

Session 4: Intentionalism

Alex Byrne (2001), 'Intentionalism Defended', *Philosophical Review*. Vol. 110, pp. 199-240.

Sensation and Perception

Christopher Peacocke suggest that we introduce a threefold distinction between sensation, perception, and judgement to analyse our consciousness of the world.

"Corresponding to the traditional distinction between sensation and perception, we can draw a distinction between sensational and representational properties of experience. Representational properties will be properties an experience has in virtue of features of its representational content; while sensational properties will be properties an experience has in virtue of some aspect—other than its representational content—of what it is like to have that experience." (Peacocke 1983, p.5)

On top of that, we find the content of judgments about experience. Though one might think that judgment can sometimes causally influence perception, the contents of perception and the contents of judgment are independent. (Peacocke uses the example of a *trompe l'oeil* painting to argue for independence.)



Question: are the sensational properties of experience in the same way independent from its representational properties? The intentionalist denies this.

(They accept what Peacocke calls an Adequacy Thesis: that you can adequately characterise the intrinsic properties of the experience by describing the way things seem to the subject of these experiences.)

Intentionalism: (un)restricted, intermodal, or intramodal

All intentionalists maintain that "within a (paradigmatic) perceptual modality, if two possible experiences differ in phenomenal character, they differ in content". (Byrne 2011, p. 205)

- Should we think that the phenomenal difference between perceptual and non-perceptual experience (e.g. bodily sensations like headaches, itches, pinpricks, and orgasms) is determined by a difference in content? **Unrestricted** intentionalists say yes. **Restricted** intentionalists say no.
- Should we also think that the phenomenal difference between perceptual modalities is determined by a difference in content? The **intermodal** intentionalist says yes. The **intramodal** intentionalist says no.

There are objections to both intermodal and intramodal intentionalism: a perception and a judgment can have the same content, yet the perception and judgment differ in phenomenal character (John 2005). Intermodal intentionalism is false. But intramodal intentionalism is false too. Crossmodal illusions and intermodal binding show that phenomenal difference in a modality are not wholly determined by the representational content in that modality (O'Callaghan 2008; e.g. McGurk effect, ventriloquist effect.)

Note that we should also distinguish weak intentionalism (supervenience) from strong intentionalism (supervenience + reduction). If we want to preserve physicalism, then strong intentionalism is an attractive thesis.

An argument for intentionalism

"Imagine the experiences of looking, on separate occasions, at three colored chips on a neutral background. The first two chips are blue, the third is red, and the subject has normal vision. All can agree that, as far as "what it's like" to undergo the experiences is concerned, seeing the first chip and seeing the second have something in common that seeing the third lacks. Saying that the first two experiences but not the third share a phenomenal character—the "B-character," we might call it—is simply a way of recording this fact." (Byrne 2001, 206)

A reconstruction of Byrne's argument

1. Necessarily, if two experiences differ in phenomenal character, then there is an introspectable difference between them.
 2. Necessarily, if there is an introspectable difference between two experiences, then there is a difference in the way things seem to the subject of these experiences
 3. Necessarily, if there is a difference in the way things seem to the subject of two experiences, there is a difference in the content of these two experiences.
- C. Necessarily, if two experiences differ in phenomenal character, they differ in content.

Three classes of objections (against P2)

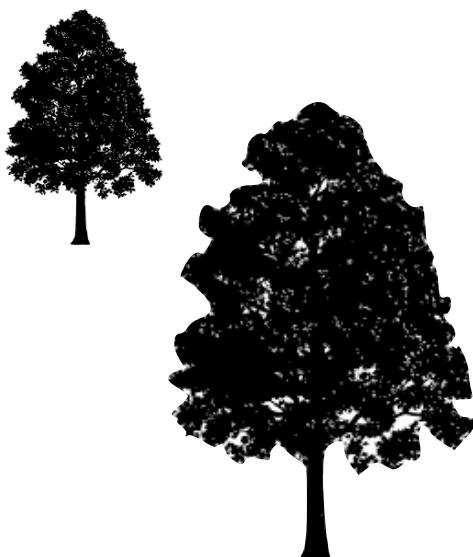
Introspectable differences without a difference in how things seem:

Class I: Science-fiction cases (e.g. inverted spectrum)

Class II: Ordinary experience (Ordinary perception, ordinary bodily, 'funny' experiences)

Cass III: Zombies (creatures that lack access to the introspectable differences)

Peacocke's trees



(1) Suppose you are standing on a road which stretches from you in a straight line to the horizon. There are two trees at the roadside, one a hundred yards from you, the other two hundred. Your experience represents these objects as being of the same physical height and other dimensions; that is, taking your experience at face value you would judge that the trees are roughly the same physical size, just as in the *trompe l'œil* example, without countervailing beliefs you would judge that there is a violin on the door; and in this case we can suppose that the experience is a perception of the scene around you. Yet there is also some sense in which the nearer tree occupies more of your visual field than the more distant tree. This is as much a feature of your experience itself as is its representing the trees as being the same height. The experience can possess this feature without your having any concept of the feature or of the visual field: you simply enjoy an experience which has the feature. It is a feature which makes Rock say that the greater size of the retinal image of the nearer tree is not without some reflection in consciousness, and may be what earlier writers such as Ward meant when they wrote of differences in extensity.⁹ It presents an initial challenge to the Adequacy Thesis, since no veridical experience can represent one tree as larger than another and also as the same size as the other. The challenge to the extreme perceptual theorist is to account for these facts about size in the visual field without abandoning the AT. We can label this problem 'the problem of the additional characterization'.