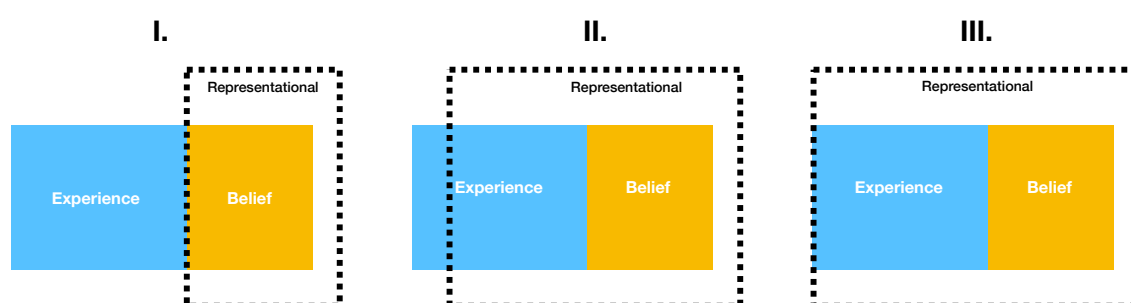


Session 5: **Intentionalism 2**

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

Sensation, Perception, and Belief

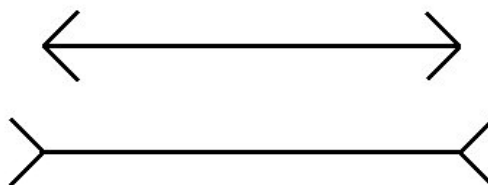
Following Christopher Peacocke, we may introduce a threefold conceptual distinction between sensation, perception, and belief to analyse our consciousness of the world. Here's are three models that jointly portray the relevant options this generates:



Belief (judgment): We cannot reduce what you believe to what is in fact the case. This is because your belief can be false or inaccurate. To account for this, we can assume that our beliefs represent the world to be a certain way. The representational properties of a belief are determined by how the subject that has the belief takes the world to be. How a subject takes the world to be is independent of how the (mind-independent) world in fact is. Given that belief has no non-representational aspects, the intrinsic properties of a belief can be adequately characterised by describing how the subject takes the world to be.

Experience (sensation + perception): Models II and III assume that experience is belief-like. Also your experience can be false or inaccurate. This motivates attributing representational content to experience. The representational properties of experience are determined by how the experience makes things seem to the subject. How the experience makes things seem to the subject is both independent of how (mind-independent) things actually are, and independent of what the subject believes.

Peacocke uses his trompe l'oeil violin example to justify the move away from Model I. We can also consider the following example (first used in this way by Gareth Evans in his *Varieties of Reference*, 1982):



Müller-Lyer illusion

Intentionalism: (un)restricted, intermodal, or intramodal

Intentionalists defend Model III. (Peacocke describes them as ‘extreme perceptual theorists’). Minimally, intentionalism maintains that “*within* a (paradigmatic) perceptual modality, if two possible experiences differ in phenomenal character, they differ in content”. (Byrne 2011, p. 205) (Some versions also include non-perceptual modalities, and some versions maintain intentionalism also across modalities.)

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

An argument for intentionalism

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.

Peacocke’s trees

To argue against Model III, we should find an experience that has a property P (i) that is not a representational property, and (ii) that is independent of the representational properties of the experience.

Byrne: “Given that the ‘two trees’ [...] are not even intended by Peacocke to be cases of phenomenal character varying despite sameness of content, it is not at all obvious why Peacocke supposes them to present an ‘initial challenge’ to the Adequacy Thesis.” (p. 222)

To what extent is Byrne confused about what the Adequacy Thesis is? To what extent is Peacocke building too much into the intentionalist position?

(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’.

