements about the sensible properties of objects in the epistemically ‘good’ case are just judgements about their intrinsic properties, then how are we to explain cases in which an object’s sensible appearances change whilst its intrinsic properties do not? A paradigm example

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<sup>14</sup> See 4.3.4 for further qualification on this point.

of such a case is that of a stick that when partially immersed in water appears bent. That is to say, in certain respects from the relevant angle, it looks relevantly like a stick that *is* bent would do under normal circumstances, i.e. when it is not immersed in water (Martin *op. cit.*).

There are two obvious responses to this problem in connection with *Parsimony*, both of which Martin rejects. The first is to claim that an object's appearance depends not only upon its intrinsic properties, but also its relational properties. The appearance of the stick, for example, varies when it is partially immersed in water due to its acquiring the relational property of *being immersed in water*. This would be entirely in keeping with the principle of *Parsimony*, which claims only that how an object looks is explained by reference to its appearance-independent properties, and not what kinds of properties these are. We can therefore identify two variants of the principle according to which types of properties are admissible in explaining looks statements: (i) *Relational Parsimony*, according to which looks statements are made true just by those properties of objects and their relations to objects that we need to appeal to in order to explain the truth of sentences that are not explicitly looks sentences, and (ii) *Non-Relational Parsimony*: looks statements are made true just by the non-relational properties of objects that we need to appeal to in order to explain the truth of sentences that are not explicitly looks sentences.

The problem with *Relational Parsimony* from Martin's (2010: 220) point of view is that:

[T]he ways of looking that the stick has just are among its basic visible properties, most saliently its length and shape, and potentially its surface colour. These simply do not change when it is placed half in the water

Martin does not give any particular argument for this assumption, though he clearly aims to give the simplest possible account of our perceptual awareness of objects and their properties. Admitting that relational properties have an effect upon appearances would, perhaps, weaken the sense in which we can be said to be directly aware of the non-relational properties of objects, since various combinations of relational and non-relational properties can combine to produce the same or similar appearances. Such combinations, however, admit of a disjunctive analysis in a similar manner to disjunctive accounts of perception and perceptual illusion. On this view, the 'bent' appearance of the stick would be explained in terms of the distorting effects of the water in which it is immersed, the refractive properties of which combine with the shape of the stick to yield the resulting look. Thus, upon seeing a stick that is immersed in water, we veridically see the properties of the both stick and water combined, rather than just the shape of the stick. Presumably, however, even in the normal case, minute distortions from the air or other intervening medium would mean that we rarely, if ever, saw the non-appearance properties of objects *simpliciter*. The resulting account is therefore unattractive to Naïve Realists, like Martin, who

wish to claim that we have direct, and therefore unmediated, awareness of external objects in the normal case.

An alternative response would be to claim that looks statements are ‘principally reports of our psychological states’ (Martin 2010: 220). This view explains how objects can change in appearance without changing their non-relational properties in terms of the subject having entered a different psychological state. However, this would seem to imply that objects do not have any particular look when they are not being experienced, which is contrary to the way we use ‘looks’. This drawback could perhaps be avoided by a move similar to the one that Jackson makes in the case of phenomenal looks, with each look corresponding to what subjects *would* experience were they to be confronted with that object (4.2.5). However, this again involves identifying looks with the psychological responses of subjects, thereby weakening the sense in which perceptual experience can be said to deliver direct awareness or knowledge of external properties, and so is similarly inhospitable to Naïve Realism.

Martin’s own response to this challenge is to claim that the appearances of objects do not, despite evidence to the contrary, change. Indeed, he observes that ‘[i]f we endorse Parsimony, then we must reject the claim that the stick has changed in appearance’ (Martin 2010: 220). Instead, according to Martin, what changes is the appropriateness of asserting that the object has certain appearances according to the ‘perspective of comparison’ that one adopts (ibid. 221). On this view, the stick has both the property of ‘looking straight’ and ‘looking bent’, but one is only in a position to assert the former upon seeing the stick out of water, and the latter when it is partially immersed. The intrinsic properties of the stick that ground both appearances, however, remain fixed regardless of whether it is immersed or not. This position is highly counterintuitive since we can, and frequently do, say that the appearances of objects change. However, it follows from *Parsimony* that if an object’s appearance-independent properties do not alter, its appearance—or appearances—must remain similarly fixed. In a sense, then, *Parsimony* entails that objects possess *all* of the objective appearances that they can possibly have, irrespective of which of these is currently available to observers at any given time. What makes it the case that things appear one way rather than another is instead the perspective or psychological state of the observer.

This unpalatable consequence of *Parsimony*, however, may be avoided since the principle does not require that there be a simple one-to-one correspondence between perceptual appearances and the appearance-independent properties of objects. Instead, appearances may be realised by many different physical properties with the similarities between them being explained by the constitution and perceptual sensitivities of the subject. The ‘bent’ appearance of a stick in water, for example, need not be explained in terms of a single physical property that explains both the appearance of a stick in water and one that is genuinely bent. That we identify both appearances as forms of ‘bentness’ is not explained by sameness of truthmakers, but by their subjective—or rather

*intersubjective*—similarity to paradigm cases of bent objects. Provided that such similarities are grounded in the relevant appearance-independent properties, which may include the perceptual constitution of the subject, *Parsimony* is maintained. In most paradigm cases of perception, however, such properties typically will be just the shape, colour, distance properties, and on so, of external objects. However, in cases of illusion or subjective similarity (e.g. the submerged stick), this need not be the case.

A modified version of Martin's view may therefore be constructed in which changes of appearance are explained by the tendency of the human perceptual system to group appearances or looks together, based around certain paradigm cases. What an object *looks like*—a comparative notion—is explained in terms of its visual similarities to other objects, which in turn instantiate those properties of which they are paradigmatic. Precisely which objects constitute the relevant paradigms will be a partly empirical matter upon which the *Parsimony* theorist need not take a view. Indeed, it will not matter whether the relevant cases differ between times and subjects provided that the same sets of similarities are maintained. In that respect, a genuinely bent stick is as good an exemplar of bentness as, for example, a banana.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it is no objection to *Parsimony* that the resulting looks are equivocal, since this is an inevitable consequence of any comparative analysis of 'looks'. Rather, it suggests that what determines an object's appearance is its similarities to other objects. This in turn may be explained by reference to both the object's and the perceiver's non-appearance properties, as *Parsimony* suggests. That we can describe the presence of a particular appearance in terms of a potentially complex disjunction of physical properties is neither here nor there. Indeed, the problem with doing so will be precisely the representationalist's difficulty in attempting to index p-representational content by visible looks (2.3.2). Provided that we identify looks with sets of similarities rather than looks-independent properties, however, this issue need not arise.

#### 4.3.4. Consequences of Parsimony

Thus far, we have only considered what might be termed *objective looks*; that is, the looks that objects have to any suitably perceptual observers under certain narrowly defined conditions. But Jackson and Byrne's non-comparative accounts of looks are relative to individual subjects; i.e. *subjective looks*. How are 'looks to *S*' to be accounted for in the parsimonious account? In fact, *Parsimony* offers an elegant way of unifying these two varieties of looks since subject-relativity is already built into the parsimonious analysis in the form of the similarity function (4.3.1). Since the experiences that various subjects find relevantly similar may differ from one individual to the next, subject-relative looks are simply what constitutes a visually relevant similarity for a particular subject. That is, sentences like (1)—'The ball looks red to *S*'—exhibit an identical logical structure to (13), as formalised by (20), but employ a subject-

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein on the grammar of sensation terms (1953: §293).

specific, as opposed to global, similarity function. We can formalise this as follows:

$$(22) \quad \exists y (\text{has}(x, y) \wedge (\text{look}(y) \wedge \text{SIM}_S(\text{C}(\varphi, \text{look}, k), y)))$$

where the subscripted similarity function  $\text{SIM}_S$  captures those similarities that are visually relevant to subject  $S$ .

An objective look, on the other hand, involves a set of similarities that all sufficiently acute perceivers have in common. Thus, for something to objectively look red is for the subject's perceptual experience of an object to exhibit the same similarities to their experiences of red things as other subjects' experiences do to *their* experiences of red things. This does not entail that one subject's experience of an object or property need be subjectively similar to another's experience of the same object or property—something that would in any case be impossible to determine. Rather, the intersubjectivity applies to *what the subjects' similarity functions have in common*; i.e. the kinds of experiences that the subjects find to be visually similar. The mapping from subjective to objective looks thus reflects the similarities that all normally perceiving subjects share. To that extent, the global similarity function  $\text{SIM}$  may be thought of as a subset (or in some cases, a superset) of  $\text{SIM}_S$ . It is therefore a feature of *Parsimony* that it takes both subjective and objective looks to share the same logical structure.

Another important aspect of *Parsimony* is the role it accords to a subject's prior knowledge. In fact, two distinctive kinds of knowledge are involved: (i) knowledge of the characteristics of each given type of look, i.e. *getting-the-characteristics*, or  $\text{C}$  (4.3.1); and (ii) knowing which experiences exhibit relevant similarities to those characteristics, i.e.  $\text{SIM}_S$ . Such 'knowledge' need not be explicit, but may correspond to an innate capacity—for example, to perceive certain experiences as being inherently similar—or be acquired through experience. Children below the age of five, for example, find it difficult to identify the colours of unfamiliar objects despite being familiar with the relevant colour terms in other contexts—they have no difficulty in naming a random selection of colours, for example (Bornstein 1985). This suggests that such associations, or the ability to reflect upon the sensory experiences that support them, may be acquired.

*Parsimony* accords a role to this type of knowledge not only in acquiring the ability to name colours according to their appearance, but in recognising relevant similarities between different perceptual experiences. Once learned, this knowledge becomes implicit such that we can identify a red-looking object as 'red' without any conscious thought or inference even though this term covers a wide range of actual and mere appearances—for example, under different lighting conditions. Conversely, a perceiver's conception of *green* and *blue* may differ from other perceivers with similar levels of acuity not only because they differ in their phenomenal character (they may not) but because one finds certain pairs of colours to be more similar than others on the basis of one's prior experience and training. Some subjects, for example (including the present

author), may find certain shades of bluish-green to be more subjectively similar to paradigm examples of blue than do those who class them as 'green'. This need not be merely a matter of using the terms 'blue' and 'green' in slightly different ways. To such a perceiver, these colours may really more closely resemble blue than green. Thus, the implicit knowledge of looks plays a central role in the parsimonious analysis (cf. 6.4.2).

Martin (2010) primarily presents a semantic analysis of looks statements. However, one might equally be interested in the psychological analysis of looks. What makes something look the way it does, and in what sense can this be said to be similar or identical to the looks of other things? As noted above, Martin does not attempt to provide such an analysis, but his account is suggestive of the basic outline for one. The look of an object is determined by the similarities that a subject is able to draw between experiences—in particular, similarities between this and one's prior experience of paradigm examples of particular colours, shapes, and other visible properties. Subjects are able to move from looks to classes of experiences; for example, in being able to group together objects that look the same, or similar. Conversely, in moving from an experience to a look, one is able to recognise the property that is paradigmatic for that look—*being red*, *being square*, and so on, as encoded by the function C. Consequently, a subject's grasp of looks runs both from a given looks-expression to a class of experiences, and from a given experience to the corresponding looks-expression. Both of these abilities are therefore necessary for the understanding and communication of looks statements. Whether these constitute two forms of knowledge or two different uses of the same knowledge is an empirical question to be determined by the presence or absence of the corresponding abilities in actual subjects.

The final aspect of the deflationary account of looks that I wish to consider is what, if anything, it tells us about the various uses of 'looks'. Whilst Martin talks about 'comparative' and 'non-comparative' looks in the sense used by Chisholm, Jackson and Byrne (4.2.2), this terminology is potentially misleading. What *Parsimony* shows is arguably not that there are several different uses of 'looks', but that there are (at least) *two different uses of looks statements*.<sup>16</sup> A sentence like (1) can be used (a) comparatively, as in *the ball looks the way that red things do*; and (b) phenomenally, as in *the ball has a red\* look*. This does not reflect any difference in the meaning of 'looks', but rather in the intention that the speaker wishes to communicate. In the first case, the speaker is drawing an implicit comparison between her experience of the ball, which seems to be red (even though it may not be), and the characteristic appearance of red things. The second case draws attention to the phenomenology of the subject's experience, which has a *red\** phenomenal character. According to *Parsimony*, both cases employ the same sense of looks, which is implicitly comparative.

The same is true of the evidential and epistemic uses of 'looks'. When (1) is offered as evidence of the proposition that the ball is red, the intended sense of 'looks' is also implicitly comparative. The only difference from (i) is that the

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<sup>16</sup> This distinction was pointed out to me by Mark Eli Kalderon.

speaker intends her audience to take this as evidence for, or justification of, the latter proposition. Similarly, sentences like

(23) It looks like rain

may be taken to mean *it looks as if it is going to rain* or *those clouds look like rainclouds do*. However, even in the former case, it is precisely because the clouds look like rainclouds that one concludes it is going to rain, and not because the term ‘looks’ takes on a different meaning. Rather, the difference between these two readings is pragmatic rather than semantic. This in turn helps to explain why both Chisholm (1957: 47) and Jackson (1977: 33) find epistemic and comparative looks statements to be so closely connected since they are effectively two different uses of the same proposition.

*Parsimony* therefore suggests that we should abandon the idea of distinct comparative, non-comparative and epistemic uses of ‘looks’. Instead, it offers a single logical analysis of ‘looks’ in the form of (20) and its subject-relative variant (22), and two, or perhaps three, uses of looks statements. ‘Looks’, on this account, is implicitly comparative in both its epistemic and phenomenal uses. These two uses only come apart, if at all, in certain very specific cases, such as when talking about the phenomenal character of one’s experience. In most cases, however, including all of Jackson and Byrne’s examples (4.2), it is the comparative use that is being employed. As a general rule, we have little application for the phenomenal usage in everyday conversation, and even when we do use it—when doing philosophy, for example—it is unsuitable for indexing p-representation for the reasons given above.

Furthermore, on the assumption that the deflationary analysis is correct, which seems at least plausible, most uses of ‘looks’ are either explicitly or implicitly comparative and so subject to Travis’s argument from looks (2.3.2). This conclusion is unfavourable for the representationalist insofar as it suggests that experiential contents cannot be looks-indexed, since comparative looks are equivocal, thereby contravening the *Face-value* condition. The representationalist is therefore faced with the choice of rejecting either *Looks-indexing*, *Face-value* or *Parsimony*. However, the mere plausibility of the deflationary analysis of looks is itself a problem for representationalism, since in the absence of an effective counter-argument, the mere possibility that looks may be comparative undermines the argument for representational content. Indeed, given the problems with Jackson and Byrne’s alternative accounts of phenomenal looks and the resulting notion of phenomenal content, one could argue that the burden of proof lies very much upon the representationalist to give a substantive account of looks that does not suffer from the problem of phenomenal content, or else—assuming that *Face-value* forms part of the view that they wish to defend—to reject *Looks-indexing*. Either way, the prospects for looks-indexed p-representational content do not look good.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined three different notions of looks: comparative, epistemic and phenomenal, or ‘non-comparative’, looks. I argued that Jackson’s case for the primacy of the latter is unconvincing given its reliance on the unwarranted and implausible assumption that there must be some particular set of conditions according to which all looks statements are judged. Moreover, the phenomenal or non-comparative use of looks is only capable of indexing phenomenal content, which is veridical even in cases of perceptual illusion or misleading—i.e. ‘mere’ looks—and so incapable of misrepresenting. Such uses are arguably equally well explained by a comparative analysis of looks statements based upon the intersubjective similarities between experiences of different objects and properties. Combined with the principle of *Parsimony*, which states that the properties that make looks statements true or false are just the appearance-independent properties of objects, this deflationary account delivers a unified analysis of looks encompassing both objective and subjective appearances. Furthermore, the deflationary account renders the notions of comparative and epistemic looks redundant, replacing them with comparative and evidential uses of looks statements, respectively.

The availability of an alternative, more powerful deflationary analysis of ‘looks’ renders Travis’s provisional assumption of *Looks-indexing* untenable. If looks are essentially comparative, as *Parsimony* suggests, then they are equivocal and so incapable of indexing p-representational content, as per Travis’s argument from looks (2.3.2). The only sense of ‘looks’ that is not comparative, therefore, is Jackson’s phenomenal sense, but this is similarly unfit to index p-representation. Therefore the content of experience cannot be looks indexed and *Looks-indexing* is false. In the absence of any further argument against the plausibility of the deflationary analysis, this neutralises the representationalist claim that the existence of representational content may be derived from an analysis of appearances. Any appeal to the nature of appearances, or the semantics of ‘looks’, may be defused by a counter-appeal to *Parsimony*. Whilst this does not constitute a knock-down argument against representationalism, it does shift the grounds of the debate away from the analysis of looks-statements and towards the issue of recognisability, or availability of content to the subject. This is perhaps unsurprising since the semantics of ‘looks’ or appearances is a peripheral, though related, issue to the metaphysics of experience. If one cannot ground the representational content of experience in appearances, however, then Byrne, Siegel’s and Schellenberg’s arguments are beside the point. The following chapter therefore considers the nature of recognisability, along with some possible responses to it, in greater detail.

# 5. Recognisability and Phenomenal Character

*Objective representation & perceptual awareness*

## 5.1. Introduction

Having rejected various appeals to visual phenomenology, appearances and the semantics of ‘looks’ as responses to Travis in chapters 3 and 4, the following two chapters examine the relation between representationalism, Travis’s *Recognisability* condition and the phenomenal character of experience. I approach this by way of two distinct, but related questions. First, should representationalists endorse *Recognisability*, and if not, what are the consequences of rejecting it (5.2)? Second, how might some form of this condition be met by those representationalists who do endorse it (ch. 6)?

I begin by considering the motivation for *Recognisability* in relation to *Face-value* (5.2.1) and phenomenal character (5.2.3), as well as what form the condition should take (5.2.2). I then examine Tyler Burge’s (2010) account of ‘objective representation’ and its relation to Travis (2004), arguing that they each relate to quite different explanatory projects (5.2.4). The second part of the chapter identifies a potential challenge, or ‘phenomenological objection’ (5.3.1), to representationalism concerning the role of phenomenal character in explaining our awareness of mind-independent objects that features in Travis’s argument from unmediated awareness (5.3.2). I argue that the challenge is question-begging and so does not, without substantial additional argument, constitute a genuine problem for representationalism.

## 5.2. Recognisability

I introduced *Recognisability* in chapter 2 as a means of capturing Travis’s requirement that the contents of individual experiences be cognitively available or otherwise accessible to the subject (2.2.4). In this section, I examine the

arguments for and against this condition in greater detail (5.2.1), how it should be interpreted (5.2.2) and the relation between *Recognisability* and phenomenal character in order to establish whether the representationalist need be committed to it (5.2.3). This in turn clarifies two different questions that may be asked about representational content in perceptual experience (5.2.4), along with the consequences of accepting or rejecting this condition upon p-representation (5.2.5).

### 5.2.1. *The case for Recognisability*

As described in previous chapters, Travis's arguments from looks and recognisability rely heavily upon the notion that the contents of experience are not just attributable to perceptual experiences from a third-personal theoretical point of view, but accessible to or 'recognisable' by the subject. Without this condition, which forms an explicit premise in the argument from recognisability (2.3.3) and is also referenced in the argument from looks (2.3.2), Travis's arguments would fail to go through. It is therefore essential to his case against representationalism that the condition obtains. But precisely what does *Recognisability* entail, and why should the representationalist endorse it? Here is how Travis (forthcoming: §4) motivates this condition:

If we are going to be represented *to* in experience, then the relevant representing must be something we can appreciate for the representing that it is. If, in a perceptual experience, things are represented to us as being thus and so, then we must be able to appreciate the experience as representing as so what it thus does; to appreciate what it is that is so according to it. This need not mean that we can characterise such representational content accurately, or formulate it explicitly. But we should be able to recognise, where needed, of particular ways things may or may not be, whether that is what the experience represented to us as so—whether that is what one would take be so in taking the experience at face value—whether, for example, the experience is one according to which a certain stick is bent, or rather one according to which that stick is straight. The core idea is: you cannot represent things to people as so in a way they simply cannot recognise as doing that.

The above passage highlights the connection between *Recognisability* and other conditions that Travis places upon p-representation, in particular *Face-value* (2.2.2) and *Givenness* (2.2.3). Jointly, these two conditions entail that experiences have a determinate and univocal (i.e. single) 'face value' at which they may be taken or declined that is represented to the subject. Naturally, not all representations are recognisable in this way. Brain states, for example, may have representational content that need not be manifest at the level of conscious thought. Instead, these may form part of subconscious, sub-personal mechanisms, the nature of which is known only to neuroscientists if at all. Crucially, however, according to *Givenness*, p-representation is a form of

representation *to the subject* and so operates at a personal, rather than sub-personal, level.

*Givenness* alone, however, does not entail recognisability. According to Tyler Burge's (2010) view of perceptual representation, perception is 'a type of *objective sensory representation by the individual*' (ibid. 368; original italics) that is 'constitutively a representational competence' (ibid. 379) and 'where representation begins' (ibid. 366). Perception, according to Burge, has objective, subject-level contents. These are not, however, recognisable to the individual, but rather play a distinctive role in scientific theorising. They are not *representations-to*, but *representations-by* the individual; autorepresentation rather than allorepresentation in Travis's terminology (2.2.3).

What, then, appears to motivate *Recognisability* is the notion that experiences have a specific 'face value' at which they are capable of being taken or declined. It is constitutive of being able to take something at face value that what is taken or declined, i.e. its representational content, must be consciously available or accessible to the subject. When Travis (op. cit.) states that 'you cannot represent things to people as so in a way they simply cannot recognise as doing that', his thought appears to be that in order to facilitate the taking or declining of contents in perceptual judgement, it must be apparent to the subject what those contents are. If this were not the case, then it would be difficult to make sense of the idea that subjects are able to take experiences 'at face value', or to recognise the distinction between how things appear to them and how they believe them to be at all, since only the latter contents would be available to conscious reflection.<sup>1</sup> On such a view there would be no determinate way that things appear to the subject to be, and so nothing capable of being judged as so. Rather, perceptual judgements and beliefs would simply spring fully formed, as it were, into consciousness—something that is clearly not the case.<sup>2</sup> Thus, for Travis, the recognisability of content is a necessary condition for representing to a subject, though not necessarily for representations in general.

Having established at least one motivation for endorsing *Recognisability* (I give another in 5.2.3 below), we can capture this condition as follows:

*Recognisability*: perceptual subjects must be capable of recognising the representational content of any given p-representation solely in virtue of having that very experience.

This formulation, however, leaves at least two important questions unanswered: (i) what does such 'recognition', or availability to a subject, consist in?, and

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<sup>1</sup> A related objection to representationalism is given in 5.3.1.

<sup>2</sup> The situation here might seem no worse than for the anti-representationalist, who denies the existence of such experiential contents outright. However, since representationalism specifically appeals to representational contents as being constitutive of perceptual experience, the problem constitutes an objection to the coherence of the representationalist view.

(ii) in virtue of what are such experiences recognisable? I address each of these questions below.

### 5.2.2. *Availability to the subject*

The qualification at the end of the above formulation of *Recognisability* is intended to capture the need for the p-representational contents to be recognisable *as* contents of experience, and not, for example, as the contents of beliefs or actions. This is important because whilst it is widely accepted that perceptual beliefs, judgements and actions have intentional content, this cannot in itself be taken to prove the existence of p-representation. Provided that an alternative explanation of the relevant phenomenon—namely, perceptual experience—is available, then representation is just one of many several possible explanations, each of which is compatible with the existence of the contents of belief and action. Moreover, if the notion of p-representation is itself incoherent, as Travis argues, then there can be no such representations. It is therefore necessary for p-representational contents to be attributable directly to experience, and not simply to beliefs or judgements, which are traditionally thought of as being ‘downstream’ of experience. Consequently, cognitive access to the intentional content of perceptual belief or action is not sufficient to meet *Recognisability*. Similarly, a subject who is connected to a brain-scanner, the output of which is interpreted by a machine or team of scientists that informs the subject of the ‘contents’ of their experience would fail to meet the relevant condition. Rather, it must be apparent to the subject—perhaps on the basis of reflection or via perceptual phenomenology—what the content of their experience is. I will talk of such content as being *available to* or *accessible by* the subject.

One way in which p-representational contents may be available to a subject is through introspection, or reflective awareness, of their own mental states. That is, in reflecting upon their experience, the subject may be able to tell that it represents, for example, that there is a lime in the fruit basket. For this to count as evidence of the content of experience, rather than of belief, such content should exhibit a degree of independence from the subject’s beliefs. If they do not believe there is a lime in the fruit basket, for example, since they bought only lemons, then experience must still recognisably represent there to be a lime—perhaps due to some trick of the light—in spite of their inclination to believe otherwise. Similarly, the lines of the Müller-Lyer illusion continue to look different lengths even to subjects who know them to be otherwise—because they have measured them, for example—quite independently of the subject’s beliefs. Finally, there must be some specific way that experience represents the world as being in order for it to qualify as p-representation. Contents that are equivocal about what is represented, or that merely reflect what the subject is inclined to judge under those circumstances, do not constitute evidence of p-representation.

The above considerations suggest a stronger interpretation of *Recognisability* based upon the subject's ability to gain knowledge of the content of their experience as follows. Call this *Knowability*:

*Knowability*: perceptual subjects must be capable of coming to know the representational content of any given p-representation solely in virtue of having that very experience.

As with *Recognisability*, *Knowability* does not require that subjects routinely know or are capable of formulating the accuracy conditions for each individual experience. Rather, it suffices that they are in principle capable of knowing how any given experience represents the world as being. This renders the resulting contents cognitively available or accessible to the subject as part of their overall mental economy, and so capable of playing a role in motivating action or belief. Nevertheless, *Knowability* might be thought to be too strong a condition upon p-representation for two reasons. First, such knowledge may be tacit or implicit, rather than explicitly held by the subject. Second, this may require the subject to employ other capacities, such as conceptual competencies or draw upon other background knowledge, and so not be 'solely in virtue of having that very experience'.

In relation to the first point, Travis's account of *Recognisability* does not require subjects to *know* the content of their experiences in any explicit sense. Rather they should be 'able to appreciate the experience as representing [what it] does' and to 'recognize, where needed, of particular ways things may or may not be, whether that is what the experience represented to [them] as so' (Travis 2004: 62). This suggests a weaker interpretation of *Recognisability* according to which the subject need only possess a tacit or implicit grasp of what it would take for their experience to be veridical. That is, they would recognise upon further inspection, for example, whether the experience was veridical or not based upon their interactions and expectations of the world.<sup>3</sup> Such an understanding may be reflected in thought and action by guiding subjects' actions and judgements according to what is represented. We can therefore formulate a weaker condition than *Knowability* as follows:

*Recognisability'*: perceptual subjects must be capable of grasping what it would take for the content of any given p-representation to be accurate or veridical solely in virtue of having that very experience.

Note that even on this weaker formulation, it must still be possible for a suitably self-aware and conceptually sophisticated subject to consciously recognise that experience is representational as such. If this were not the case, then the relevant representations would be opaque to reflective awareness

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<sup>3</sup> This counterfactual claim is intended to apply both to subjects who are actually capable of such investigation and those who are not.

(though not, perhaps, to empirical or scientific investigation; cf. 5.2.4). Not all perceptual subjects who satisfy *Recognisability'*, however, need possess such reflective self-awareness.

In relation to the second of the above points, *Looks-indexing* characterised the recognisability of perceptual content in terms of how, according to the relevant experience, things perceptually seem—or *look* in the case of vision—to the subject. In this case, the relevant contents were recognisable solely in virtue of experience, since to have that experience was just to be aware of things looking some particular way. Having rejected *Looks-indexing*, however, we must now consider how else a subject might understand or grasp what is represented to them. Plausibly, this may involve the operation of various cognitive capacities, including conceptual capacities or other forms of background knowledge—a knowledge of appearances, for example (6.4.2). Whether such recognition is solely in virtue of experience will depend upon the nature of the particular capacities or knowledge involved, and whether this is taken to be built into experience or external to it.

In the case of background knowledge, we can rule out the use of inference or deductive reasoning, since p-representation is intended to capture how *experience* represents the world as being, and not what can be concluded or deduced on the basis of it. However, to avoid ruling out the non-inferential application of the relevant capacities, we can further weaken *Recognisability'* as follows:

*Recognisability''*: perceptual subjects must be capable of grasping what it would take for the content of any given p-representation to be accurate or veridical solely in virtue of having that very experience plus the non-inferential operation of perceptual capacities and/or tacit knowledge of appearances.

This formulation of *Recognisability* retains the spirit of Travis's requirement that the relevant recognition be perceptual, and not simply a matter of reasoning or deduction, whilst not unnecessarily limiting the forms that such recognition might take.

### 5.2.3. *Recognisability and phenomenal character*

In addition to motivating *Recognisability* via its connections with *Face-value* and *Givenness* (5.2.1)—both conditions that many representationalists would accept—there are good reasons to think that p-representation must also be recognisable in the following sense. To perceptually experience something entails a modification of the subject's conscious state such that there is something that it is like for them to have that experience.<sup>4</sup> This 'what it's like'-ness of experience is identified as its *phenomenal character* (1.2.2). Given that representationalists explain the nature of experience in terms of its

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<sup>4</sup> I discuss unconscious perceptual experiences below.

representational content, and that every such experience has some specific phenomenal character, it follows that such content must play a role in determining phenomenal character. Several variants of this view are possible. Chief amongst these are *weak* and *strong intentionalism*:<sup>5</sup>

*Weak intentionalism*: the phenomenal character of a perceptual experience supervenes upon the (p-)representational content of that experience.

*Strong intentionalism*: the phenomenal character of a perceptual experience is identical to the (p-)representational content of that experience.

In the case of strong intentionalism, every phenomenal character that an experience can have corresponds to some specific representational content since the two are, on this view, identical. Since phenomenal character captures what experience is like for the subject, and assuming that the subject is or can become consciously aware of this phenomenal character, it follows that such representational content will in some sense also be recognisable to the subject.

This claim needs to be stated with some care since on a representationalist view of perception, the object of the subject's conscious awareness is not the phenomenal character of experience *per se*, but worldly objects and their properties. Nevertheless, if we take phenomenal character to be a modification of the subject's conscious state, there is a sense in which they are, or can become, aware of what their experience 'is like', i.e. its phenomenal character. Such awareness of phenomenal character is derivative of the subject's experience of the objects of perception, and is what is subjectively indistinguishable from the case of a phenomenally matching hallucination or illusion. Since, according to strong intentionalism, every phenomenal character is identical to some representational content, it follows that this content is also recognisable to the subject on the basis of their experience in virtue of that experience's phenomenal character.

The position is less straightforward for weak intentionalism, which posits a supervenience rather than identity relationship with representational content. On this view, different contents may correspond to the same or subjectively indistinguishable phenomenal characters (though not *vice versa*). Consequently, representational content is underdetermined by phenomenal character. This means that contents need not be recognisable on the basis of phenomenal character alone, giving the weak intentionalist grounds to reject *Recognisability* on the basis of phenomenal character. (The above argument from *Face-value* and *Givenness*, however, still applies.) Nevertheless, according to many weak intentionalist accounts, there is some subset or core of representational content that determines phenomenal character. Where this is the case, it may in some

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<sup>5</sup> These positions are also sometimes referred to as *weak* and *strong representationalism*. For the avoidance of confusion, however, I will adhere to the present terminology.

(though not necessarily all) cases be possible to recognise that subset of content, though not the content of experience in general, on the basis of the phenomenal character to which it gives rise. That is to say, the subject will be capable of grasping what it would take for their experience to be veridical on the basis of its phenomenal character alone. On such views, a version of *Recognisability* will also hold.<sup>6</sup>

It is notable that neither form of intentionalism requires that the content of experience be exhausted by its phenomenal character. As such, there may be elements of p-representation that do not contribute to phenomenal character and so cannot be recognised in virtue of it. If so, however, this will place constraints upon the explanatory role that those elements of conscious perceptual experience can play. If certain aspects of a representational content make no contribution to what experience is like for the subject, for example, then it is difficult to see how they can form part of that experience's face value.<sup>7</sup> Whilst there is no reason that such content could not play some other explanatory role—in scientific theorising, perhaps (5.2.4)—it is unclear what it could possibly say about perceptual experience as such. Nevertheless, an interpretation of *Recognisability* that ruled out the existence of such content elements would be beg the question against those forms of intentionalism that include them. We can therefore place a further gloss upon *Recognisability*" as follows:

*Recognisability*": perceptual subjects must be capable of grasping what it would take for that content which gives rise to the phenomenal character of any given p-representation to be accurate or veridical solely in virtue of having that very experience plus the non-inferential operation of their perceptual capacities and/or tacit knowledge of appearances.

It is this version of *Recognisability* that I will assume in further discussion and that I take representationalists to be committed to (*modulo* underdetermination of content by phenomenal character in weak intentionalism, as described above).

In discussing perceptual experience, I have so far focused upon *conscious* experience. That is, those experiences that have a distinctive phenomenal character of which the subject is, or may become, consciously aware. It remains an open question whether the same kinds (i.e. type-identical) experiences can be had by subjects who are *not* consciously aware, or not actively attending to, whatever it is they are experiencing. Block (2007), for example, defends an account of perceptual experience which distinguishes between what he calls 'phenomenal' and 'access consciousness', the first of which may be present in

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<sup>6</sup> For a representational view that denies *Recognisability*, see 5.2.4.

<sup>7</sup> A possible exception to this might be externally individuated or demonstrative elements, though these arguably do make a contribution to perceptual phenomenology, at least in a general sense, and so form part of the resulting experience's phenomenal character.

non-conscious perceptual experience and the latter of which corresponds to conscious access to the contents of experience. These come apart in cases such as blindsight or deaf-hearing, which are claimed to exhibit the second but not the first kind of perceptual consciousness.

Nevertheless, the nature of conscious perceptual experience has—rightly or wrongly—assumed a certain priority in the discussion of perception due to the latter’s relation to thought and consciousness more generally. A subject whose perceptual experiences have a specific phenomenal character, for example, may be able to form demonstrative thoughts about the objects of their experience (5.3.1). This seems not to be true of subjects, such as blindsight or deaf-hearing patients, who lack the relevant phenomenal character in at least part of their perceptual field, or whose experience exhibits phenomenal but not access consciousness, similarly preventing phenomenal character from playing an epistemic role (cf. *ibid.*). The notion that phenomenal character plays a role in demonstrative thought does not of course rule out the existence of non-conscious perception. However, if experience is to be explained in representational terms, then it should be clear what role it plays in conscious awareness. Plausibly, this occurs through the phenomenal character of experience which, according to intentionalism, is a function of its representational content. Thus if intentionalism, i.e. the view that phenomenal character supervenes upon or is identical to representational content, cannot account for the nature and role of conscious perceptual experience, then it should be rejected.

#### 5.2.4. *Two questions about perception*

Having clarified the interpretation of *Recognisability*, along with some motivations for endorsing it, I will now consider the consequences of rejecting this condition upon p-representation. One theory that does this is Tyler Burge’s account of perceptual representation, or what he calls ‘objective’ or ‘*empirical representation*’ (Burge 2010: 3). I will argue that in rejecting *Recognisability*, Burge’s account fails to account for the nature of perceptual experience, and so does not constitute a form of representationalism as such. This in turn helps to clarify the claims made by Travis (2004), showing that these two views are not necessarily incompatible, but rather are responding to two different questions about the nature of perception and experience, respectively.

According to Burge (2010), ‘[p]erception is a type of *objective sensory representation by the individual*’ (*ibid.* 368; original emphasis) and ‘constitutively a representational competence’ (*ibid.* 379). The contents that perceptual states have, however, is not in virtue of their phenomenal or conscious character, since they may have none, but rather a function of certain distal facts about the evolutionary history and representational capacities of the organism. Combined with the proximal stimuli of the organism’s sensory surfaces, this yields representational contents that play a non-trivial role in the scientific explanation of the relevant individual’s psychology and behaviour. On this view, perceptual states have representational content irrespective of whether

those contents are consciously available to the subject via introspection. Rather, such content has a purely formal or descriptive role in explaining the functioning of the organism from a scientific perspective. Burge therefore rejects *Recognisability* as a necessary condition for perceptual representation, claiming in relation to vision, for example, that '[a]t the level of conscious *access*, individuals are oblivious to what they perceive' (ibid. 375).

In contrast to Burge (2010), whose account aims to explain the emergence of representation and objectivity in general, Travis (2004) claims that 'perception is not representational' (ibid. 57), that 'perceiving what we do has no representational content' (ibid. 92) and so is 'not an intentional phenomenon' (ibid. 93). It is tempting to read Burge (2010) as a refutation of Travis (2004) on the basis that the latter makes precisely the mistake that Burge warns against; namely, attributing a capacity for representing certain general conditions for perceptual representation—the availability of content, phenomenal character, conscious awareness, and so on—to the subject. According to Burge, such attributions 'constitute hyper-intellectualization of constitutive requirements on perception' (Burge 2010: 13) which can equally occur in the absence of such personal-level rational capacities. Rather, objective representations are attributable to the subject—in virtue of initiating action (ibid. 373), for example—but are not representations *to* the subject in the sense described above (5.2.1). It is unclear, however, that Burge's and Travis's accounts actually conflict. Rather, we can understand each as addressing quite separate and independent questions about the nature of perception.

The question to which Burge is responding concerns *whether perceptual states have representational contents*, and if so, what those contents are. The answer to this question will determine whether such content features in an account of what it is for a creature to perceive external objects. Such content need not be consciously or otherwise accessible to the subject in order to play an explanatory role in the relevant scientific theories. To say that *perceptual states* may be assigned representational content from some third-person theoretical point of view, however, is not to say that *perceptual experiences* are to be explained solely in terms of their content—the position I have been referring to as 'representationalism'. What a subject experiences when they are in a given perceptual state is intimately related to their perceptual phenomenology, which need not be explained in purely representational terms. Indeed, Burge himself endorses a non-representational account of perceptual sensations, denying that intentionalism constitutes an adequate account of phenomenal character (ibid. 14, fn. 2). Thus, the question of whether perceptual states possess or can be assigned representational content need not entail—or at least not straightforwardly so—a representationalist explanation of perceptual experience, where this is taken to involve conscious phenomenal character.

In contrast to Burge, Travis (2004) is concerned to give an account of *the constitutive nature of perceptual experience*; that is, of the presentation of an external, mind-independent world in consciousness. This brings considerations about phenomenal character to the fore, since this is—at least in a large number

of central cases—an aspect of the conscious experiences of some conscious or self-aware subject. This is not to say that consciousness or self-awareness is a necessary condition for perception—a point that Burge (sometimes erroneously) makes against what he calls ‘Individual Representationalism’ in contrast to his own ‘anti-individualist’ account of perception (Burge 2010: 12–22). Rather, it underscores the need to explain the role of phenomenal character in the subject’s consciousness or perceptual awareness of the world. If perceptual experience is to be explained in terms of representational content, then there must presumably be some relation between that content and the phenomenal character of experience—hence Travis’s *Recognisability* condition (5.2.3). Not all representationalists endorse *Recognisability*. But where they don’t, the burden is upon them to explain precisely *how* the contents of perceptual experience give rise to its phenomenal character, and how this in turn enables us to be consciously aware of the external world, objects, properties, and so on.

The above two questions about the existence of representational content and the nature of perceptual experience therefore come apart, and may—to some extent, at least—be considered independently of one another. On the one hand, Burge argues in favour of representational content on the strength of its role in scientific explanation, but without explaining how this relates to the phenomenology of conscious perception. Travis, on the other hand, argues that perceptual experience cannot be explained in terms of representational content, since the relevant content cannot explain what is recognisable to us (2.3.3) or how perceptual awareness is possible (2.3.4). So far, there is no reason to think that these two claims are incompatible. It would, for example, be perfectly possible to give a Burgean account of representational content whilst accepting that perceptual experience, in terms of its conscious phenomenal character, cannot be explained in this way—indeed, Burge himself takes this view. Intentionalist accounts of perception attempt to answer the second question concerning the nature of phenomenal character in terms of the first, i.e. the existence of representational content. Anti-representationalists, on the other hand, who endorse REL (1.2.4), deny that any answer to the question concerning phenomenal character that draws upon the representational content of experience can be given. Strictly speaking, however, they are neutral on the first question. Rather, their principal claim concerns *the role that representation can play* in an account of perceptual experience, rather than ruling out its existence altogether.

Distinguishing these two aspects of the debate—the existence of representational content and its role in accounting for conscious experience—enables us to more precisely pinpoint and evaluate the claims made by Travis (2004) and Burge (2010). Travis’s concern with perception is directed towards the experiential dimension of the debate. His arguments aim to show, based upon what is available to the subject through the phenomenal character of perception, that conscious perceptual experience cannot be explained in purely representational terms. This does not, however, rule out those views that do not appeal to representation to explain perceptual phenomenology, such as Burge’s

objective representation or Naïve Realist accounts of experience. Conversely, by abandoning Travis's *Recognisability* condition, Burge (2010) is able to avoid the arguments from looks and recognisability since, for him, representational content has an entirely different explanatory role relating to scientific explanation and not the phenomenal character of experience.<sup>8</sup> However, it does so at the cost of failing to make any substantive claims about the phenomenal character of experience, which remains unexplained. This is not to say that a Burge-style account of phenomenal character could not be developed. Such an account would, however, require substantive additions to Burge's theory which would then be subject to Travis's critique of representational content, as discussed in the following chapter (6.3).

Similarly, when Travis claims that '[p]erception is not the stuff of which things might be represented to us as so' (Travis 2004: 93), he must be interpreted as making a claim about conscious experience, since nothing in the arguments he gives in this paper rules out the possibility that we might assign, for scientific or other reasons, representational content to perceptual states.<sup>9</sup> Provided there is some way—teleosemantic, anti-individualism, asymmetric dependence, etc.—of disambiguating the contents of these states from all the other possible contents that might be attributed to that state, then such content cannot be objectionable on the basis of the arguments Travis provides.<sup>10</sup> Rather, his claim is that *such content cannot yield an adequate characterisation of perceptual experience*, where this is taken to include conscious phenomenology. Understood in this way, 'The Silence of the Senses' does not establish that there is no role for representational content in the philosophy of perception—indeed, it is silent on precisely this point. Instead, Travis (2004) denies that we should think of perceptual experience, i.e. the conscious phenomenal character of perception, in representational terms. No form of representation, according to Travis, is capable of doing the required explanatory work.

#### 5.2.5. *Consequences of Recognisability*

Having argued that Burge (2010) does not engage with the issues that concern Travis (2004) concerning the nature of conscious experience, there remains the question of whether any account that rejects *Recognisability* could do so. I

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<sup>8</sup> Whether it can in fact play this role is debatable since science can only inform us about causal relations between perceptual 'inputs' and experimental 'outputs'. To the extent that scientific explanation posits the existence of externally individuated representational contents, these are a purely descriptive tool or convenience for simplifying the relevant explanations, and do not indicate an ontological commitment to the existence of *representations* plural, as Burge (ibid. 379, fn. 15) himself admits. Furthermore, the role of the sciences in grounding the nature of such content raises issues concerning the priority of scientific over philosophical explanation, especially given that the alleged consensus over the existence of the relevant contents is much weaker than Burge claims, if indeed there is such a consensus. I will not, however, pursue these issues further here.

<sup>9</sup> Travis (forthcoming: §1) hints at this possibility when he says that '[t]he representing this essay is thus *not* about is, I suggest, enough to serve the purposes of serious psychology'.

<sup>10</sup> See 6.3 for further discussion.

argued above that if we understand conscious perceptual experience as being at least partly constituted by its phenomenal character, then according to a representationalist account of experience, some form of intentionalism must also obtain (5.2.3). This follows because if all there is to experience is its representational content, then the phenomenal character that partly constitutes that experience must also be representational. The alternative—a representational account of experience that did not account for phenomenal character—would not say anything about the conscious aspect of such experience or what perception is like for the subject. Furthermore, it is highly plausible that phenomenal character plays a positive epistemic role in perceptual awareness—for example in enabling the subject to entertain demonstrative thoughts about an object, or to know which object it is they are perceiving (5.3.1). Moreover, since phenomenal character includes at least those aspects of the subject's conscious state that are discernible via introspection, these aspects of experience are accessible to the subject in the sense of being available to consciousness.

According to strong intentionalism, an experience's phenomenal character is identical with its representational content. It follows that if the phenomenal character of experience is accessible to the subject, then so is its representational content since they are one and the same thing. This in turn entails a form of *Recognisability* since the content of experience may be grasped by the subject simply in virtue of that experience's phenomenal character (5.2.3). Where the subject's access to phenomenal character is incomplete—for reasons of 'anti-luminosity' (Williamson 2000: ch. 4), for example—or where the experience's content is not exhausted by its phenomenal character, then only the content that corresponds to the accessible phenomenal character will be recognisable. Nevertheless, *Recognisability* in the sense discussed above will hold. Strong intentionalism is therefore incompatible with the denial of *Recognisability*.

Rejecting *Recognisability* amounts to the claim that the representational content of experience need not be graspable on the basis of that experience—which for the intentionalist includes its phenomenal character—alone. This might be the case under weak intentionalism where content is underdetermined by phenomenal character due to different contents yielding the same, or subjectively indistinguishable, characters. In such cases, it may not be possible for the subject to grasp which of the relevant contents is represented in virtue of the resulting phenomenal character, and so *Recognisability* can fail. This might happen for a number of reasons. For example, two subjectively indistinguishable experiences might be thought to confer differing warrants for justification or belief according to the epistemic situation of the perceiver—a position known as *content disjunctivism*. Alternatively, the contents of experience may vary according to aspects of the perceiver's environment, evolutionary history or other externally individuated factors (6.3.1). In each instance, subjectively indistinguishable experiences may plausibly lead to different beliefs, judgements or epistemic warrant in a way that is indistinguishable to the experiencing subject.

The weak intentionalist may therefore wish to reject *Recognisability* on the basis that representational content is not indexed by phenomenal character. Whilst this might be true of weak intentionalism in general, however, the above examples need not count against the version of *Recognisability* according to which only those content elements that give rise to phenomenal character need be available to the subject (5.2.3). Indeed, it would be surprising if subjectively distinguishable differences in phenomenal character were not closely correlated with corresponding differences in representational content, at least at a course-grained level. Such qualitative differences may enable a limited form of *Recognisability*, i.e. *Recognisability'''*, to be preserved despite the global underdetermination of content by phenomenal character. This will be the case for any form of intentionalism in which phenomenal character unambiguously maps onto elements of representational content, at least in a wide variety of (though not necessarily all) cases. Such cases are not ruled out by weak intentionalism *per se*, but will depend upon the details of individual representationalist accounts.

If the weak intentionalist were to reject *Recognisability* outright, however, then it would be possible to avoid Travis's arguments from looks and recognisability. The cost of doing so would be to deny that the corresponding differences in content form part of what is given to the subject in experience. This raises the question of what explanatory role such ostensible contents can play in perceptual experience, since they cannot be manifest to the subject through the phenomenology of experience. This in turn puts pressure on whether, given their cognitive inaccessibility, such contents should be considered a part of experience at all. Perhaps such elements, which may include references to external particulars, might facilitate the perceptual 'tracking' of externally individuated factors or demonstrative reference of the kind described above. However, such a role must be confined to a level below that of phenomenal consciousness, since such differences will be indiscernible to the subject via perceptual phenomenology.

The weak intentionalist is therefore faced with a choice. They can either reject *Recognisability*, in which case it remains to be shown how it is possible for the relevant representational content to perform a substantive cognitive or epistemic role at the level of the subject. Moreover, if such content does not form part of the phenomenal character of experience, then it will be questionable to what extent it should be regarded as the content of experience at all, rather than of judgement, belief, or some other mental state. Alternatively, the intentionalist may endorse *Recognisability*, in which case an account of precisely how such content is recognisable is required. Again, the resulting contents must be demonstrably attributable to experience rather than any consequent beliefs, judgements or actions, since any evidence on the basis of the latter will be equally compatible with an anti-representationalist account of experience, and so not decisive in the present debate. For the weak intentionalist, this will involve explaining how it is possible to disambiguate the multiple possible contents of experience that correspond to any given

phenomenal character given that the latter is held to underdetermine the former. This topic is addressed in the following chapter.

### 5.3. Phenomenal Character and Awareness

#### 5.3.1. *The phenomenological objection*

One of the objections that is sometimes levelled against representationalism concerns the relationship between the phenomenal character of experience and the perceptual awareness of objects. Specifically, Schellenberg (2011b: 18) identifies the ‘phenomenological objection’ as the charge that representationalist views of perception ‘which explain phenomenology in virtue of relations to anything other than the mind-independent objects, properties, and events that perceiving subjects are aware of sever phenomenology from what we are aware of’ (ibid.). A version of this objection can be found in Travis’s argument from unmediated awareness (5.3.2), which claims that any mental state that can occur independently of the objects and properties of which it is a perception—in a hallucination or illusion, for example—will be incapable of explaining how that state can constitute an awareness of those objects and properties. This objection requires stating with care, since if the claim is supposed to be that we cannot gain knowledge of qualitative features of the world towards which we do not stand in a relation of direct acquaintance, then it risks begging the question against representationalism.

In describing the phenomenological objection, Schellenberg (ibid.) cites Campbell (2002), Martin (2002b) and Brewer (2007) as claiming that ‘representational views misconstrue the phenomenological basis of perceptual experience insofar as they detach the phenomenology of experience from relations to qualitative features of the world’ (Schellenberg 2011b: 3). Of these, the clearest exposition of a problem of this kind is to be found in Campbell (2002: 120–26), who claims that the explanatory role of experience can only be accounted for in relational terms as follows (ibid. 122–23):

On the Relational View, experience of objects is a more primitive state than thought about objects, which nonetheless reaches all the way to the objects themselves. In particular, experience of an object is what explains your ability to grasp a demonstrative term referring to that object.

For Campbell, the grasp of demonstrative terms is what enables us to gain knowledge of particular objects, and in particular *which* objects it is we are perceiving (cf. Evans 1982: 65). The principal objection, however, does not concern the acquisition of perceptual knowledge, which Campbell (op. cit. 125) admits may be explained in both representational and relational terms provided that the relevant representations are of particulars and not only general features. Rather, Campbell claims that only a relational understanding of experience ‘can explain how it is that we can have the conception of objects as mind-independent’ at all (ibid. 121).

Campbell's objection, then, is that a purely representational account of experience that does not constitutively involve the objects of experience cannot explain how we can conceive of objects as being independent of our perceiving them. If, as Campbell puts it, the contents of experience 'do not reach all the way to the objects themselves', then any resulting conception would only be of our own subjective experience, which can occur without any such objects, rather than of an objective world as such.

This problem does not arise for the relationalist, according to whom perceptual experience is a matter of standing in a relation of direct acquaintance with perceptual objects and their properties, since acquaintance is not an intentional relation and so cannot obtain in the absence of the relevant objects. Moreover, according to certain versions of relationalism—Naïve Realism, for example—the phenomenal character of experience is not merely individuated, but metaphysically constituted by the properties of whatever external objects are being perceived. On this view, the phenomenal character of experience is directly explicable in terms of its objects, rather than something that is also present in the non-veridical case, as in the case of representational content.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, our conception of objects as mind-independent may be explained in terms of the subjective experience of such objects in perception through the phenomenal character of experience.

Travis's argument from unmediated awareness contains a related objection: without experience being grounded in the presence of worldly objects that are brought into view by perception, experience cannot explain our awareness of external objects and the world. Underlying both of the above claims is an assumption that thought and representation must at some point 'bottom out' or be grounded in some kind of unmediated or primitive connection with the world. Plausibly, this connection occurs in perception through the phenomenal character of experience, which reflects how the world is revealed to us in consciousness. Call this *the grounding assumption*.

*Grounding assumption:* perceptual awareness of external mind-independent objects must be grounded in the phenomenal character of experience.

According to this assumption, an account of experience should explain both how phenomenal character enables us to grasp demonstrative references to objects, and how this makes an awareness of an external mind-independent world possible. That representationalism cannot do so is what I will refer to as *the phenomenological objection*.

A number of responses to this objection are available. First, the representationalist may simply reject the grounding assumption, as per Burge (2010). According to Burge, the objectivity of perceptual representation comes

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<sup>11</sup> As discussed in 3.2.1, the phenomenal character of non-veridical experience may be explained as being in some sense parasitic upon, or secondary to, that of veridical experience.

from its teleological or functional nature, and not from the availability of content to the conscious subject.<sup>12</sup> However, as we saw above (5.2.4), this fails to explain the connection between phenomenal character and demonstrative thought, since it is not account of perceptual experience as such. Nor does it explain how we are able to form a conception of a mind-independent world, since the relevant representations need not be conscious. Furthermore, the possibility of blindsight, in which a perceiver lacks the usual visual phenomenology and yet is able to respond at better-than-chance levels to perceptual stimuli strongly suggests that there is such a connection, since without conscious access to the relevant phenomenal character, the blindsighter appears unable to form demonstrative thoughts about objects to which he is otherwise able to respond. Rejecting the grounding assumption may not, therefore, be the representationalist's best option.

A second response appeals to the relation between the subject and object on the representationalist account. According to intentionalism, phenomenal character is either identical to or supervenes upon representational content, and not relations to the qualitative features of objects or property-instances (5.2.3). Moreover, most representationalists hold that a perceiving subject *does* stand in a relation to the objects and properties they perceive—namely, a causal relation. Moreover, this relation may be considered perceptual in virtue of its being constitutive of seeing, hearing, and so on. On such a view, the state or process of being perceptually aware of some external object or property may be factored into (at least) two distinct components: (i) a representational state, the truth or accuracy conditions of which, in the case of veridical perception, are met by the perceiver's physical environment, but not in the case of hallucinations and illusions, and (ii) the satisfaction of some external, typically causal, relation between the intentional objects of that representational state and the state itself. Thus, according to this kind of representationalism, perceptual experience consists of no more than being in an appropriately caused representational state that there is (so far) no reason to suppose cannot occur in the absence of the relevant external objects and properties. Indeed, this is typically how perceptual illusions and hallucinations are to be explained on a representationalist view (2.3.1).

If the phenomenological objection is that representationalism detaches phenomenal character from the objects of experience, however, then it is difficult to see how an appeal to causation is supposed to help here. According to intentionalism, the phenomenal character of experience is explained by its representational content, not the causal relation of experience to its objects.<sup>13</sup> If the awareness of objects were to be explained in terms of a causal or other relation, then it is no longer clear what explanatory work is being done by

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<sup>12</sup> 'The developmental, phylogenetic, psychological, and constitutive sources of objectivity in perception lie below the level of individual representation, control, awareness, or responsibility' (ibid. 547).

<sup>13</sup> Building the causal element into the content, as in Searle (1983), does not seem to help here.

representational content, and in particular the content that gives rise to the experience's phenomenal character. To the extent that the original objection was to explain how phenomenal character enables a grasp of demonstrative reference, this explanation does not seem to address the problem. Consider, for example, two distinct experiences, only one of which is veridical and which possess the same phenomenal character in virtue of their contents, but where only the veridical experience constitutes perceptual awareness. Since the only thing that differs between these experience is the presence of the causal relation, then (so the argument goes) it must be this and not their phenomenal character that explains the resulting awareness. Thus the representationalist fails to explain the role of phenomenal character in perceptual awareness since the causal relation is doing all of the explanatory work.

Travis makes an objection of this form when he claims that 'awareness of something else plus satisfaction of surrounding conditions cannot add up to that awareness of [an object] which we have in seeing one (to be there)' (Travis 2004: 89). From this, he derives the following principle (*ibid.*):

[I]f *X* is something there might be even without *Y*, then awareness of *X* (and whatever accompanies it *per se* in a particular case) cannot qualify as unmediated awareness of *Y*—the sort one might have in seeing *Y*.

This principle, however, is contentious for a number of reasons. First, it relies on two different kinds of awareness: the awareness of external objects and the awareness of representational content. According to the representationalist, we are aware of external objects by, or in virtue of, representing them to be some particular way. We are only aware of representational contents, however, in an indirect or derivative sense—for example by reflecting upon perceptual phenomenology. Thus, for the representationalist, we are not aware of representational content in the same way that we are aware of external objects, that is to say *perceptually aware*. Second, the objection is too quick. Like any 'common factor' account, intentionalism entails is that representational content is not sufficient for perceptual awareness. This does not mean that it is not necessary. If representational content plus some causal or other relation were held to be jointly sufficient for such awareness, then phenomenal character, or the representational content that underlies it, will form part of the explanation of perceptual awareness. This meets the objection that representationalism detaches phenomenal character from awareness. Thus the phenomenological objection can be met.

In order to constitute an objection against representationalism, the anti-representationalist would need to claim that phenomenal character *alone* should explain perceptual awareness and the subject's grasp of demonstratives. But such a strong principle does not seem to be motivated and would be potentially question-begging. It is not clear, therefore, that the phenomenological objection as stated above constitutes a genuine constraint upon representationalism. This is not to say that Travis's principle is without merit, but to uncover the nature of his argument we will need to make it more precise.

### 5.3.2. The argument from unmediated awareness

A formulation of the phenomenological objection that does not appeal to the causal relation or other contentious metaphysical principles may be found in Travis's argument from unmediated awareness (2.3.4), reproduced below for convenience.

- U1 P-representation is either (a) a separate source of perceptual information in seeing or (b) constitutes one's perceptual awareness.
- U2 If p-representation were a separate source of perceptual awareness to seeing, then it would be unnecessary for the awareness of objects *simpliciter*.
- U3 We have no phenomenological evidence for the existence of multiple sources of perceptual information in visual experience.
- U4 P-representation and seeing are not separate sources of perceptual information.
- U5 Subjectively indistinguishable veridical and non-veridical perceptual experiences share a common representational content. (*Common Content*)
- U6 In non-veridical experience, p-representation cannot yield unmediated awareness of intentional objects, since there may be no such objects.
- U7 The same representational content cannot explain the unmediated awareness of objects in some cases, but not in others.
- U8 P-representational content cannot yield unmediated awareness of an object in veridical perception. (*From U5, U6 and U7*)
- U9 Visual experience (seeing) is a source of information that yields unmediated awareness of objects.
- U10 Visual experience is not p-representation. (*From U4, U8 and U9*)

Premises U1 through U4 argue that, according to representationalism, visual representational states must be constitutive of perceptual awareness, and not merely co-present with it. This is followed in U5 by the representationalist principle of *Common Content* (2.2), which is used to argue that representational content cannot yield unmediated awareness of an object, even in veridical perception (U6 through U8). Finally, since we do think that visual perception yields unmediated awareness of objects (U9)—that is, of having one's cognitive responses shaped by the presence of perceptual objects (Travis 2004: 90)—then visual experience cannot be p-representational (U10).

There are a number of points at which the representationalist may resist this argument. First, as noted above, representationalism is not necessarily committed to the view that representational content alone must account for perceptual awareness. Rather, causal or other conditions, such as the ability to perceptually track or re-identify objects over extended periods of time (cf. Evans 1982: 175), may also need to be satisfied. Nevertheless, since none of these conditions itself constitutes an information source in the way that representational content is envisaged as doing, it does not seem that such considerations provide sufficient grounds for rejecting U4.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, if experience were both a source of information about external objects and wholly representational, there would be no room for any additional or supplementary sources of information such as might be required for perceptual awareness.

A more promising line of attack can perhaps be mounted against U7, the claim that the same representational content cannot explain the unmediated awareness of an object in some cases and not others. By arguing that what holds for non-veridical experience must also hold for perception, this move is analogous to the ‘generalising step’ in the traditional argument from illusion—a move that is often taken to be unsound (e.g. Snowdon 1990; Reid 1997). It is U7 that enables the inference from U6 to U8—the claim that p-representation cannot yield unmediated awareness—from which it is but a short step to the conclusion in U10 that seeing, and by extension other perceptual states, do not involve p-representation. As with the traditional argument from illusion, this argument may be rejected as unsound on the basis that just because representational states do not yield awareness in one case—for example, hallucination—does not mean that they cannot (in part, at least) constitute it in *any* cases, such as veridical perception. Indeed, it is difficult to see this premise as anything other than begging the question against the representational view.

Even given the rejection of U7, however, there remains an explanatory burden upon the representationalist to show how representational content can, in certain cases given the satisfaction of certain further conditions, constitute perceptual awareness. The challenge for the representationalist, then, is to provide an account that explains perceptual awareness at least partly on the basis of representational contents that are not in themselves sufficient for such awareness. Or, to put it another way, how the perceptual awareness of objects depends upon the representational content of perception despite veridical and non-veridical experiences sharing a single common factor—Martin’s ‘common kind’ assumption (2.3.1). Unlike Naïve Realism, representationalism does not deny the common kind assumption. Indeed, the existence of a common factor is, according to intentionalism, precisely what explains the phenomenal character of experience.

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<sup>14</sup> Travis’s use of the term ‘source’ here is somewhat misleading, since it is clearly perceptual objects and properties that constitute the ultimate source of perceptual information. According to the target views, however, representational content is part of the means by which such information is perceptually available to the subject, and so constitutive of the way that objects and properties are presented to the subject in experience.

#### 5.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered whether and how the representationalist ought to meet the *Recognisability* condition proposed by Travis. This highlighted the distinction between the question of whether *perceptual states*, as considered from a third-personal scientific point of view, have representational content, and whether the phenomenal character of *perceptual experience* may be explained in such terms. Consequently, views such as Burge (2010) that seek to establish the representational nature of perceptual states quite independently of any concern with conscious phenomenal character do not engage with the point at issue in Travis (2004), which relates to the explanatory role of representational content in experience and our conscious awareness of mind-independent objects. As such, Burge (2010) should not be interpreted as providing any kind of response to Travis. Rather, he offers a largely orthogonal account of how representation might figure in the philosophy of perception, though not necessarily in conscious perceptual experience. The debate, therefore, is not so much between representationalism on the one hand and relationalism on the other, but rather between intentionalist theories of phenomenal character and their rivals, such as Naïve Realism.

Furthermore, representationalists that accept intentionalism—the view that phenomenal character is identical to or supervenes upon representational content—face a number of problems in explaining how *Recognisability* can be met. I argued that this condition should be endorsed by any theorist who accepts strong intentionalism, and will also apply to some versions of weak intentionalism, at least for that content upon which phenomenal character is held to supervene. If it does not, then this will severely restrict the explanatory role of the relevant content. I also rejected the ‘phenomenological objection’ that representationalism detaches phenomenal character from perceptual awareness, as claimed in Travis’s argument from unmediated awareness (2.3.4). This is undoubtedly the weakest of Travis’s arguments, and arguably begs the question against representationalism. To the extent that this objection represents a genuine constraint upon representational accounts of experience, it does not appear to present any particular problem for the representationalist, though it does raise questions as to the explanatory role of phenomenal character in perceptual experience.

## 6. Disambiguation Strategies

*Externalism about self-knowledge &  
discriminatory capacities*

### 6.1. Introduction

In chapter 3, I argued that some straightforward, superficially plausible attempts to derive the representational content of experiences from the way that things appear or look fail to establish the existence of objective face-value content. Further considerations concerning the semantics of appearance expressions—in particular the availability of an alternative comparative or deflationary analysis of ‘looks’ (chapter 4)—led to the rejection of Travis’s provisional *Looks-indexing* condition on perceptual representation. This was replaced by the weaker *Recognisability* condition that the content of any conscious perceptual experience should be in some sense ‘recognisable’, or consciously available to the subject, solely in virtue of having that experience (5.2). I argued that *Recognisability* should be taken as a condition upon perceptual representation, or *p-representation*, by those representationalists who take experience to have face-value content that is given to the subject or is otherwise cognitively accessible via the phenomenal character of conscious perceptual experience. Furthermore, rejecting this condition would result in severe constraints upon the explanatory role of the resulting content and its relation to phenomenal character, i.e. *intentionalism*.

In this chapter, I consider various ways in which a representational account of experience and phenomenal character might meet *Recognisability*. To overcome Travis’s objections, the representationalist must propose some plausible means by which the multiple possible contents of experience are ‘disambiguated’ to yield a univocal face-value content (6.2.1). I argue that the most plausible way in which this may be achieved is through an account of perception in which both the individuation and recognisability of *p-representational* content share a single explanatory source (6.2.2). I then examine a range of candidates for such a mechanism including externalism

about self-knowledge (6.3.2), demonstrative content (6.4.1), and recognitional, conceptual or other discriminatory capacities (6.4.3). Of these, I conclude that the latter *capacities approach* offers the most promising response to Travis, but also raises a series of questions about the nature and role of such capacities in individuating representational content, which do not exclusively favour representationalism over relationalism.

## 6.2. Content and Experience

### 6.2.1. Transmission and convergence models

In the previous chapter, I distinguished between the following two questions about perception and representational content:

- (i) Do perceptual states have representational content, and if so, how is this content individuated? (*Individuation*)
- (ii) Is representational content recognisable to the subject in experience, and if so, how is this possible? (*Recognisability*)

Accounts of representational content that provide a positive explanation of *Individuation*, but reject *Recognisability*, e.g. Burge (2010), are *representational*, but not *representationalist* as I have been using this term. Those that give a positive explanation of both *Individuation* and *Recognisability* may be further subdivided according to whether the individuation and recognisability of perceptual content are explained by the same or different factors into what I will call *transmission* and *convergence models* of experience. On the transmission model, whatever fixes the content of perceptual experience also makes that content recognisable with the relevant contents ‘transmitting’ through to the subject’s grasp of that content. Examples of this approach include Byrne’s ‘non-comparative’ looks (3.2) (insofar as this may be taken to support *Looks-indexing*), externalism about self-knowledge (6.3.1), as well as certain forms of strong intentionalism; e.g. Glüer (2009). The convergence model, on the other hand, explains the individuation of content and its recognisability via different mechanisms that converge upon a single univocal face value, at least in the majority of ordinary cases.<sup>1</sup>

The problem for advocates of the transmission model is to explain how, in virtue of experience combined with the subject’s perceptual capacities and background knowledge, p-representational content is recognisable to the subject (5.2.3). Assuming that the relevant content has objective import—i.e. it is not *phenomenal content* that represents only the properties of subjective experience rather than of the objective world (3.2.3)—then what is recognised cannot be explained on the basis of what experience is like alone, since perceptual

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<sup>1</sup> An account that gave separate explanations of *Individuation* and *Recognisability* that did not converge upon a univocal face value would be a *divergence model*. I take it that this is not an attractive position for the representationalist (see below).

phenomenology is equivocal, at least at the level of what is subjectively distinguishable to the subject. Alternatively, if perceptual phenomenology is *not* taken to be equivocal, then an account of how this is possible given the existence of perceptual ‘ringers’, i.e. subjectively indistinguishable cases that are non-veridical, and so equally candidates for the face-value contents of experience. In either case, then, some additional factor that is present in experience must feature in the explanation of how content is both individuated and recognised. This additional factor aims to explain how both actual and recognisable contents remain in step on the basis that both arise from the same source. The question for the transmission model, then, is to specify what this additional factor is and how it is able to perform its disambiguating role.

Advocates of the convergence model, on the other hand, must explain both how p-representational content is individuated and how the resulting content is recognisable to the subject on the basis of something other than what individuates it. The problem here is to show how the content that is recognisable from experience—typically relating to phenomenal character—can correspond to, or track, the contents that those experiences actually have. If these contents are divergent, the resulting account of perception will be an error theory, since the representational content that the subject grasps will be different to the content that experience actually has, and so not a form of p-representation. Unless there is something about the way that content is recognised by the subject that explains why, in the normal case, it corresponds to the content of experience, this model will be unable to explain how such content is recognisable to the subject.<sup>2</sup> Whilst this possibility cannot be ruled out in advance—due to the evolutionary pressures of natural selection, for example—it seems implausible that the individuation and recognisability of content can be explained by two separate mechanisms that just happen to deliver precisely the same results in the majority of cases. In any case, this would be a substantial commitment that supporters of a convergence approach would need to defend. I therefore consider it unlikely that the convergence model is capable of delivering an account of p-representation that satisfies *Recognisability*.

### 6.2.2. Explanatory strategies

The primary objection that Travis (2004) sets up for those forms of representationalism that endorse *Face-value* is one of indeterminacy; i.e. there are too many possible contents of experience, each specifying a way that the world would need to be in order to satisfy the relevant appearance, and all with equal claim to being ‘the’ content of experience. As Tyler Burge puts this point in relation to vision, ‘[a] key aspect of this problem is that effects of proximal stimulation on the sensors of a perceptual system *underdetermine* both

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the problem here is not to *guarantee* that subjects cannot be mistaken about the contents of experience, since this is something that representationalists can allow. Rather, it is to explain how in a substantial number of ordinary cases that such recognisability is possible.

*representata* of perception and the nature of the perceptual state that represents such *representata*' (Burge 2010: 344). A suitable response must therefore specify both how determinate univocal content is to be assigned, and how it is recognisable to the subject. That is, it must *disambiguate* between the multiple possible contents of experience in such a way that explains how the resulting content is capable of playing some substantive cognitive or epistemic role in the perceiver's mental life. Consequently, to determine precisely what the representational content of experience is, some additional element or factor must be appealed to.

Focusing on the transmission model (6.2.1), then, possible candidates for explaining both the individuation and recognisability of contents via the same mechanism include:<sup>3</sup>

- (i) anti-individualism about content (Burge 1979; 2010), self-knowledge (Burge 1998; 1996) and phenomenal character (Tye 1995; 2002)
- (ii) distal causes, such as evolutionary function, that explain the function of perceptual mechanisms in terms of the role they play for that organism or genus (Millikan 1989; Burge 2010)
- (iii) asymmetric dependency upon the veridical case (Fodor 1987)
- (iv) demonstrative identification of the external objects and/or properties being perceived (McDowell 1994; Brewer 1999)
- (v) the subject's background knowledge of which appearances are correlated with which objects and property types
- (vi) conceptual or discriminatory capacities invoked by individual perceptual experiences (McDowell 1994; 2008)

Options (i) through (iii) fall under the heading of *externalism about representational content and self-knowledge* (6.3) whilst options (iv) through (vi) are related by their reliance upon *perceptual discriminatory capacities* (6.4). Option (iv) exhibits characteristics of both groups, but is included in the latter for convenience. In the following sections, I examine each of these candidate views in turn.

### 6.3. Externalist Strategies

Externalist theories of content—for example, Burge (2010)—maintain that representational content depends upon distal factors, such as the evolutionary history of the organism's genus or the representational capacities of its perceptual systems (6.3.1). I will call this kind of view *individuating externalism* (cf. Peacocke 2003). This may be contrasted with object-involving or Russellian

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<sup>3</sup> This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but is rather a representative sampling of disambiguation strategies employed in the recent literature.

views that entail that perceptual objects or their properties are proper parts or constituents of representational content. This is comparable to the views of Naïve Realists, who take phenomenal character to be at least partly constituted by external objects and their properties. I will call these kinds of view *constitutive externalism*. When using the terms ‘externalism’ and ‘externalist’ without qualification, I will mean individuated externalism, or anti-individualism in Burge’s (1979) sense.

When considering the availability of externally individuated content to the subject, however, it is not clear that such ‘external’ factors are accessible to introspection, thus presenting a challenge to any externalist theory of experience that wishes to uphold *Recognisability*. One solution to this would be to claim that the subject’s awareness of their own mental states is also externally individuated, thereby ensuring that the contents of experience ‘transmit’ through to the resulting beliefs and judgements (6.3.2). This strategy aims to reconcile the external individuation of perceptual content with the requirement that the subject be capable of grasping such contents simply in virtue of having—or rather being able to conceptualise—the relevant experience. This in turn amounts to a rejection of premise R7 in Travis’s argument from recognisability (2.3.3). Combined with intentionalism, however, this approach has the consequence that the p-representational content upon which phenomenal character supervenes or is identical to must also be externally individuated (6.3.3). Finally, I consider an alternative externalist account that is due to Fodor (1987) that I reject as an explanation of perceptual experience.

### 6.3.1. Teleosemantics and biosemantics

The first approach to disambiguating p-representational content that I will consider is the *teleosemantic approach*, or TA for short. Like other externalist views, this faces the difficulty of explaining how distal factors can influence a subject’s recognition of experiential content. According to one version of this view (Millikan 1989), the semantic content of a subject’s mental states depends upon the role that those states play in suitably defined ‘normal’ conditions for that organism. For example, a beaver’s splashing the water smartly with its tail represents (for that animal) that there is danger, not because beavers routinely splash their tails when there is danger (they also do this for all sorts of other reasons), but because ‘only when it corresponds to danger does the instinctive response to the splash on the part of the interpreter beavers, the consumers, serve a purpose’ (ibid. 288). According to Millikan’s bio- or ‘consumer’ semantics, it is this purpose, which is typically linked to the biological and evolutionary goals of the organism for survival, foraging, procreation, and so on, that fixes the representational content of the resulting mental state, and not the nature of the distal object or the organism itself. Whilst Millikan’s theory is not specifically targeted at perceptual states, it may be naturally extended to cover all forms of mental representation, including perception.

As discussed in chapter 5, Burge (2010) takes a similar view, emphasising the evolutionary role or function of the representational states in question. For example (ibid. 321):

[T]he specific range of attributes in the environment that an individual perceptually represents ... are constrained by causal interactions with the environment, explained in ethology and zoology. The key interactions are those that figured in molding [sic] the perceptual system shared by relevant individuals.

Thus, according to Burge, it is to ethology and zoology that we must look to settle the question of which properties are represented in perception. Furthermore, ‘the relevant functional individual responses need not be by living individuals’ (ibid.). Rather, the relevant facts are ones about the evolution of an organism or genus that are common to all its individual members, and not facts specific to the individual doing the representing. Both Millikan and Burge’s views therefore constitute forms of ‘anti-individualism’ (Burge 1979), or individuative externalism.

In each of the above cases, however, it is difficult to see how the distal factors that fix representational content could enable a subject to grasp that content, as *Recognisability* requires. The problem is particularly vivid in Burge’s formulation, since the relevant facts may concern aspects of the evolutionary history of an organism that are opaque to all but the most scientifically well-informed observers—and even they can easily be wrong. However, even in Millikan’s consumer semantics, there is no suggestion that an individual must grasp, or be able to grasp, what their own mental states represent. Indeed, the ‘consumer’ of a perceptual representation may be a sub-personal cognitive system, such as the system for bodily action, rather than the subject herself.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, such representational content need neither be conscious, nor consciously available to the subject. Similarly, it need not be obvious to nor recognisable by the subject what the normal function of a given representation is. Rather, this will be a matter for empirical investigation and debate, and so need not feature in the subject’s experience in the way that *Recognisability* requires. By assigning a disambiguating role to distal causal and functional factors, TA therefore makes it difficult to meet *Recognisability*, and so fails to explain how the representational contents of experience are manifest in the conscious experience of a perceiving subject.

As discussed in chapter 5, an advocate of TA might simply reject this explanatory commitment, as per Burge (2010). This would fail to engage with Travis since the resulting content no longer plays the same (or possibly any) explanatory role in relation to the phenomenal character of conscious experience. It is therefore not a representationalist view of experience as I define this term.

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<sup>4</sup> Here Burge differs from Millikan, insisting that the biological functions that fix representational content are ‘functions of the whole individual’ (Burge 2010: 320).

Alternatively, the representationalist might wish to deny that there is any obstacle to a subject grasping the content of their own mental states on the basis that they do not need to know the enabling conditions of a mental state in order to know its content. Even if correct, however, this stipulation cannot explain precisely *how* it is that a subject can grasp these contents, which is the main point at issue. To do this, one might respond to the objection by appealing to the kind of externalism about self-knowledge described below (6.3.2). On this view, what individuates the representational contents of perceptual states also individuates the subject's reflective grasp or awareness of those contents, thereby meeting the *Recognisability* constraint.

A third approach would be to argue that a subject's grasp of the contents of their experiences is at least partly conventional in that it is conditioned by their past experience of the object and property types represented. This is a variation of the background knowledge strategy (BKS) discussed below (6.4.2), which claims that subjects are able to recognise the contents of their experience by associating its phenomenal character, as determined by its content, with the objects or properties represented therein. Such associations may themselves be learned by experience or innate. Applying this strategy to TA, however, gives rise to a convergence model of experience (6.2.1), since experiential contents would be individuated and recognised by different means. This places constraints upon the kinds of knowledge that may be brought to bear in recognising such contents, along with the need to explain how BKS delivers contents that match those delivered by TA, which are externally individuated by the subject's evolutionary history and environment.

### 6.3.2. Externalism about self-knowledge

Tyler Burge (1998) presents a strategy for explaining how a subject whose mental states are externally individuated may nevertheless possess knowledge of the contents of those states. His strategy can be summarised by the following four claims:

- (1) *Anti-individualism*: first-order thoughts are at least partly individuated by external physical objects and/or the shared practices of a community of language users.
- (2) *Privileged access*: second-order thought has a reflexive, self-referential character that is directly accessible to consciousness.
- (3) *Enabling conditions*: it is not necessary to know the enabling conditions of a thought in order to know the contents of that thought.
- (4) *Redeployment*: knowledge of one's own thoughts 'inherits' its empirical component from the concepts that those thoughts employ.

The first of Burge's claims is the thesis that mental content may be externally individuated in various ways. He labels this *anti-individualism* in contrast to the idea that a subject's mental states constitutively depend only on the physical state of the relevant individual, as well as to differentiate it from semantic externalism in the philosophy of language. It is a form of individuating externalism in the terminology introduced above (6.3.1). Whilst it lies outside the scope of this chapter to discuss each of the above claims in full generality, the representationalist may wish to employ a similar strategy to account for the recognisability of p-representational content. Although this is not a move that Burge himself makes, it is one that is available to advocates of externally individuated content, such as McDowell (1994) and Tye (2007). The precise method of individuation will not affect the present strategy, which is also compatible with a teleo- or biosemantic approach (6.3.1).

Burge's second claim posits a form of 'second-order' knowledge or *privileged access* to one's first-order mental states. This may be contrasted with a perceptual model of self-knowledge according to which introspective thought replicates the content of another mental state, thereby giving rise to a second-order mental state with representational content distinct from the first-order thought. This model of introspection is analogous to perception in that it conceives of mental states as internal 'objects' that a thinker is able to inspect in a way comparable to the sensory perception of external physical objects. Burge, however, rejects the perceptual model, taking thoughts, beliefs, judgements, and so on, about other thoughts to have a 'reflexive, self-referential character' (Burge 1998: 659–60). On this view, the content of every second-order thought about one's own thinking contains a reference both to the subject and to the first-order thought's content. This enables the resulting belief state to 'inherit' the content of the first-order thought, rather than duplicating it, in such a way that the two cannot come apart.

On this view, the content of the thought 'I am thinking that there is some water' when I see water in front of me, for example, would have the following structure:

- (5) I am thinking that *there is some water*

where the italicised proposition is not distinct from the first-order thought thinking, but rather an instance of that thought itself.<sup>5</sup> Thus the content of the first-order thought ('there is some water') is 'inherited' by the second-order claim—or to borrow a metaphor from computer science, its content is passed by reference rather than by value. This enables Burge to claim, contrary to McKinsey (1991) *et al.*, that we have a priori knowledge that we are thinking about water without needing to know that there is H<sub>2</sub>O in our environment as opposed to, for example, XYZ, as in Putnam's (1975) 'Twin Earth' scenario.

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<sup>5</sup> This approach is similar to, though should be differentiated from, so-called higher-order thought, or HOT, theories of consciousness (e.g. Rosenthal 1986), which employ a similar self-referential structure to account for consciousness rather than self-knowledge.

Our water-thoughts about H<sub>2</sub>O are subjectively indistinguishable from corresponding twin-water thoughts about XYZ (also called ‘water’ on Twin Earth). However, the very fact that individuates our thoughts as being about *water*—i.e. the presence of H<sub>2</sub>O in our physical environment—also individuates our first-personal knowledge that it is *water* about which we are thinking. Thus the first-personal awareness of the contents of thought can be said to ‘track’ the contents of those very thoughts without requiring any knowledge of the presuppositions or ‘enabling conditions’ (Burge 1988: 654) for thinking about water, such as ‘water is H<sub>2</sub>O’ or ‘there is an external world’—Burge’s third claim.

According to Burge’s fourth and final maxim, the empirical component of our second-order beliefs, etc., derives from the concepts that they employ rather than any evidential connection between first- and second-order thoughts. Such empirical content is therefore common to the subject’s first-order thought and their second-order awareness of it, since both employ the same concepts. This is what Peacocke (1996: 131) refers to as the *Redeployment Claim* and follows from second-order thoughts inheriting their contents from first-order thoughts. Thus we can know that we are thinking about water, where this term picks out some externally individuated natural kind, in virtue of possessing the concept *water* without having to know precisely *which* natural kind, i.e. H<sub>2</sub>O or XYZ, our concept picks out.

Burge’s ESK strategy may be adapted by representationalists to explain how content that is externally individuated is nevertheless available or recognisable to the subject. In place of first-order beliefs we have perceptual experiences with externally individuated content. In place of the second-order knowledge of thoughts, we have the grasp, awareness or knowledge of perceptual content. The resulting account would therefore claim that content recognised on the basis of perceptual experience is ‘inherited’ directly from the experiential state. Unlike on Burge’s account, however, this cannot be due to the relevant second-order states having a reflexive, self-referential character since the corresponding first-order states are experiences, not beliefs. Consequently, self-knowledge of perceptual content cannot be self-verifying in the same way as self-knowledge of thought since to *think* an experiential content is not thereby to perceptually experience it. Nevertheless, the empirical content of such states could still derive from the concepts that they employ. This approach is conducive to theorists like McDowell (1994) and Brewer (1999; 2005) who argue that the representational content of perceptual states must be conceptual in order to yield knowledge of the world.<sup>6</sup> However, even non-conceptual content theorists might apply a similar strategy provided that their account posits some kind of constitutive representational elements that are common to both p-representational contents and our reflective grasp of them, and from which the relevant empirical components may be derived.

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<sup>6</sup> Brewer has since abandoned conceptualism in favour of a relational view of perceptual experience. McDowell (2008) still endorses conceptualism but no longer requires that the contents of perceptual experience be propositional.

Adapting Burge's maxims to the case of perceptual experience, then, yields the following claims:

- (1') *Anti-individualism*: perceptual experiences are at least partly individuated by external physical objects and/or the evolutionary history and representational capacities of the genus.
- (2') *Privileged access*: perceptual belief has an indexical nature that is directly accessible to consciousness.
- (3') *Enabling conditions*: it is not necessary to know the enabling conditions of a perceptual experience in order to grasp the content of that experience.
- (4') *Redeployment*: one's grasp of the content of one's own perceptual experiences 'inherits' its empirical component from the concepts or non-conceptual elements that those experiences employ.

Here, the relevant enabling conditions in (3') would be *knowledge of the relevant content types for perceptual experience*, which under ESK will not be required in order for the subject to grasp that they are in that state.

A first approximation of such a view might be modelled on the notion of demonstrative reference. One way of thinking about ESK about experience would be that the relevant second-order beliefs have demonstrative contents. On this view, the content of a second-order thought about seeing a red tomato would be of the form:

- (6) I am seeing that: *there is a red tomato*

where the italicised proposition is the content of a visual experience that is demonstratively referenced by the second-order thought. This quotational model of perceptual belief would, however, make the object of such beliefs a proposition, which is—at least on some accounts of what it is to be a proposition—an abstract object. This raises problems with indirect senses, and does not seem a plausible account of experiential self-knowledge.

A more sophisticated view would be to take the content of the resulting belief to incorporate demonstrative terms. For example:

- (7) *That (there) is thus.*<sup>7</sup>

Here, the sense of these demonstrative elements would be constrained by the content of experience such that their reference is fixed by whatever objects and properties the experience itself picks out—in the above case a red tomato. This enables the representationalist to circumvent Travis's argument from

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Brewer 1999: 185; 6.4.1.

recognisability by giving an externalist account of self-knowledge according to which p-representational contents and the first-personal awareness of them are individuated by the same external factors; i.e. a transmission model of experience. Thus it would be possible for a subject to know that they are, for example, representing a tomato (round object, red, etc.) when they see one (or a wax tomato, tomato-shaped ketchup bottle, etc.) on the basis that the content of their second-order awareness ‘inherits’ the externally individuated content of the first-order experience.

Note that this need not mean that subjects simply represent whatever objects happen to be in front of them. Rather, depending upon the method of external individuation employed, p-representational content may be determined by the creature’s evolutionary history or representational capabilities. On this view there is no need for the subject to be able to consciously disambiguate between the multiple possible contents of experience. Rather, according to the above version of ESK, their perceptual system does it for them. This then carries through, or transmits, to any subsequent awareness, knowledge or belief about the perceptual state itself, yielding precisely the same content. Thus, a second-order belief about the perceptual experience in (7) would have the content:

(8) I am seeing that: *that* (there) is *thus*.

Just as one’s water-thoughts track the presence of H<sub>2</sub>O as opposed to XYZ, one’s tomato- (round-, red-, etc.) perceptions would track one’s capacity to represent the presence of tomatoes (spheroids, red, etc.) in one’s perceptual environment. Thus, Travis’s *Face-value* and *Recognisability* conditions may be met by an ESK-based account of p-representation.

The application of ESK to the recognition of perceptual content has a number of important consequences. First, it entails that a subject’s reflective awareness or grasp of the face-value content of experience involves a second-order thought with demonstrative or indexical content. This means that first-order perceptual awareness and second-order reflective awareness of p-representational content are, according to ESK, separate and distinct mental states.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, ESK requires the resulting contents to be either conceptually structured or concept-like. Although *Recognisability* does not require that subjects are able to state the relevant content or accuracy conditions for their experience (5.2.1), the possession of such concepts would presumably be required in order for ESK to be capable of delivering the relevant empirical content in accordance with *Redeployment* (4′). Such concept possession would in turn require either (i) the subject to have had prior experience of the types and entities that their experiences represent—shapes and colours, for example—in order to acquire the relevant concept, or else (ii) that the grasp of such concepts is innate. The precise conceptual apparatus required would depend upon the relevant form of external individuation, but will involve some form of *recognitional concepts*, i.e. concepts that are essentially tied to the recognition of

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<sup>8</sup> Note that the first-order state may, though need not, be conscious.

perceptual stimuli, with similar considerations applying in the case of non-conceptual content.

ESK, then, accounts for the way in which subjects are able to grasp the contents of their perceptual experiences—for example, *that is*  $\varphi$ , where  $\varphi$  corresponds to some perceptible property—on the basis of their recognitional concepts, but without requiring them to be able to articulate the resulting contents or differentiate them from cases that may be subjectively indistinguishable; e.g. *that is*  $\psi$ . This is directly analogous to the external individuation of thoughts, where *there is some water* (i.e. H<sub>2</sub>O) and *there is some twater* (i.e. XYZ) may be indistinguishable from the thinker's own perspective. Despite not being in a position to know *which* of these thoughts he is thinking, the subject can nevertheless know precisely *what* he is thinking due to the second-order thought 'inheriting', or being constrained by, the first-order content. In the case of perception, then, a subject would not need to know or recognise whether their experience represents there to be a tomato, a bulbous red spheroid or a wax imitation lemon in order to grasp what it would take for that experience to be veridical. Rather, according to ESK, they are capable of recognising that things would need to be like *that* in accordance with whatever demonstrative concepts or concept-like elements are employed by their first-order experience.

Whilst constituting a direct response to Travis, the form of recognisability delivered by ESK therefore constitutes something of a limited victory for representationalism. The sense in which subjects are able to grasp or know the contents of their experience is tempered by their inability to discern which of a range of properties is represented therein. Furthermore, if the resulting thoughts are of the kind described by (7) and (8), it remains to be explained how such demonstrative content plays a role in justifying or fixing the content of ordinary beliefs such as 'there is a tomato' or 'the tomato is red'. At the very least, the relationship between the content of experience and the content of belief is not as straightforward as it might first appear. Furthermore, since all perceptual beliefs will take a similar form to (7), this content alone does not explain what makes certain beliefs subjectively distinguishable and others not. If, on the other hand, the relevant second-order thoughts or awareness are not of this kind, then it is incumbent upon the representationalist to give an account of them. Thus, whilst ESK offers a way of meeting *Recognisability*, this strategy is not without its costs.

### 6.3.3. Phenomenal externalism

A further consequence of ESK is that if, as suggested above (5.2.4), we understand representationalism as a thesis about the phenomenal character of experience, this raises the possibility of the external individuation of phenomenal character. The combination of intentionalism and ESK predicts that not only p-representation, but also phenomenal character will be externally individuated, since the latter is identical to, or supervenes upon, the former (5.2.3). According to this position, which I will call *phenomenal externalism*,

what experience ‘is like’ for the subject will depend not only upon that individual’s internal state, but the states of objects in the world. Thus the experiences of two exact physical duplicates could have differing phenomenal characters simply in virtue of the properties of the objects that they perceive despite having identical patterns of activity throughout their brains and nervous systems. Many philosophers find this consequence of phenomenal externalism to be problematic and counterintuitive, though it is contentious whether any of the arguments against it are decisive (see Lycan 2008, esp. §§4.4–4.5, for a representative sample). Phenomenal character, it is tempting to think—at least on the traditional conception of this term as picking out what is distinguishable by the subject—must surely be *internally* individuated.<sup>9</sup>

There are two basic ways of responding to this issue. The first is to deny that it constitutes a real problem for the representationalist. On this view, in accepting ESK we must embrace an externalist notion of the mind and mental states upon which the external individuation of phenomenal character is no more problematic than, for example, the external individuation of thought and knowledge. This is Michael Tye’s (1995; 2002) view, who argues that phenomenal character is externally individuated in precisely this manner and that any philosophical intuitions to the contrary are based on a mistaken ‘Cartesian conception’ of the mind. Alternatively, one could deny that those aspects of representational content upon which phenomenal character supervene are in fact externally individuated. This gives rise to the existence of ‘broad’ and ‘narrow’ contents according to which phenomenal character only supervenes upon the internal aspects of representational content (cf. Schellenberg 2011a, 2011b; Tye 2007). This again raises questions concerning how *Recognisability* can be met given the difference in individuation conditions between broad and narrow contents, which effectively rule out the use of the ESK strategy.

It is also worth noting the parallel between phenomenal externalism and Naïve Realism, according to which external objects and their properties are considered to be partially constitutive of phenomenal character. These positions differ in that the former is a thesis about what *individuates* rather than what *constitutes* phenomenal character (in the metaphysical sense), as in the case of Naïve Realism. Nevertheless, there is a degree of convergence and overlap between the two theories. This in turn raises the question of whether we should account for phenomenal character in purely internal terms. If not, this reduces the grounds upon which the representationalist can object to Naïve Realism on the basis that external objects determine phenomenal character, since their own theory predicts the same, albeit with important metaphysical qualifications. Indeed, if the relevant contents are demonstratively individuated, as they are for Burge and Tye, then there is a sense in which the resulting representationalism *is* just a form of relationalism (i.e. *weak relationalism*) in that the subject’s relation to the external objects of perception plays a fundamental role in explaining the

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<sup>9</sup> This is a particular problem for the kind of demonstrative content posited by McDowell and Brewer, which may vary according to the objects and properties the subject is presented with (6.4.1).

nature and role of perceptual experiential. This yields a kind of compatibilism that combines elements of both relationalism and representationalism within a single hybrid view. Of course, such views will differ in how they account for perceptual illusions and hallucinations. But as discussed in 2.3.1 and 3.2.1, this need not constitute a knock-down objection to relationalism.

#### 6.3.4. *Asymmetric dependency*

The final externalist approach that I wish to consider uses counterfactual dependences to determine which of a range of possible, potentially disjunctive, representational contents is present in any given case. Jerry Fodor's (1987: 101–10) solution to this 'disjunction problem', as he calls it, involves the counterfactual dependence of, for example, a frog's visually representing flies—a potential food source—upon the presence of flies in its environment, as opposed to, say, black dots. According to Fodor, the frog can be said to be representing *flies* as opposed to the disjunction *flies or black dots* on the basis that it would not represent black dots as a token of this type if there were no flies in its environment. The converse claim—that it would not not represent flies as a token of this type if there were no black dots in its environment—is, however, false since flies are the frog's food source and so the primary target of its representational abilities. Consequently, the frog's representation is *asymmetrically dependent* upon the existence of flies, but not upon the existence of black dots. Thus the frog may be said to represent the former, and not the disjunction of flies and black dots.

Whilst this may present a plausible method of individuating p-representational content from a third-person point of view—something upon which many theorists would disagree (e.g. Burge 2010: 322; 307–8, fn. 27)—the truth of the relevant counterfactuals are not obviously available to subjects in experience. Indeed, given the contentious nature of modal facts in philosophy, it is debatable whether they are even available to philosophers. It therefore seems implausible to hold that in order to know what one's perceptual experience represents, one must have access to facts about which counterfactual conditionals would hold in the absence of the thing that is ostensibly represented; e.g. *if there were no lemons then I would not represent a wax lemon as a token of the same type as a real lemon*. To suppose this—which Fodor himself does not, since he does not endorse *Recognisability*—would hugely over-intellectualise the notion of p-representation, the contents of which would be inaccessible to all but the most philosophically sophisticated perceivers. Thus, even if it constitutes a viable account of the representational content of perceptual states, asymmetric dependency cannot form the basis for the content of perceptual experiences whose content is recognisable to the subject.

### 6.4. The Capacities Approach

The remainder of the candidate representationalist strategies for meeting *Recognisability* I wish to consider highlight the role of perceptual capacities.

These range from recognitional and conceptual capacities (6.4.1) to the role of background knowledge (6.4.2), other discriminatory capacities (6.4.3) and so-called ‘intuitional’ or non-propositional content (6.4.4). Each of these draws upon some form of perceptual discriminatory capacity which forms the basis for representational content that is recognisable to the subject. Whilst not exclusively internalist in nature, I argue that such approaches constitute the representationalist’s best opportunity to respond to Travis whilst avoiding phenomenal externalism. Such approaches, however, do not necessarily favour representationalism over relationalism, and so do not in themselves constitute an argument for representationalism *per se* (6.4.5).

#### 6.4.1. Demonstrative content

The notion of demonstrative content is introduced by McDowell (1994) and developed by Brewer (1999) as a way of explaining how propositionally structured perceptual contents can provide reasons for belief and action. According to the latter account, such contents have the structure ‘*that* (there) is *thus*’, where the first demonstrative refers to some externally individuated object and the last to some determinate property-type that is predicated of that object (cf. 6.3.2). Call this the *demonstrative content strategy*, or DCS for short. According to McDowell (1994: 57), demonstrative concepts include potentially short-lived capacities to pick out or ‘track’ the relevant object or property over time, as well as more stable conceptual capacities as these are traditionally envisaged. Demonstrative concepts may also be arbitrarily fine-grained so that each colour shade or object-type corresponds to a different ‘concept’. Both McDowell (*ibid.* Lecture I) and Brewer (1999: ch. 5) argue for a fully conceptual account of representational content for reasons connected with the justification of knowledge claims. This does not mean, however, that subject need possess fully-fledged concepts for every object- or property-type that they represent, but merely what I will refer to as the *discriminatory capacity* to identify them throughout a given perceptual episode, with demonstrative ‘concepts’ being one example of such capacities.

Since discriminatory capacities are general, i.e. they can apply to different objects or property-instances, there is nothing to stop them featuring not only in the representational contents of experience, but also in the subject’s first-personal beliefs or knowledge of that content. When seeing a red cube, for example, the demonstrative ‘*that*’ might refer to the cube itself and the ‘*thus*’ its colour—in this case a particular shade of red. Consequently, even a subject who lacked the concept *cube* would arguably be able to recognise that her experience was of *that object*, where the demonstrative picks out the relevant cubical object. Such an experience would yield a different content, and so different accuracy conditions, to the experience of an otherwise indistinguishable but numerically distinct cube presented on a different occasion. Furthermore, this difference is in some sense ‘recognisable’ to the subject in that on each occasion it is manifest to them that they are representing *that particular object*, and not merely some object that falls under a general kind; e.g. a cube. Thus a subject

who enjoys a visual experience with the content ‘*that* (there) is *thus*’ may, by reflecting upon their experience, grasp that they are representing *that* spatially bounded object *thusly* without requiring any means of individuating the relevant object or property other than by demonstrative reference. In this way, the ‘particular’ (i.e. object-dependent) content of a visual experience, and not just its ‘general’ content, may be said to be recognisable to the subject solely in virtue of the experience itself, as *Recognisability* requires, by means of the experience’s phenomenal character, which is demonstrative in nature.

This form of DCS, then, would appear to be a candidate for a transmission model of experience that is capable of meeting *Recognisability* and so refuting Travis. Moreover, it is a view upon which different contents may be present in subjectively indistinguishable (e.g. veridical and non-veridical) experiences, since the identity of the object will affect the experience’s accuracy conditions, though not its subjective character. This avoids Travis’s argument from unmediated awareness (2.3.4) and similarly circumvents the argument from recognisability (2.3.3), since the resulting contents are conveyed to the subject in experience.

The difficulty with this view, however, lies not in the structure of the representational contents that it posits, but in the individuation of the relevant objects and properties. In order to represent that ‘*that* (there) is *thus*’, it must be possible for the perceptual system to single out both a particular object (‘*that* there’) and a property-type (‘*thus*’) which is predicated of that object. A Travis-style indeterminacy objection to the view would therefore be that it is not recognisable from experience alone *which* object and property-type are thereby individuated since there are numerous different and incompatible ways of partitioning the world into objects and properties.<sup>10</sup> The response that it is *that* object or property—namely, the one demonstrated in experience—is unhelpful as it fails to settle the question of how the relevant terms are individuated. In the case described above, for example, it is the cube and its colour that are so identified, rather than, say, the shape of its visible surfaces. The representational contents of a cube-colour experience and a cube face-shape experience are presumably different despite both falling under the same general description of ‘*that* (there) is *thus*’. Indeed, on a purely demonstrative view, *every* perception will fall under this general schema, or some complex conjunction of terms of this form. There is therefore still a case to be answered by the DCS theorist in order to avoid falling prey to the indeterminacy objection, since the relevant contents are as yet indeterminate between multiple sets of accuracy conditions, depending upon the types of object and property that are demonstrated.

In practice, a suitable response to this problem must lie in the way that the demonstrated objects and properties are perceptually individuated. To exercise a visual discriminatory capacity for, say, a cube, the subject’s perceptual apparatus must pick out and track the spatial extent and boundaries of that object over time. Similarly, if it is the object’s colour that is being tracked as opposed to its shape, then there must be some corresponding capacity that is perceptually attuned to the particular colour of the object over time. Where

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<sup>10</sup> For an externalist solution to this objection, see 6.3.2.

multiple properties are being represented then many such capacities will be active.

Moreover, there must be some definite answer to *which* discriminatory capacities are active during any given perceptual episode. The answer to this question will in turn fix the contents of p-representation, thereby resolving the indeterminacy objection. To do this, the DCS theorist must appeal to further facts about the individuation or activation of the relevant discriminatory or conceptual capacities. Since the same (or indistinguishably similar) appearances can be shared by multiple object types, the activation of a particular capacity must be explained in terms of the perceptual abilities or conceptual repertoire of the subject. This makes DCS a form of the discriminatory capacities approach described below since the employment of such capacities on particular occasions is what individuates p-representational content (6.4.3). Furthermore, the subject must be capable of grasping *which* specific capacities are being employed in order for the resulting content to be recognisable. The precise methods by which this may be done are discussed in the following sections.

A variation upon the above response to Travis's indeterminacy objection would be to link phenomenal character to some other feature of experience, such as the exercise of concepts or recognitional capacities, as per Schellenberg (2011b). On this view, although the particular contents of experiences are externally individuated, their phenomenal character is constituted by the employment of concepts or conceptual capacities, rather than supervening directly on its content. On this view, seeing a lemon under typical circumstances would activate the concept *is a lemon*, thereby making it apparent to the subject that they are representing a lemon, as opposed to, say, a lemon-shaped bar of soap. This would be true even if the object were a lemon-shaped bar of soap that looked suitably like an actual lemon, since in both cases the same concept or recognitional capacity will be activated. It is unclear, however, that this is more than a notational variant upon the standard intentionalist view in which phenomenal character supervenes upon or is identical to the relevant contents. Moreover, it is unclear why the exercise of such recognitional capacities should result in the tokening of content. Indeed, it is debatable to what extent such views need posit general contents at all since, according to them, phenomenal character is a mere by-product of the operation of discriminatory capacities and so not necessarily represented in the contents of experience as such.

#### 6.4.2. Background knowledge

The background knowledge strategy, or BKS, is a variation upon the discriminatory capacities approach that appeals to the subject's explicit or tacit knowledge of the correlation between their sensory impressions and object- or property-types. For example, a subject who has visually experienced a number of yellow-looking objects, the majority of which, upon inspection, in fact turned out to be yellow rather than merely appearing to be, could plausibly come to know what it is to see an object *as yellow*.<sup>11</sup> If these objects become their

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jackson's (1982) Mary.

paradigms—or ‘samples’, to use Wittgenstein’s (1953: §16) terminology—of what it is to look yellow, then the subject can plausibly come to know that an experience *represents* some novel object to be yellow by means of its similarity to these paradigms. Such forms of background knowledge may be considered ‘external’ to perceptual experience in that the subject does not recognise an experience to represent yellow in virtue of that experience alone. Rather, by employing explicit (i.e. inferential) or tacit (non-inferential) knowledge of the link between subjective appearances and the objective characteristics of objects, a subject can come to recognise their experience as representing that an object *is* yellow as opposed to merely *looking* yellow or some other way.

To take a simple example, the yellowish, roundish appearance of a lemon may be taken to represent that there is something yellow, round, and so on in front of one because one knows (associates, has previous experience of, ...) objects with this appearance as *being* yellow, round, lemons, etc. Such knowledge, if it can be described as such, will consist in associations between experiences of the relevant appearance types and the actual properties of objects which, upon further investigation, turned out to instantiate the properties that one comes to associate with the corresponding appearances; i.e. *being yellow, round, a lemon*, etc.<sup>12</sup> Thus a form of *Recognisability* may be derived on the basis of the tacit knowledge of appearances.

By acquiring knowledge of the appearances of yellow objects, the subject thereby acquires the capacity to recognise not only yellow objects, but the *representation* of yellow in perceptual experience. On this view, what privileges *being yellow* as the content of such representation—as opposed to, say, *being white and illuminated by yellow light*—is its role in the relevant paradigm cases. Typically, paradigm cases of yellow objects—a ripe lemon or banana, for example—are in fact yellow and can be seen to be such under a wide variety of environmental conditions.<sup>13</sup> Thus whilst a white object, such as a white piece of chalk illuminated by yellow light, shares the same yellowish appearance and so ‘looks yellow’, it is not paradigmatic of that appearance. Consequently, on the present view, objects that look this way are represented in perceptual experience as being yellow in virtue of their possessing a similar appearance to (i.e. they *look like*) certain paradigm objects that *are* yellow. That is, under BKS, just what it means to look yellow.

It is worth noting that something not unlike this kind of knowledge is present in Martin’s comparative analysis of looks-statements in the form of the similarity function (4.3.1). This takes a predicate (e.g. *is yellow*) and a look, yielding truth if and only if the latter is relevantly similar to the look of those objects that satisfy the predicate. Crucially, however, on Martin’s account this

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<sup>12</sup> Note that the application of such knowledge need not render access to representational contents epistemically indirect since the relevant capacities may operate at a sub-personal level rather than involving conscious inference, at least once the learning phase is complete.

<sup>13</sup> Note, however, that at least one paradigm case of a yellow object—namely, the sun—is not in fact yellow, but white; it merely appears yellow due to the effect of atmospheric absorption (Wilk 2009).

need not be part of a psychological process that the subject goes through in identifying particular looks. Rather, it is part of the semantic analysis of looks-statements, and so not necessarily even implicitly known by the subject. It is therefore an important question for the BKS theorist whether subjects do in fact possess such knowledge of appearances and whether it is acquired or innate. If they do, then there seems to be no reason why this could not be applied at the level of recognising the content of perceptual experience on the basis of appearances.

According to BKS, then, a subject's background knowledge of certain paradigm cases of looks may be used to disambiguate p-representational contents. However, in order for this to be more than a mere convention—i.e. a way of reporting appearances, rather than constitutive of p-representation itself—it must be explained how this knowledge comes to figure in the content of perceptual experience in the first place. For this to be the case, such knowledge must in some sense be *exercised* by the perception of objects, whether consciously or otherwise. The exercise of tacit or explicit background knowledge thus becomes equivalent to the possession of a conceptual, recognitional or discriminatory capacity for the relevant object- or property-type. When an object with the relevant appearance is perceived, this activates the subject's background knowledge, causing the corresponding type to be tokened as part of that experience's representational content. BKS is therefore effectively a special case of the discriminatory capacity strategy described below.

#### 6.4.3. Discriminatory capacities

A number of the above approaches—specifically DCS (6.4.1), BKS (6.4.2) and certain forms of TA (6.3.1)—can be reduced to what I will call *the capacities approach*, or CA for short. According to CA, what gives experience univocal content is the exercise of conceptual, recognitional or discriminatory capacities, each of which corresponds to a particular type of object or property that may be represented. Since I take it that conceptual and recognitional capacities are themselves forms of discriminatory capacity, I will prefer the latter term on the grounds that it does not entail the existence of conceptual content (not all representationalists are conceptualists), or the successful recognition of perceptual stimuli (discriminatory capacities may misfire). However, variants of the present approach may be constructed for each of these and other types of capacity accordingly. Thus, if a given experience invokes the discriminatory capacity for lemons (being yellow, ellipsoid, etc.), then the resulting content of experience will *represent* a lemon (yellow, ellipsoid, etc.). This content is in turn available to the subject in virtue of its employing a particular concept, or non-conceptual structure, that features in any second-order awareness of that

content—for example, ‘*my experience is as of a lemon*’, where ‘as of’ is not taken to entail the presence of lemons.<sup>14</sup>

This becomes important when we consider a subjectively matching hallucinatory experience of—to continue the above example—a lemon. In this case, according to CA, the same discriminatory capacity will be operative, in this case erroneously, causing the experience to have the same or subjectively indistinguishable phenomenal character, which in turn supervenes upon, or is correlated with, the discriminatory capacities that are employed. However, since in this case there is no such object (colour, shape, etc.), the resulting representation is inaccurate, yielding a false or non-veridical content. Thus CA seeks to accommodate both (a) the sense in which veridical and non-veridical contents share the same phenomenal character in virtue of the discriminatory capacities that they employ, and (b) how the content of experience is recognisable to the subject in virtue of the very same capacities that give rise to its content. CA is therefore a transmission model of experience (6.2.1) that adheres to the modified recognisability condition set out in the previous chapter (5.2.3).

Several features of CA are worth noting. First, in order to deliver univocal face-value content, the operation of the relevant capacities must not be underdetermined by the perceptual stimuli, since if the same stimuli were to trigger multiple capacities whose representational contents conflict, then this would yield multiple incompatible contents. This does not, however, prevent multiple *compatible* capacities from being invoked by the same perceptual stimuli. To take McDowell’s (2008: 3) example, seeing a red cardinal might invoke discriminatory capacities for *bird*, *animal* and *cardinal*, as well as for *red* and numerous other properties. If the same perceptual stimuli were to invoke the recognitional capacities for *cardinal*, *crimson rosella*, *imitation wax cardinal*, and so on, however, then the resulting content would be incoherent and so necessarily false, since these properties are incompatible with one another (a cardinal is not a crimson rosella, nor is it made of wax). This does not mean that there can be *no* cases of incoherent or necessarily false contents. Rather, such cases cannot be veridical or typical of experience in general without rendering CA an error theory of perception. To avoid this, independent justification that discriminatory capacities do not work in this way, or some limit to their scope and complexity, must be given if the threat of indeterminacy is to be avoided (see below).

The second notable feature of CA is that the particular (as opposed to general) contents of experiences will necessarily outstrip what is recognisable on the basis of discriminatory capacities alone. Such abilities are limited to what is subjectively distinguishable in experience, and so cannot be used to support the

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<sup>14</sup> I take CA itself to be neutral between conceptual and non-conceptual approaches to perceptual content. Given the role of the resulting elements in the recognition of content, one might take the resulting view to be essentially conceptual in nature, which is McDowell (1994; 2008) and Brewer’s (1999) position. For simplicity, in what follows I will therefore speak only of conceptual content, though this should not be taken to rule out the possibility of a parallel non-conceptual version of CA.

recognisability of particular aspects of experience. They may, however, generate particular contents that include, for example, demonstrative references to external objects and property-instances. Such references are not directly discriminable from experience, but arguably do contribute to the phenomenal character of experience in the sense that experience is presented as being an experience of particulars, and not merely general types. CA theorists, such as Schellenberg (2011b), would therefore do well to insist that the particularity of experience *is* manifest in perceptual phenomenology, which is not distinct from its particular content.

By combining CA with DCS (6.3.1) in this way, it is possible to explain how a subject is able to grasp both the general content of their experience, based upon the discriminatory capacities it employs, and its particular content, based on the subject's ability to identify and track objects in their perceptual environment. As with DCS, the indexical character of particular content, e.g. '*that* cardinal (*there*) is *thusly* red', allows the subject's grasp of demonstrative reference to 'transmit' to the relevant self-knowledge claims; e.g. 'I see a red cardinal'. Thus, by employing a combination of discriminatory capacities and demonstrative content, a potential response to Travis's indeterminacy objection may be constructed.

According to CA, then, the operation of perceptual discriminatory capacities results in the tokening of concepts or corresponding non-conceptual structures in the content of experience. This in turn raises further questions about the nature of these capacities and contents. Why, for instance, should the operation of discriminatory capacities yield representational content at all? And why should we think of such capacities as being active in experience as opposed to an anti-representational account of experience in which experiences give rise to thoughts in which such capacities *are* active? In effect, CA assimilates perceptual experience to a form of thought in which the exercise of discriminatory capacities yields structured representational contents. However, whether experience *is* assimilable in this way is part of what is in dispute. Whatever account of discriminatory capacities is given by the representationalist at the level of experience can be paralleled by the anti-representationalist in their account of how experience gives rise to thought. Just as hallucinations and illusions, in which representationalists posit the existence of false or non-veridical contents, can be explained by anti-representationalists in terms of the misinterpretation or misjudgement of perceptual stimuli (2.3.1, 3.2.1), the role of discriminatory capacities can equally be applied at the level of thought or judgement. So even if CA constitutes a satisfactory response to Travis (2004), it remains to be seen why this should be considered a better account of experience than the corresponding anti-representationalist position.

In practice, one of the primary motivations for representationalism, and specifically conceptualism, about experience comes from epistemological concerns, such as the need to provide reasons for beliefs and judgements, or as an explanation of hallucination and illusion. Given the Davidsonian dictum that only beliefs, which are paradigmatically both representational and conceptual, can constitute such reasons, this drives some theorists such as McDowell and

early Brewer to posit the existence of belief-like, i.e. conceptual, p-representational contents. However, whether this motivation is sufficient to establish the question of whether experience is representational or not is itself highly contentious. Such considerations shift the debate away from the *type* of representations involved in experience, or indeed whether it has any, to what the *explanatory role* of such representations should be. Providing reasons or justification for judgements, beliefs, and ultimately knowledge is just one such role. Explaining the phenomenal character of experience, or what perceptions and illusions have in common, is another. Accounting for the behaviour and perceptual constancies in biological organisms is yet another. To conflate these explanatory roles, or to assume that they are all played by a single notion or type of representational content, runs together several different issues in a way that is antithetical to philosophical clarity. It is therefore vital that representationalists specify precisely what role, or roles, the contents they posit are supposed to play, and why this constitutes a better explanation of the relevant phenomena than the alternative anti-representationalist account.

For the reasons given above, it is insufficient for representationalists to merely prove the existence of the relevant discriminatory capacities, since this eventuality is compatible with both REP and REL. Rather, it is the role played by the resulting representational content that must be justified. This leaves room for accounts of perceptual experience in which discriminatory capacities are active and may even be described in representational terms, but where the resulting account of experience is primarily relational, or is neutral between these two views. Again, the decisive factor in the debate will not be the fact that a representational description of experience is possible, but rather the explanatory role of that description in the explanation of thought and behaviour more generally. Even supposing that the existence of the kind of discriminatory capacities posited by CA were granted, this leaves a considerable amount of justificatory work to be done in order to show that experience is fundamentally representational. Moreover, if the operation of the relevant capacities themselves turns out to be relationally individuated, or partly constituted by the subject's relation to the objects of perception, then the resulting view would itself qualify as a form of relationalism since the operation of such capacities would, on this view, form an essential part of perceptual experience.

#### 6.4.4. *Intuitional content*

It is an interesting (though perhaps unsurprising in light of the above) historical fact that two of the leading proponents of CA—namely McDowell and Brewer—have since abandoned the view in favour of some form of relationalism. Brewer (2011) now endorses a version of Campbell's (2002) 'Relational View' and McDowell now rejects the idea that representational content is propositional, though he still takes it to be conceptual—a notion he calls 'intuitional content' (McDowell 2008: 6).<sup>15</sup> The precise reasons for this change

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<sup>15</sup> Burge (2010: 381) also holds a non-propositional view, but advocates a form of non-conceptual content.

are unclear, but in the case of McDowell it seems likely that it concerns the difficulty of determining precisely which discriminatory capacities are active in any given experience, along with the number of such capacities that would be required to justify the range of true judgements that can result from experience (McDowell 2008: 3–4). This change in the role of the discriminatory capacities means that, for example, the concept *cardinal* need not feature in the content of a subject's experience in order for it to justify the judgement that there is a cardinal. Rather, the recognitional capacities for *red*, *bird* plus certain shape and colour concepts may be operative, with the act of judgement combining these conceptual elements in the appropriate way to derive the content of the resulting belief. On this revised view, the question of precisely which capacities are operative in any given experience will presumably be an empirical one. However, breaking the link between p-representational contents of experience and the contents of beliefs or judgements brings McDowell a step closer to a relational account of experience.

If the distinction between the capacities that are operative in experience and those that are operative in judgement is to be a clear and principled one, then further justification for this distinction must be given. Moreover, since McDowell also admits the existence of discriminatory capacities at the level of judgement, then why should all such capacities not work in this way, rather than some being operative at the level of experience and others only in judgement? If this were the case, however, then the resulting account would no longer be representational, since this would leave no role for representational contents to play given that phenomenal character can already be explained in terms of the employment of the relevant capacities.

Furthermore, it is unclear that McDowell's 'intuitional content' even constitutes a form of content in the philosophical sense since, being non-propositional, it has no determinate accuracy conditions. Rather, McDowell's claim appears to be that it is a feature of experiences that they are fully *conceptualisable*, or conceptually structured, rather than that they possess representational contents *per se*. However, this is no grounds for disagreement with the relationalist, who also holds that experiences are conceptualisable in the formation of beliefs and judgement. It is therefore unclear that McDowell (2008) should be taken to be offering a defence of representationalism as opposed to simply introducing an alternative non-representational notion of 'content'. Indeed, in the terms I have been using here, once one drops the claim that p-representations are propositional, the resulting view more closely resembles a form of relationalism than it does representationalism.

## 6.5. Conclusion

Of the views considered above, two possible strategies emerged as potential responses to Travis. Each approach seeks to disambiguate the 'face-value' content of an experience from its subjectively indistinguishable alternatives in order to avoid Travis's indeterminacy objection. The *teleosemantic approach* (TA) holds that the contents of experience are externally individuated by distal

causal relations, such as the evolutionary history or biological function of the relevant organism's genus. Since, by their nature, such factors are not directly accessible to the perceiving subject, the ability to recognise the content of experience must be explained by some further means, such as the external individuation of knowledge (ESK) or the application of background knowledge (BKS). That Travis's arguments push the representationalist towards the external individuation of content is interesting in itself, and has potential ramifications for their account of phenomenal character; i.e. *phenomenal externalism*. The *demonstrative content strategy* (DCS), on the other hand, as proposed by McDowell (1994) and Brewer (1999), may be coupled with the view that the content of perceptual experience is recognisable to the subject in virtue of the operation of the same discriminatory capacities that are deployed in structuring that content (CA). This raises important empirical and conceptual questions concerning the nature and individuation of the discriminatory capacities it proposes, which need not favour representationalism over anti-representationalism.

In order to motivate their view, representationalists must not only show that it is coherent and answers Travis's challenge, but that it is superior to the equivalent anti-representationalist view in a way that does not itself reduce to a form of, for example, relationalism. Failure to do so gives representationalism no explanatory advantage over the comparable relationalist view—a position which in some cases it collapses into. McDowell's (2008) notion of 'intuitional content' appears to do precisely that, since the non-propositional 'contents' that it posits are not assessable for truth or accuracy, and an equivalent explanation can also be given at the level of judgement or belief. For these reasons, the existence of representational content should not be seen as an end in its own right, or as a silver bullet for solving problems in the philosophy of perception, but rather as fulfilling some specific explanatory role, the nature of which needs to be made clear from the outset. The existence of multiple such roles, including epistemic justification and explaining phenomenal character, may require multiple contents, the interrelations and connections between which need to be made explicit, or else a detailed account of how such contents are individuated, integrated and, where necessary, recognisable to the subject, given.

# 7. Conclusion

## *Beyond representationalism*

### 7.1. Summary

In this thesis I have argued that the case against *representationalism*—the view that perceptual experience is fundamentally and irreducibly representational—set out in chapter 2 constitutes a powerful and much neglected argument against the currently prevailing philosophical orthodoxy. Moreover, Travis’s arguments establish substantive constraints upon the nature and role of perceptual content. I also argued that the debate surrounding the content of experience centres not so much upon the existence of representational content, but rather its explanatory role, particularly in relation to phenomenal character and its relation to other mental states—beliefs, thoughts, knowledge, intentions, and so on.

In subsequent chapters I examined the implications of the above arguments for various accounts of representational content including, though not restricted to, looks- and appearance-based accounts (chapters 3 and 4), Burge’s ‘objective representation’ (chapter 5), demonstrative, teleosemantic, counterfactual and non-propositional accounts (chapter 6). In particular, the idea that perceptual representation is ‘looks-indexed’ was rejected (*pace* Glüer 2009) on the basis that such looks are either equivocal (in the case of comparative or visible looks) or non-perceptual (epistemic or thinkable looks). Whilst the existence of a phenomenal or ‘non-comparative’ notion of looks was not ruled out, this proved to be unhelpful in establishing the existence of objective representational content (4.2). Moreover, the availability of alternative comparative analyses of phenomenal looks in the form of Martin’s (2010) ‘parsimonious’ account and Brewer’s (2011) similarity-based account (4.3), neutralises this form of argument for representationalism by reducing most such phenomenal uses to their comparative equivalents, which are equivocal and so unsuitable for indexing face-value content of the kind that many representationalists endorse.

In chapter 5, I argued that the central issue at stake in the debate between Travis and the representationalist is not the existence of representational content, *per se*, but its role in explaining perceptual phenomenology. Thus, views like Burge (2010), which claim that perceptual states have representational contents with some other explanatory purpose—in scientific explanation, for example—but deny that this explains the phenomenal character of experience, i.e. *intentionalism*, are not in conflict with Travis (2004). Rather, ‘The Silence of the Senses’ should be read as denying that representation can fulfil a particular explanatory role in the mental life of conscious subjects, not that representation has no role to play in the analysis of perceptual states or abilities whatsoever.<sup>1</sup> This criticism extends to the supposed justificatory or reason-giving role of perceptual content, along with its relation to belief, which can equally be explained in terms of conceptual or discriminatory capacities operating at the level of judgement as at the level of perception (chapter 6). Furthermore, I argued that the so-called ‘phenomenological objection’, or argument from unmediated awareness, that is sometimes levelled at representational views is unmotivated and potentially question-begging, despite raising substantive unanswered questions concerning the role of phenomenal character in perceptual awareness (7.3.3).

In chapter 6, I considered how externally individuated representational views, such as Millikan and Burge’s teleosemantics, might be extended to account for the recognisability of phenomenal character through externalism about self-knowledge (6.3.2). This view generalises to yield a form of externalism about phenomenal character that many philosophers find implausible, but which is able to escape the most serious of Travis’s arguments, albeit with restrictions on the type of contents it can deliver.

Finally, I examined a number of alternative responses to Travis (2004), including demonstrative, background knowledge- and capacity-based approaches. Each of these involved the operation of perceptual discriminatory capacities—whether these be conceptual, recognitional or otherwise—that structure experience and its content. This raised a range of important and non-trivial questions about the precise nature of such capacities, their relation to thought, concepts, content and phenomenal character. Whilst constituting the outline of a possible response to Travis (2004) (7.2.4), such approaches fall short of a providing conclusive argument for representationalism.<sup>2</sup> Such an argument would need to show why such representational content constitutes a better explanation of perceptual phenomena than a comparable non-representational view, such as Naïve Realism. As in the case of looks, any argument based on the existence of discriminatory capacities that is available to the representationalist at the level of experience is also potentially available to the relationalist at the level of judgement, thereby neutralising its dialectical

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<sup>1</sup> This conflicts with an obvious reading of some of Travis’s stronger claims, most notably that ‘perception is not representational’ (ibid. 57). Further arguments for this claim may be found in some of Travis’s other work; e.g. Travis (2007) and Travis (unpublished).

<sup>2</sup> See 7.1 below.

force. Thus, even if a satisfactory response to Travis on this basis can be given—something that it is far from clear (see 7.3.1)—this may not be decisive in the wider debate concerning the fundamental nature of perceptual experience.

## 7.2. Implications for Representationalism

The case against representationalism presented above has a number of important consequences for representationalist accounts of experience. First, it rules out many otherwise apparently plausible accounts of representational content, including the appearance-based accounts that I discuss in chapter 3. Second, it refocuses the debate upon the existence of various constraints upon the notion of representation that they employ (7.2.2) as well as the explanatory roles that such representation is supposed to play (7.2.3). This in turn helps to move the debate away from present, and in some cases artificial, divisions and towards the more central issue of the distinction between perception and thought (7.2.1) and the role of perceptual phenomenology (7.3.3).

Most importantly, however, Travis's anti-representationalism sets up the following challenge for representationalists about experience. Either:

- (i) they drop the requirement that p-representational content is apparent to the subject in virtue of experience, including its phenomenal character, i.e. *Recognisability*,
- (ii) they reject the claim that each experience has a single privileged 'face value' content, i.e. *Face-value*, or
- (iii) they provide an alternative account of how the subject, in virtue of perceptual experience, plus relevant perceptual capacities or background knowledge, is able to grasp the representational content of their experience.

As I argued above, none of these options is without its costs. The first either leads to the rejection of intentionalism, or an acceptance that perceptual representation is, as Travis claims, 'silent' in that it does not make representational contents available to the subject, thus severely constraining its explanatory role. Representational accounts of this sort are not forms of representationalism *per se*, since they do not explain the nature of perceptual *experience* as such (cf. 1.2.4). The second option rejects what many representationalists take to be a basic datum about the phenomenology of experience: namely, that things can be 'just as they seem' in the sense of having accurate or veridical representational content. Rejecting this principle grants a key premise of Travis's argument—that looks are equivocal—which again constrains the role of representational content in explaining perceptual experience and the formation of judgements and belief. The third option therefore seems like the most promising for any representationalist who wishes to uphold some form of *Recognisability*. An account that aims to meet this criteria, however, will need to do so in a way that does not itself reduce to a

form of relationalism in order to qualify as a fundamentally representational view. Alternatively, it may give rise to a ‘hybrid’ or compatibilist position in which both representational and relational aspects of experience are taken to be equally fundamental (7.3.2). I sketch a possible strategy for responding to this challenge below (7.2.4).

### 7.2.1. *Perception and thought*

The debate between representationalism and anti-representationalism—or between representationalism and relationalism, as it is sometimes, in my view misleadingly, portrayed—is most fundamentally a question concerning the division of labour between *perception* and *thought*. Assimilating the former to the latter yields a representational picture of experience that is more obviously conducive to explaining the reason-giving role of perception and the formation of judgements and beliefs, which are representational. It does this, however, at the cost of making perception into a kind of testimony of the senses, to be accepted or rejected at face-value—a notion which Travis shows to be highly problematic. Whether perceptual experience *is*, in the relevant sense, analogous to testimony, or whether there are other ways in which it might satisfy this function, are therefore central questions in the debate concerning the existence (or otherwise) of representational content.

Moreover, Travis puts pressure on the assumption that the kind of content that is needed to explain the phenomenal character of experience and the representational contents that justify perceptual judgement or belief are one and the same thing. This calls into question the role of phenomenal character in the awareness and knowledge of the external world, and whether representationalism can account for it.

Many representationalists whose accounts involves demonstrative or otherwise externally individuated elements take themselves to have already addressed these apparent shortcomings of the representational view. By incorporating externally individuated elements into the contents of experience, they aim to do justice both to the particularity, or fine-grained nature, of experience and its role in enabling knowledge of the physical world. However, as the arguments from looks and recognisability show, these issues are not limited to the individuation of content, but also its availability to the subject—an epistemic constraint.

This issue of ‘recognisability’, as I have called it, highlights the point at which perceptual content becomes available to consciousness. This occurs most obviously, though not necessarily exclusively, through the phenomenal character of experience, or what experience ‘is like’. Only by being available to the subject in some way can representational content play a substantive cognitive role in the formation of thoughts and beliefs. Conversely, without explaining how such availability to consciousness is possible, representationalism fails to meet its goal of explaining the connection between thought and experience. Of course, the representationalist can simply deny that experiential contents need be available to consciousness, claiming instead that we simply find ourselves disposed to

think, believe or do certain things as a result of our experiences. This approach, however, fails to do justice to perceptual phenomenology which, at least in a wide variety of cases, is available to conscious introspection, not to mention the representationalist's own notion that we can accept or reject perceptual experience 'at face value' (2.2.2). To reject this principle therefore places severe constraints upon the role that such content can play in our conscious mental life.

Apart from drawing attention to the many and varied roles that representational content may be thought to play (7.2.3), this highlights the need for representationalists to explain precisely how experience makes it possible to grasp or 'recognise' the content of experience. Indeed, it is upon precisely this point that Travis's arguments press. Any account that is unable to do this fails to say anything about what it is to perceptually *experience* the world, regardless of whether it posits the existence of representational content for other explanatory purposes (cf. Burge 2010). Furthermore, the mere fact that beliefs, judgements and knowledge possess such contents cannot be taken as a point in favour of representationalism since the anti-representationalist can apply similar explanations at the level of judgement as does the representationalist at the level of experience. That is, whatever the representationalist takes to make experiential contents *available* could instead be given as an explanation of what *gives* perceptual judgements, beliefs and subsequent actions their contents. To constitute an argument in favour of representationalism, then, as opposed to an anti-representationalist view, such an explanation would need to be one that is not available to the anti-representationalist 'downstream' of experience at the level of perceptual interpretation or belief, or that otherwise rules out a non-representational explanation of the relevant phenomenon.

### 7.2.2. Constraints upon representationalism

By challenging both the coherence of and need for objective representational content, the arguments set out in chapter 2 present a series of constraints upon representationalist theories of experience. Whilst this, in my view, falls short of ruling out all representational accounts of perceptual experience, it also helps to shift the debate onto potentially more fertile ground. As suggested above, the alleged dichotomy between exclusively 'representational' views on the one hand and exclusively 'relational' views on the other is a false one. Many so-called representational views—for example, those that include demonstrative or indexical elements—also contain a strongly relational aspect, whilst some relational views may also be described in representational terms. Focusing solely upon this axis of the debate only serves to obscure many other important distinctions—and indeed similarities—between the candidate views. These include the difference between individuating and constitutive externalism (i.e. Fregean and Russellian content) and whether phenomenal character should be explained in terms of purely internal or partly external factors, along with its role in accounting for perceptual awareness (7.3.3).

What constraints, then, do these arguments place upon representationalism? To some extent these are set out in Travis's *Objectivity, Face-value, Givenness* and, crucially, *Recognisability* conditions (2.2), which provide a useful way of categorising various forms of representationalism according to which of these conditions that they endorse. But since not all representationalist accounts endorse each of the conditions, what else does this tell us about representationalism?

Travis's arguments highlight the need to separate two important issues about representational content. First, how is such content to be *individuated*—phenomenologically, internally, externally, and so on. Second, whether and in virtue of what it is it *recognisable*, or cognitively available, to the subject. Accounts that aim to satisfy the latter criteria also need to explain why the content that is recognisable from experience matches the content that is individuated. Most plausibly this will be because both are determined in precisely the same manner—the so-called *transmission model* described above (6.2.1). Alternatively, the account may be an 'error theory' in which the contents that are recognisable in experience are never, or only very rarely, instantiated. Such an account, however, raises questions concerning the desirability or advantages of such a theory over the available alternatives.

Finally, the relation between representational content, phenomenal character and the role that each plays in conscious perceptual awareness must be explained. If representational content is to explain phenomenal character, i.e. if intentionalism is true, then at least some elements of that content may be recognisable to the subject in virtue of this phenomenal character. Other content elements may, however, be recognisable to the subject via other means. Furthermore, if the same representational contents are to play a role in explaining perceptual awareness and so ground the subject's epistemic access to perceived objects and properties, then this will also depend upon certain content elements. Now, only where these two sets of content elements—i.e. those that are recognisable to the subject in virtue of perceptual phenomenology and those that explain perceptual awareness—are *identical* will the subject's justification, or reasons, for perceptual beliefs and judgements be cognitively available to them. As the arguments in chapter 5 showed, the mere overlap or association between these two sets of elements will be insufficient for such cognitive availability. This impacts upon both the explanatory role of phenomenal character in perceptual awareness as well as the kinds of explanation of perceptual knowledge that can be given. Thus the issue of recognisability highlights an important epistemological constraint upon the representational content of experience.

### 7.2.3. Explanatory roles of representation

In 'The Silence of the Senses', Travis states that '[i]n no case I am aware of is this view [representationalism] argued for' (2004: 57). Whilst being something of an overstatement, and certainly no longer the case, as demonstrated in chapter 3, beyond a vague appeal to some form of argument from illusion,

representationalists are often less than clear about the motivations for and benefits of their view. Indeed, the notion of ‘representation’ has been seen as something of a silver bullet in solving a wide variety of problems within the philosophy of perception and action. Whether all of these can be solved by a single form of content is, however, doubtful. Travis’s argumentative strategy pits just two of these roles, or perhaps more, depending how finely they are individuated, against one another to show that they cannot be made to coexist without considerable difficulty. This highlights a general need for philosophers of perception to be clear and explicit about precisely which explanatory role, or roles, any given type of content is supposed to fulfil, as well as how it achieves that goal and its relation to other content types.

By focusing exclusively upon the nature and existence of representational content, it is easy to lose sight of the various overlapping roles it is often supposed to play, many of which are frequently conflated or simply assumed without substantive argument. Just a few of these—some of which have already been mentioned above—are listed below, though the list is far from exhaustive:

- (i) Presenting objects and properties in the world in such a way as to make them available to the subject in conscious thought and action
- (ii) Epistemic justification or giving reasons for beliefs and judgements
- (iii) Explaining the contents of beliefs, judgements and knowledge
- (iv) As the supervenience base for, or as constitutive of, phenomenal character, or what perception ‘is like’
- (v) The nature of perceptual appearances, or how the world appears to the perceptual subject to be
- (vi) Consciousness or awareness of objects and properties in the external world
- (vii) Explaining the existence or nature of perceptual hallucinations and illusions
- (viii) As a common factor between subjectively indistinguishable, but epistemically distinct (i.e. veridical and non-veridical), experiences
- (ix) As part of the scientific explanation of an organism’s psychological functioning and behaviour
- (x) As a way of individuating perceptual states
- (xi) Explaining the finely-grained nature of perceptual experience

That a single phenomenon—i.e. perceptual representation—might even be considered to play each of the above roles may itself seem to be a point in its favour. However, it is far from clear that any one form or notion of content is capable of encompassing all of the above. If it did, the nature of, and responses

to, Travis's arguments from indeterminacy and awareness would surely be much clearer.

Whilst it is tempting to posit different forms of representational content, or different content elements, that fulfil various of the above roles, the resulting contents will still face the above objections either individually (in the case of multiple contents) or *en masse* (in the case of disjunctive or 'multi-level' contents). Moreover, in order to constitute an argument for representationalism, each content would need to explain some aspect of perceptual experience that could not equally well be explained by a comparable anti-representationalist view. Simply assuming or insisting upon the existence of such contents from the outset, particularly where this encompasses multiple explanatory roles, does not constitute a justification for representationalism. If the content of experience is to play a distinctive role in the philosophy of perception, then it needs to be clear precisely what this role is and how it performs it, otherwise the supposed explanation merely obfuscates the problem it is intended to solve. To this extent, I concur with Burge that 'the dispute would be better focused on questionable psychological, representational, and epistemic roles that [perceptual] representations have been given' (Burge 2010: 379, fn. 15).

#### 7.2.4. Responding to Travis

Having set out various roles of and constraints upon the content of experience, how should representationalists respond to the challenges posed by Travis (2004)? Clearly, if a representationalist account of experience is to be given, then it must account for perceptual phenomenology. Furthermore, the resulting content should play a constitutive, and not merely incidental, role in our conscious awareness and epistemic access to the external world. Finally, the representational content of experience must be available to the subject in conscious thought and introspection, and not merely derivatively through the contents of, for example, belief and action.

In chapter 6, I argued that the most plausible way of doing this would be via a 'transmission' model of experience in which both the individuation and recognisability of perceptual content are explained in terms of the same mechanism or factor. Furthermore, I suggested that the most likely candidate for such a mechanism would be some form of discriminatory capacities that are responsible for structuring perceptual experience, and so its content, but that also involve a demonstrative or indexical component that enables the subject to grasp, as reflected in their perceptual phenomenology, particular and not only general contents. Whether such capacities are conceptual or a precursor to conceptualisation remains an open question. In either case, however, such capacities will be grounded either in the subject's implicit knowledge of appearances, as gained through their past experience, or innate capabilities for representing aspects of the world via the relevant sense modalities.

Whether perceptual experience *is* fundamentally representational, in the sense required for representationalism, however, is uncertain. It is entirely plausible that the discriminatory capacities that structure perceptual content, if

indeed there are such capacities, would themselves be fundamentally relational in character. That is, the operation of such capacities cannot be described in isolation from the objects and properties to which they are perceptually sensitive. Moreover, depending on the details of this account, it may make sense to consider those objects and properties not only as individuating the contents of experience, but as its constituents or *relata*. This would make the ‘contents’ of experience essentially relational as well as representational, and so a form of compatibilism about experience. Provided that the phenomenal character of experience can be described in terms of the operation of discriminatory capacities that are fundamentally dependent upon the relevant objects or properties that they track in the world, this need not divorce it from perceptual awareness. However, any account of such awareness must in turn explain how it is possible that a capacity that can ‘misfire’—in the case of perceptual illusions, for example—can constitute awareness of an environmental particular, rather than of some aspect of experience that can also occur in the absence of its intended target. Alternatively, such capacities may operate at the level of belief or judgement, rather than experience, in which case they could also be used to support a non-representational account of experience.

Such a solution would represent only a partial victory for representationalism, since the resulting view incorporates both representational and relational elements. It is, therefore, an endorsement of CON and not only REP or REL (1.2.4). Moreover, whether this constitutes a form of representationalism at all will depend upon the explanatory work done by the content that resulted from the operation of the relevant discriminatory capacities, the precise mechanism for which remains unclear. Indeed, there are reasons to be sceptical about the very distinction that philosophers draw between perceptual experience and belief that motivates the need for such content in the first place (7.3.4). An account of the above form, however, would appear to be the representationalist’s best hope of giving an adequate response to Travis. That such a response has yet to be given in any detail is a reflection of the fact that, at the time of writing, there is no convincing argument in favour of representationalism in its present forms.

### 7.3. Directions for Future Research

The above conclusions suggest the following areas for future research which follow on directly from the issues raised in this thesis.

#### 7.3.1. *Perceptual discriminatory capacities*

In chapter 6, I identified the role of what I called *perceptual discriminatory capacities* as being central to a satisfactory account of perceptual experience and/or belief. This is true not only for representationalism, but for relational views as well, which require an explanation of the conceptualisation of experience in belief, judgement and intentional action. Developing a more detailed account of the nature and role of such capacities in experience is therefore a priority for future research in this area that will in turn help inform

the debate concerning the nature of perceptual experience. Such research will involve answering the following questions concerning the individuation and scope of such capacities, requiring a combination of philosophical and empirical work to ascertain the precise role and mechanisms for such capacities along with their relation to both representational content and perceptual phenomenology:

- (i) How and why does the operation of discriminatory capacities instantiate tokens of the relevant types in the content of experience?
- (ii) How are the relevant perceptual capacities to be individuated, and how do they differ from the corresponding capacities involved in perceptual judgement or belief?
- (iii) Precisely which discriminatory capacities are involved in any given experience, and how is this to be determined?
- (iv) How and when do we acquire or develop the relevant capacities, and are these learned or innate?
- (v) How does the operation of discriminatory capacities relate to the conceptualisation, recognition and perceptual awareness of objects and their properties?
- (vi) If the capacities that individuate experiential content differ from what makes it recognisable, why should the latter contents coincide with the former?

### 7.3.2. *The possibility of hybrid views*

It is surely no coincidence that a number of the positions described above (7.2.4) are those more typically assumed by relationalists than by representationalists. There is, however, no reason why these two views should be seen as opposing or competing hypotheses, rather than two sides of the perceptual coin. Just as it is possible to posit different representational contents to fulfil different explanatory roles, it may be similarly advantageous to adopt, for example, a representational account of non-conscious visual content and a relational account of visual phenomenal character, or some other combination thereof. Moreover, certain aspects of these positions are compatible such that it is possible to combine relational elements within representational content, or to even to describe fundamentally relational states as having propositionally structured contents. Such ‘hybrid’ or compatibilist positions are not without precedent, with Siegel (2010), Schellenberg (2011b) and McDowell (2008) all advocating some form of hybrid view (cf. 6.4.4).

The possibility and potential advantages of such hybrid views is a worthwhile and interesting development in recent philosophy of perception. By letting go of the false dichotomy between representationalism and relationalism,

it may be possible to move beyond the present debate and see representational and relational elements not as two competing accounts of experience, but as complementary ways of describing a single underlying perceptual reality. Thought of in relational terms, representational content need not be seen as a surrogate for, or epistemological barrier between, perceptual subjects and objects, but as a descriptive tool for individuating and characterising the role of certain perceptual states. Further work is needed, however, both on what forms such hybrid accounts might take as well as the relation, or interrelation, between the representational and relational elements of perception.

### 7.3.3. *The role of phenomenal character*

Much of the literature in the representationalist tradition is devoted to explaining how representational content can account for the phenomenal character of experience. However, comparatively little attention has been given to the explanatory role of phenomenal character itself. If, as Campbell (2002) and Johnston (2006) suggest, phenomenal character is not a mere by-product of perceptual experience, but the means by which we are aware of the objective world, this places further constraints upon the kinds of representational content that can fulfil this role. In particular, representationalist accounts upon which phenomenal character is epiphenomenal, as opposed to being constitutive of perceptual awareness, may be ruled out. Furthermore, an explanation of how the content that gives rise to phenomenal character contributes to perceptual awareness will need to be given. The precise role of phenomenal character in an overall account of perceptual experience is therefore a central question in the philosophy of perception that, in my view, deserves much greater attention.

### 7.3.4. *Experience and belief*

Finally, as described above (7.2.1), the existence of representational content in experience is often motivated by the division between perceptual experience on the one hand, and perceptual belief, judgement and knowledge on the other. This in turn assumes a division between experiential and belief states that, whilst well established in the philosophical literature, is neither well defined nor grounded in empirical research. In particular, the question of what makes a state distinctively *experiential*, as opposed to doxastic or discursive, is not well defined. Moreover, the individuation of particular experiences over time and across multiple perceptual modalities is highly problematic. Whilst the multi-modal nature of perception has received considerable attention in recent times, the distinction between experience and belief that is so central to the present debate has not. After all, it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the contents or metaphysical nature of experience when it is unclear how individual experiences are to be defined or individuated. Most importantly, this issue holds the potential to dissolve many of the puzzles surrounding the existence and nature of perceptual content.

Some authors—notably Hinton (1973) and Byrne (2009: 431–32)—have expressed scepticism that there is any such thing as perceptual experience in the

philosophical sense of this term. Moreover, the notion of an ‘experience–belief synapse’ (Byrne unpublished) at which experiential episodes become belief states forms part of the motivation for the notion of perceptual content, which is intuitively characterised as what experience and belief have in common, or from which the content of belief may be derived. This in turn presupposes a model of perception as a sequential ‘pipeline’ or ‘train of operations’ (Reid 1974: VI.xxi, 174) in which raw sensory input is processed by our perceptual faculties to yield one form of content which is then conceptualised and transformed into belief through the act of judgement. If, however, the relevant processes were not sequential but, for example, mutually constraining such that perceptual experience is the result of both top-down and bottom-up processes that constrain or mutually reinforce one another to form a coherent and stable percept, then the standard division between experience and belief may itself be ill founded. On this view, instead of a causal relation between experience and belief, experiences may themselves be constitutive of perceptual beliefs, with experiential states playing a belief-like role in the psychology of the subject.

The existence of a constitutive relationship between perceptual experience and perceptual belief would explain why many theorists—including Byrne (2009: 450), Smith (2002), Armstrong (1968), Heil (1982) and Reid (1974), to name but a few—have taken experience itself to be a doxastic state. However, it would also negate the need to posit representational contents of experience that can form the basis for the contents of belief in the first place, since experience and perceptual belief would each be complementary aspects of the same underlying mental state. Such an approach has the potential to unify representationalism and relationalism in a single account of perceptual experience centred around the kind of discriminatory capacities described above (7.2.4). As with many other areas in the contemporary philosophy of mind, however, a satisfactory resolution to this issue is only likely to be achieved through a combination of philosophical and empirical investigation.

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