

PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE: NON- RELATIONALISM WITHOUT ADVERBIALISM

Laura Gow

University of Cambridge

PLAN

- 1. Explain why standard representationalism is incompatible with naturalism.
- 2. Reject a proposal for a naturalistic relational view.
- 3. Suggest a new form of non-relationalism and explain why it is preferable to adverbialist non-relationalism.

BACKGROUND ASSUMPTIONS

- Naturalism
- The category *perceptual experience* includes the 'good cases' and the 'bad cases'.

I. WHY STANDARD REPRESENTATIONALISM IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH NATURALISM

REPRESENTATIONALISM & NATURALISM

- Externalist Representationalism – makes use of natural relations (evolution by natural selection, causal covariation etc.)
- Internalist Representationalism – compatible with naturalism, so long as the internal representational/intentional state is capable of being understood naturalistically.

PECULIAR ENTITIES

- Uriah Kriegel (2007, 2011), Angela Mendelovici (forthcoming), David Papineau (2014) and Susanna Schellenberg (2011) have all pointed out that many representationalist views posit non-natural entities of some description.
- Propositions - Byrne 2005, Glüer-Pagin 2014, Pautz 2007, Stoljar 2004 Thau 2002, Tye 1995
- Uninstantiated Properties - Bengson *et al.* 2011, Dretske 2000, Horgan, Graham & Tienson 2004, Lycan 2001, McGinn 1999, Pautz 2007, Sosa 2007, and Tye 2002, 2014a.

MUST UNINSTANTIATED PROPERTIES BE PECULIAR?

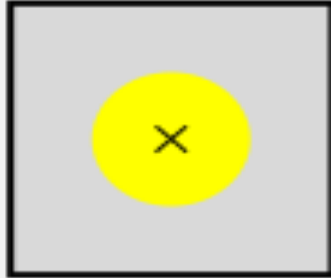
- There are two main ways of understanding universals:
- Platonic – universals exist independently of their instantiations somewhere outside the spatiotemporal realm.
- Aristotelian – universals do not exist independently of their instantiations.
- If representationalists are committed to the Platonic conception then their account is incompatible with naturalism.

REPRESENTATIONALISM & PLATONISM

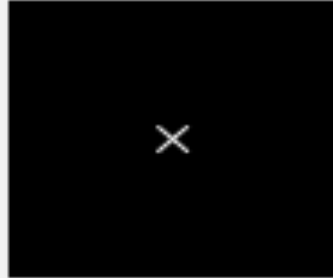
- Brad Thompson (2008) - Nothing is red.
- Impossible Colours. (Churchland 2007)

CHIMERICAL COLOR DEMO TEMPLATES

Fatigue template
(stare at "x")



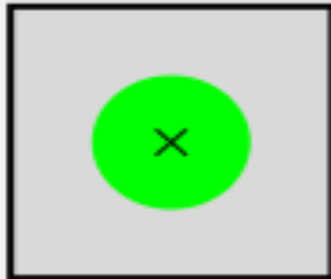
Target field
(glance at "x")



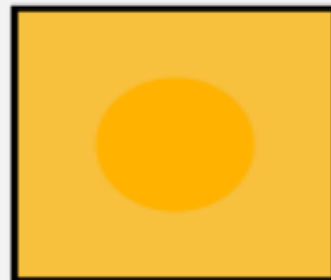
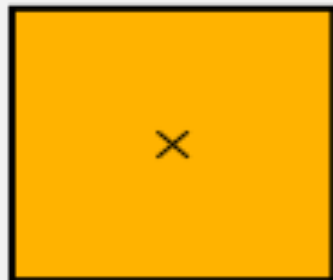
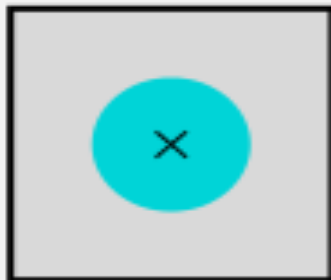
Approximate
Rendering



STYGIAN BLUE
(simultaneously deep
blue and black)



SELF-LUMINOUS RED
(simultaneously red and
brighter than white)



HYPERBOLIC ORANGE
(more than 100%
color saturation)

STANDARD REPRESENTATIONALISM IS *ESSENTIALLY* NON-NATURALISTIC

- We've seen that many representationalists do in fact rely on non-natural entities.
- But there is an *in principle* reason why standard representationalism must be incompatible with naturalism.

ABSTRACT CONTENTS

- Representational states have representational content, and content is always thought to be abstract.
- “Representational contents are abstract kinds that fix conditions under which a psychological state is veridical.” [Burge 2010: 379]
- “Standard intentional states must be taken to be *relations* to intentional contents or properties or other abstract objects.” [Pautz 2013: 205]
- This point cuts across the externalism/ internalism divide.

DIAGNOSIS

- Note: the problem is not the representationalist's commitment to content *per se*, the problem is their commitment to *abstract* content.
- Representationalists are committed to abstract content because they think that the perceiving subject stands in some sort of two-place relation to the content of the perceptual experience.
- “Every intentional state, then, consists of an intentional content related to the subject by an intentional mode. The structure of intentionality is therefore relational, and may be displayed as follows: Subject – Intentional mode – Intentional content.” [Crane 2003: 39]

DIAGNOSIS

- You might think it is possible to analyse the representational content of some perceptual experiences in terms of the physical objects and properties in the perceiver's local environment (this seems to be what's going on in appeals to the 'transparency' of perceptual experience) this won't be possible for hallucinations. (Impossible colours again.)

SUMMARY

- Representationalism is a kind of Relationalism.
- Not only do many versions of the view explicitly posit relations to non-natural entities (propositions and uninstantiated properties), all versions of standard representationalism posit a relation to a content.
- This content must be abstract since there are cases where it could not be analysed in terms of physical objects and properties.

2. CAN REPRESENTATION BE RELATIONAL AND COMPATIBLE WITH NATURALISM?

SUSANNA SCHELLENBERG'S ACCOUNT

- Schellenberg rejects standard representationalism for its dependence on relations to peculiar entities. But (unlike Kriegel, Mendelovici and Papineau), she doesn't think non-relationalism is the answer.
- On her physicalist account, perceptual experience is representational and relational.
- My conclusion will be that Schellenberg's account is compatible with naturalism, but it's not relational.

CONCEPTUAL/ NON-CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURES

- Phenomenal character is determined by the subject's employing conceptual or non-conceptual structures.
- Ordinary perceptual experiences and hallucinations which are subjectively indistinguishable have a common factor, since the same conceptual or non-conceptual structures are employed in both cases.

ORDINARY PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE - RELATIONAL?

- [I]f perceptual content is yielded by employing perceptual capacities and such capacities function to single out particulars, then relations to particulars are a fundamental part of perceptual content. So insofar as the perceptual capacities that yield content function to single out particulars, perceptual experience is fundamentally both relational and representational. [Schellenberg 2014: 17]
- [P]ossessing a concept grounds the ability to pick out the objects or property-instances that the concept is of. Therefore, the phenomenology that ensues from employing concepts is inherently related to the objects and property-instances that they pick out. [2011b: 22]

ORDINARY PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE - RELATIONAL?

- [O]n the notion of concepts in play, concepts cannot be analyzed independently of what it means to possess a concept, and possessing a concept cannot be analyzed independently of what it means to have the ability to pick out the objects and property-instances that the concept is of. In this sense, possessing a perceptual concept is analyzed in terms of perceptual relations to the very external, mind-independent objects and property-instances that the concept is of. [Schellenberg 2011a: 732]

OBJECTIONS

- 1. The fact that possessing a concept grounds concept use doesn't make concept possession relational. (BIV)
- 2. The fact (if it is one) that we analyze concept possession 'in terms of perceptual relations to the very external, mind-independent objects and property-instances that the concept is of', doesn't make concept possession relational. (Solubility)
- Conclusion: no reason to think that employing conceptual or non-conceptual structures in ordinary perceptual experience makes perceptual experience relational.

HALLUCINATIONS – RELATIONAL?

- [T]here cannot exist a perceptual concept that is not grounded in perception. It does not, however, follow from this that an individual subject must have had perceptions of the objects or property-instances that the concept is of to possess the relevant concept.... It follows only that there cannot exist perceptual concepts of objects or property instances that have not been perceived by someone, somewhere. A subject can acquire a concept through testimony and thus possess a perceptual concept without having perceived any objects or property instances that the concept picks out. If this is right, then any given individual perceiver can have hallucinations as of objects and property instances that she has not perceived. [Schellenberg 2011b: 21]
- [T]he subject who hallucinates blurriness need not herself have perceived instances of blurriness in the world. The concept could be acquired through testimony. [Schellenberg 2011b: 24]

OBJECTIONS

- 1. This doesn't seem to be neutral between conceptualism and non-conceptualism about content. We can allow that concepts can be transferred from one subject to another, but how can non-conceptual structures be thus transferred?
- 2. How does acquiring the concept 'blurriness' from another subject enable one to hallucinate blur? Why suppose that this is required?
- 3. Animals?
- Conclusion: no reason to think that hallucinatory perceptual experiences can be understood as relational.

SOLUTION: NON-RELATIONALISM

ADVERBIALISM

- Those philosophers who have taken seriously the metaphysical worries with standard representationalism, offer non-relational views that have developed from adverbialism.
- Adverbialism: based on the object-property relation.
- We can paraphrase 'I see red' as 'I see redly'. Perceiving redly is a matter of a subject perceiving in a certain way.

THREE CHALLENGES

- 1. Adverbialism about perceptual experience is incompatible with the idea that perceptual experiences have intentionality. [Crane, Tye]
- 2. Adverbialism cannot explain the apparent relationality of perceptual experience. [Crane]
- 3. Adverbialism is refuted by the 'many properties' problem. [Jackson]

I. ADVERBIALISM AND INTENTIONALITY

- “We could even deny that perceptual experiences *have* contents (as, for example, adverbial theorists do).” [Tye, 2007: 610]
- Adverbialism is the view which explains “*all* features of what it is like to have an experience in terms of intrinsic, non-intentional qualities of experience.” [Crane 2006: 26]

I. ADVERBIALISM AND INTENTIONALITY - RESPONSE

- We should deny that intentionality is a relation. [Kriegel 2007, 2008, 2011, Mendelovici forthcoming]
- Note, for this to generate a naturalistic account of intentional states in general, we must deny that intentionality involves a relation to objects but we must also deny that it involves a relation to a content.

2. ADVERBIALISM AND APPARENT RELATIONALITY

- The failure of adverbialism comes down to its “failure to accommodate even the apparent relationality of perception.” [Crane 2006]

2. ADVERBIALISM AND APPARENT RELATIONALITY - RESPONSE

- This could be taken as a criticism of the terminology. 'Seeing-redly' doesn't capture the phenomenology of perceptual experience. Adverbialists could argue that the terminology is only meant to capture the metaphysics. And a non-relational metaphysics is compatible with a relational phenomenology.
- However, the objection could be that there is no *explanation* of how metaphysically unstructured experiences could nevertheless seem to be relational. This is a problem for adverbialism.

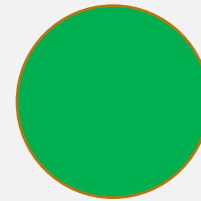
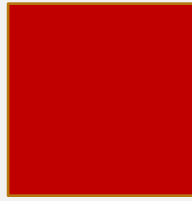
3. ADVERBIALISM AND JACKSON'S CHALLENGE



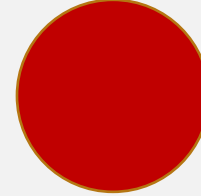
- If the adverbialist analyses this experience as 'seeing redly and squarely', then they can explain the entailment from 'I see a red square' to 'I see red'. (Seeing redly and squarely entails seeing redly.)

3. ADVERBIALISM AND THE MANY PROPERTIES OBJECTION

- However, then they can't distinguish this experience:



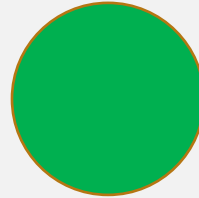
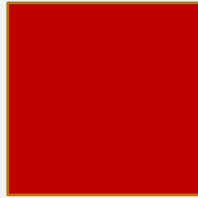
- From this experience:



- Both are 'seeing redly and squarely and greenly and roundly'.

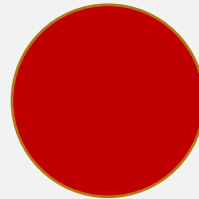
3. THE ADVERBIALIST RESPONSE

- This experience:



is 'seeing red-squarely and green-roundly'.

- And this experience:



is 'seeing green-squarely and red-roundly'.

PROBLEM ONE

- We lose the entailment relation between ‘seeing a red square’ and ‘seeing red’. Because ‘seeing red-squarely’ is an unstructured expression which doesn’t have ‘red’ as a distinct syntactic part, we cannot deduce from the fact that someone is ‘seeing red-squarely’ that they are ‘seeing redly’. (Jackson)
- Kriegel’s solution: ‘seeing red-squarely’ is a determinate of ‘seeing redly’.
- Grzankowski: we want to say that we can ‘see redly’ without ‘seeing red-squarely’ or ‘red-roundly’ etc, but it is essential to the determinable-determinate relation that something can only instantiate a determinable by instantiating a determinate of that determinable.

PROBLEM TWO

- *Can* the adverbialist explain the difference between the two experiences using ‘red-squarely and green-roundly’ for one and ‘green-squarely and red-roundly’ for the other?
- Adverbialists think that perceptual experiences are metaphysically unstructured and the unstructured terminology is designed to reflect this. Introducing structure at the descriptive level (which is what ‘red-squarely’ is doing) doesn’t get us structure at the metaphysical level. So Jackson’s objection remains.

PART-WHOLE NON-RELATIONALISM

- Instead of regarding the different aspects of the content of the experience as being properties or modifications of the experience, we should view the different aspects of the content as being constituent parts of the experience.
- Compatible with standard token identity theory – an experience is a neural process and the different aspects of the content are different parts of the experience. The overall neural process which is identical to the experience of a red square is composed of a smaller system of neurons which realize red experience, and another system of neurons which realize square experience and so on.

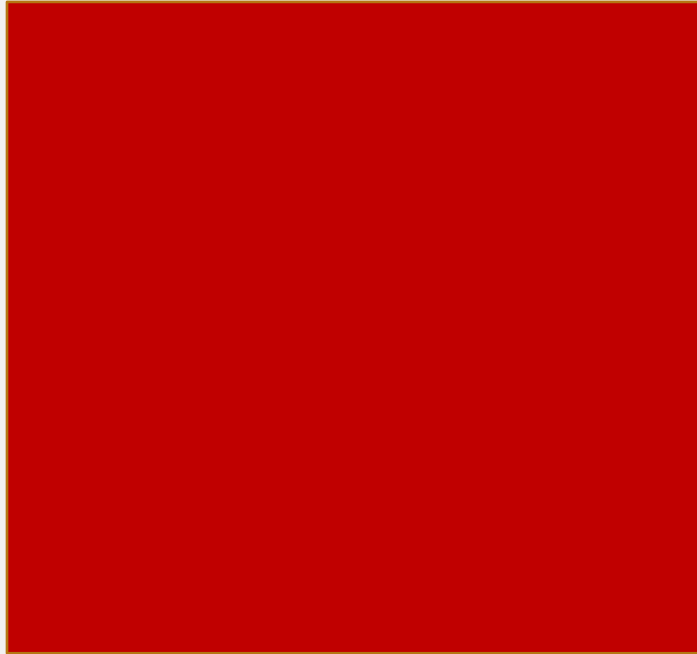
PART-WHOLE NON-RELATIONALISM - INTENTIONALITY

- Kriegel is right that intentional states have to be thoroughly non-relational if we want our view to be compatible with naturalism.
- Perceptual experiences *seem* to be relational.
- The intentionality of perceptual experience is: the phenomenon of something apparently relational being instantiated by something non-relational.
- (Phenomenologically relational but metaphysically non-relational)

BENEFITS OF PART-WHOLE NON-RELATIONALISM

- Adverbialism cannot explain why perceptual experiences seem to be relational, nor can it answer the many properties problem. This is because experiences are unstructured on adverbialism.
- Analysing perceptual experiences in terms of the part-whole relation allows structure in at the metaphysical level.

JACKSON'S 'ENTAILMENT' PROBLEM

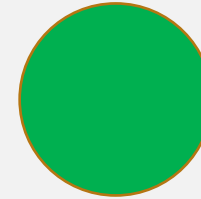


- We can deduce from the fact that someone is having a red square experience that they are having a red experience, because having a red square experience has 'red experience' as a component part.

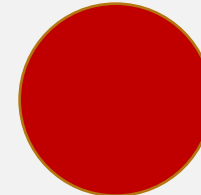
PART-WHOLE NON-RELATIONALISM AND THE MANY PROPERTIES PROBLEM

- At the initial stage of processing, experiences 1 & 2 aren't in fact different.
- It is true of both that the neural processes which realize them are composed of neural processes coding *red*, neural processes coding *green*, neural processes coding *square* and neural processes coding *round*.
- The mechanism of attention places the various features at particular locations, and co-location binds the features at that location together. (Treisman: Feature Integration Theory)
- So the reason we have experience 1 (say) is because via attention we experience *red-at-place1* and *square-at-place1*, and *green-at-place2* and *round-at-place2*.

• Experience 1:



• Experience 2:



APPARENT RELATIONALITY

- It is because the parts of the experience involve placing their features at locations that allows part-whole non-relationalism to answer the many-properties problem.
- But placing features at locations also explains why perceptual experiences seem to be relational.
- In other words, we need to see features as being located at particular places to bind those features together, and seeing at a location entails apparent relationality.

SUMMARY

- Standard representationalism is not a genuinely naturalistic view - most versions explicitly rely on non-natural entities, and all versions implicitly rely on non-natural entities.
- Schellenberg's attempt to give a naturalistic relational account fails.
- Therefore, we should be non-relationalists if we want a naturalistic account.
- Existing non-relational views are modelled on adverbialism, so perceptual experiences are unstructured. The lack of structure at the metaphysical level means that adverbialists cannot explain why perceptual experiences seem relational, nor can they respond adequately to Jackson's objections.
- Part-whole non-relationalism is more successful since it allows structure at the metaphysical level.
- Conclusion: we should endorse part-whole non-relationalism.
- Thank you!