

# Defending the Content View of Perceptual Experience



# Defending the Content View of Perceptual Experience

By

Diego Zucca

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Defending the Content View of Perceptual Experience

By Diego Zucca

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2015 by Diego Zucca

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-8275-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8275-0

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .....	x
Acknowledgments .....	xii
Introduction .....	1
<b>Chapter One: The Semantics of <i>Seeing</i> and Related “Experiential” Predicates</b>	
Introduction .....	11
Part I .....	13
A Methodological Remark	
Part II .....	15
Seeing Something	
II.1 Basic Conditions	
II.2 Some Objections	
II.3 Transparency	
Part III .....	26
Seeing That P, Seeing That <i>a</i> Is F	
III.1 Propositionality	
III.2 Factivity	
III.3 Opacity	
III.4 Literal/Metaphorical	
III.5 Object-Seeing and Fact-Seeing	
III.6 Conceptuality	
III.7 Definition	
Part IV .....	36
Seeing-As, Seeing Something As Something	
IV.1 Implicativity and Normative Evaluability	
IV.2 Recognition	
IV.3 “Thick” Categories and Sensible Profiles	
IV.4 Definition	

IV.5 What Is a Sensible Profile? The SCM-Properties	
IV.6 The Features of Seeing-As	
Part V .....	46
Looking, Seeming, Appearing	
V.1 Looks/Seems/Appears: Analogies and Differences	
V.2 A Principle Governing “Looks” Ascriptions	
V.3 Three Uses of “Looks”	
V.4 Is There a Phenomenological “Looks”?	
V.5 The Phenomenological “Looks” Is Not Independent	
V.6 “Looks F” Depends on “Is F”	
V.7 To Sum Up	
Concluding Remarks	
<b>Chapter Two: Some Basic Features of Perceptual Experience</b>	
Introduction .....	67
Part I .....	68
The Belief Theory: Philosophical Arguments For and Against	
I.1 The Belief Theory	
I.2 Virtues of the Belief Theory	
I.3 The Argument From Illusion, the Belief Theory and the Adverbialist View	
I.4 The Problems of the Belief Theory. Objections and Possible Replies	
I.5 The Belief Theory and the Phenomenological Adequacy Constraint	
I.6 Beliefs, Inferences, Concepts: Rationality Constraint and Generality Constraint	
I.7 Further Difficulties of the Belief Theory	
Part II .....	88
Against the Belief Theory: Arguments from Experimental Evidence	
II.1 Inattentional- and Change- Blindness: There Is Seeing Without Noticing	
II.2 The Sperling Experiment and What It Tells With Respect to the Belief Theory	
II.3 The Case of Visual Associative Agnosia and the Belief Theory	
II.4 The Case of Optic Ataxia and the Belief Theory	
II.5 The Case of Blindsight and the Belief Theory	
Concluding Remarks	

**Chapter Three: The Content View**

Introduction .....	105
Part I .....	106
The Core Idea of the Content View (CV)	
I.1 Introducing the Content View	
I.2 The Content View and the Belief Theory	
I.3 Phenomenal Character and Representational Content	
I.4 Transparency and Richness of Details	
I.5 The Scenario Content Introduced	
Part II .....	117
Some <i>Prima Facie</i> Virtues of the Content View	
II.1 Distinctive Features of States with Intentional Content	
II.2 Perceptual Experience and Accuracy	
II.3 The Content View and Ordinary Semantics of “Seeing” and “Looking”	
Concluding Remarks	

**Chapter Four: The Content View Articulated**

Introduction .....	129
Part I .....	130
Layers and Components of Perceptual Content	
I.1 Beyond the <i>Scenario Content</i>	
I.2 Proto-propositional Content and <i>Seeing-As</i>	
I.3 <i>Scenario Content</i> and <i>Object-Seeing</i>	
I.4 Three Layers of Content	
I.5 The Limits of Dretske’s Theory of Seeing	
Part II .....	149
Objects and Properties: How They Feature in Perceptual Content	
II.1 Back from Recognition to Discrimination	
II.2 Object-Seeing through Property Discrimination	
II.3 Which Basic Semantic Ingredients Shape the Content of Visual Perception?	
II.4 Object-Dependency and Singularity	
II.5 Demonstrative Contents and Semantic Gap	

## **Chapter Five: Phenomenal Character and Kinds of Perceptual Content**

Part I .....	174
Phenomenal Character and Representational Content	
I.1 Reconsidering Looks within the <i>Content View</i>	
I.2 The Case of Perceptual Constancy	
I.3 How Are We Aware of the Mode of Our Perceptual Experiences?	
I.4 From Content Externalism to Phenomenal Externalism?	
Part II .....	215
Fregean vs. Russellian Content	
II.1 To Recap Where We Are	
II.2 Chalmers’s Third Way: the Double-Content View	
II.3 Weaknesses of the Double-Content View	
II.4 Perceptual Content and Character Are Wide, External, Russellian	
Concluding Remarks	

## **Chapter Six: *Seeing-As* and the Range of Represented Properties**

Part I .....	232
<i>Seeing-As</i> between “Thin” Properties and “Thick” Properties	
I.1 Sensible Profiles and the Properties They Are Made Out Of	
I.2 Liberals and Conservatives	
I.3 A “Thin” and a “Thick” System? The Dual Content View	
Part II .....	244
The Phenomenal Contrast Method	
II.1 Introducing the Phenomenal Contrast Method	
II.2 Cyrillic Words and Pine Trees	
II.3 Does Visual Agnosia Support the Liberal View?	
II.4 Do Ambiguous Figures Support the Liberal View?	
Part III .....	266
The Dual Content View: Beyond the Phenomenal Contrast Method	
III.1 The Dual Content View Principle	
III.2 Preparatory vs. Constitutive Cognitive Processes	
III.3 The (Blurry) Superior Bound of Perceptual Content	
III.4 Perceptual Content Is Moderately Rich and Outstrips Phenomenal Content	
Concluding Remarks	



## **Chapter Seven: Bringing the Disjunctivist Challenge into the Intentionalist View**

Introduction .....	297
Part I .....	298
Disjunctivism Introduced	
I.1 What Is Disjunctivism?	
I.2 The Reasons for Disjunctivism: The Detachment Problem	
Part II .....	308
The Good, the Bad and the Neutral: A Moderately Disjunctive Intentionalism	
II.1 The Priority of the Successful	
II.2 Function and Content	
II.3 Where Do We Put Illusions?	
II.4 A Problem: The “Function” of Hallucinations	
II.5 The Semantic Gap of Hallucinatory Contents	
II.6 Beyond the Detachment Problem	
Concluding Remarks	
Conclusions .....	357
Bibliography .....	359
Index of Authors .....	378

## PREFACE

This book is a defense of the content view (CV) on perceptual experience. The CV is the idea that our perceptual experiences represent the world as being a certain way, so they have representational content. Three main issues are addressed in this work.

First, I show that the CV fits very well with the logical behavior of ordinary ascriptions of seeing-episodes and related experiential episodes, as well as with our pre-theoretical intuitions about what perceiving and experiencing ultimately are: this preliminary analysis speaks to the *prima facie* plausibility of such a view.

Second, I put forward a detailed account of perceptual episodes in semantic terms, by articulating a specific version of the content view. I provide arguments for the following theses: perceptual content is two-layered so it involves an iconic level and a discrete or proto-propositional level (which roughly maps the *seeing-as* ascriptions in ordinary practices). Perceptual content is singular and object-dependent or *de re*, so it includes environmental objects as its semantic constituents. The phenomenal character of perceptual experience is co-determined by the represented properties together with the mode (e.g., visual mode), but not by the perceived objects: I label such a view as impure representationalism. Perceptual content is “Russellian”: it consists of worldly objects, properties and relations. Both perceptual content and phenomenal character are “wide” or determined by environmental factors, thus there is no Fregean narrow perceptual content. In addition, there are two layers of properties that can be represented in perception: a “thin” layer—for example, for visual perception: spatial, chromatic, morphological properties—and a thicker layer, which may depend on perceptual learning and includes properties other than the “thin” ones but is nevertheless not as “thick” as natural kind-properties.

Third, I show that such a version of the CV can cope with the typical objections put forward by the advocates of (anti-intentionalist versions of) disjunctivism. I myself put forward a moderately disjunctivist version of the CV, according to which perceptual relations (illusory or veridical) must be told apart from hallucinations, and as mental states of a different kind. Such disjunctivism is “moderate” insofar as it allows genuine

relational perceptual experiences and hallucinations to share a positive phenomenal character, contrary to what radical-disjunctivism-*cum*-naïve-realism believes.

Ultimately, this will show that the CV vindicates our pre-theoretical intuitions and does justice to our ordinary ascriptive practices. I will articulate a detailed and argued version of the CV, and show that such a version is not vulnerable to the standard objections recently placed on it by the disjunctive branch. This study can therefore be considered a global, multifaceted argument for the CV

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank first and foremost Theodor Scaltsass and Matthew Nudds for their philosophical and methodological advice and constructive criticism. I am grateful to Christopher Peacocke for the kind and helpful support I received during an eight-month sabbatical spent at the Columbia University of New York. While there I also had the good fortune to encounter Achille Varzi, who made my visit particularly fruitful and interesting. I owe a special debt to Luigi Ruggiu, who has followed and encouraged my work during the years.

I have also benefited greatly from the passionate discussions, reading groups, philosophical dinners and criticisms with Andrew McKinlay, Jonas Christensen, Andreas Paraskevaides, Roberto Loss, and Matteo Giannasi.

This work is dedicated to my love who made it possible, Carolina Ozan.

## INTRODUCTION

This book is about the content view (CV) on perceptual experience—in particular, on visual experience—and about the idea that perceptual experiences have representational content. Its global aim is to argue for a certain version of the CV, one that can meet the *desiderata* of a satisfactory theory of perceptual experience and be defended from the main criticisms against it, especially from the disjunctivists. The discourse is articulated in several arguments, discussions and specific proposals that develop into three major lines of inquiry.

First, I will show that the CV fits well with ordinary ascriptions of visual episodes and visual experiences. Ordinary ways of talking about seeing and experiencing embed deep and pre-theoretical intuitions about what the ascribed episodes and states are, or at least seem to be. Capturing the commonsensical intuitions about matter and making sense of the ordinary ways of talking about it are relevant virtues for a philosophical theory, even if our pre-theoretical intuitions are wrong and our ordinary ways of talking are confused. From a methodological point of view, showing that the CV respects and vindicates these pre-theoretical intuitions and ways of talking is not an arbitrary celebration of vulgarity. Having such virtues does not amount to it being true, of course; still, a theory that possesses such virtues is, *ceteris paribus*, to be preferred over a theory that lacks them. Therefore, showing that the CV has these virtues counts as a *prima facie* argument in favor of its plausibility.

Second, I will argue for a certain detailed version of the CV by discussing the main issues raised within the debate on it and taking a stand on each of them so as to produce a systematic picture involving arguments and commitments. These issues concern the many types and layers of perceptual content, the semantic structure and the way objects and properties feature in perceptual content, the relation between phenomenal character and representational content, the externalism/internalism debate on perceptual content and character, the issue about whether perceptual content is Fregean or Russellian and the issue about whether the properties represented in perception are just “thin” (e.g., colors, shapes and spatial properties for the visual mode) or also “thick.”

Third, I will try to defend the CV—after having spelled out a specific and detailed version of it—from the principal criticisms of the recently

revived naïve realism, a new form of radical disjunctivism, revolving around the relation between successful and deceptive perceptions. I will show that *some* of these criticisms, instead of defeating the theory, can be embedded into it. Indeed, the CV I articulate is a form of moderate disjunctivism. However, I will argue that some other criticisms, according to which the CV should just be abandoned, can be addressed and coped with. As a result, my specific version of the CV is vindicated and shown to be the most promising, avoiding the problems ascribed to it and the dismissal of it *as such* by its opponents.

To develop these three lines of inquiry organically, I will proceed as follows.

Chapter one is the introduction. I systematically analyze the logical and semantically relevant features of ordinary ascriptions and self-ascriptions of visual episodes and experiences. First, I propose a list of necessary and sufficient conditions for a subject to be said to be *seeing* something, then I argue that such conditions are highly plausible. The logical behavior of seeing-ascriptions is analyzed, like “S sees O”, “S sees an F.” Second, I move on to consider how *seeing-that* ascriptions behave and what seeing-that involves in cases like “S sees that P”, “S sees that *a* is F.” I individuate certain features of ascriptive contexts (opacity, concept-involvement, propositionally, factivity) and argue that seeing-that is a fully-fledged propositional attitude that amounts to *coming to know by visual means*. Then I consider *seeing-as* ascriptions and their behavior, expressed by a three-place relation as “S sees *a* as an F.” Seeing-as is intermediate between object-seeing and seeing-that; it presupposes the first and is presupposed by the second. I show that ascribing a *seeing-as* episode amounts to ascribing a positive, recursive, vision-based recognitional disposition, and I discuss the relation between such ascriptions and the evaluability of such episodes as mistaken or accurate.

After evaluating object-seeing (seeing-X), propositional seeing (seeing that P), and recognitional seeing (seeing *a* as an F), I move on to consider the ascription of experiential predicates like “looking,” “seeming” and “appearing” in their different uses, roles and applications in ordinary sentences. In discussing look-ascriptions specifically—helped by the relative literature—I make explicit the relationship between the different senses in which “looking” may be ascribed an epistemic sense (it looks to S as if *a* is F), a comparative sense (A looks like B) or a phenomenological sense (“the penny looks elliptical to me from here”). I question the independence of the phenomenological use of “looks.” Then I argue, by re-articulating a point held by Sellars, that the understanding of “looks F” conceptually and logically depends on the understanding of “is F”: I

explore the ways of this dependence.

Such a taxonomic survey is a way of getting into perception with a clearer grip on certain fundamental distinctions, both conceptual and terminological. As Austin suggested, ordinary language is not the last word; yet, it is the first.

In Chapter Two, I introduce the belief theory of perception and point out some of its basic virtues. I start with introducing the belief theory itself and locating it in the classical debate on perception between sense-data theorists, direct realists and adverbialists. By showing its advantages in treating perception in representational terms (beliefs are representations), I consider its difficulties—the philosophical ones, on the one hand, and the problems it encounters before experimental evidence is obtained on the other. The philosophical problems are related to its phenomenological inaptness and to the different behavior of perceiving something to be F from believing that something is F (concept-involving, entailing inferential sensitivity and demanding constraints on rationality). The experimental evidence I have focused on (inattentional- and change blindness, the Sperling experiment, visual associative agnosia, optic ataxia, blind sight) suggests that there is seeing without noticing, seeing without believing, and also belief-acquiring through perception without perceptual experience, so perceptual experience cannot be reduced simply to belief-acquiring.

In Chapter Three, I go on to introduce the CV as a view that can embed the virtues of the belief theory—as a semantic, representational account of perception—without suffering from the philosophical and experimental weaknesses focused on above. The first crucial move is that of introducing the notion of non-conceptual content and substituting it for the doxastic account involved in belief theory. I argue that if perceptions are considered as non-conceptual representations, the CV can avoid all the difficulties encountered by the belief theory. Non-conceptual content is phenomenologically apt, does justice to the difference between something looking F to S and S's believing that something is F (this being concept-involving, entailing inference-sensitivity and rational capacities on the part of S), and has no special problems with the experimental data (a non-conceptual representation is pre-doxastic, can occur without its content being believed, can outstrip conscious attention, and so on). Then, I take into consideration the relation between phenomenal character and representational content to suggest that fineness of grain and the lack of structure of non-conceptual content can do justice to perceptual phenomenology, which is profuse and rich in details in a way a doxastic state cannot be. I introduce Peacocke's notion of *scenario content* as a

very promising way of semantically characterizing perceptual content that does justice to the distinctiveness of perceptual phenomenology.

Afterwards, I isolate and briefly discuss some general reasons for favoring the CV, namely, some of its fundamental explanatory virtues with respect to certain apparent features of perceptual experiences: *aspect*, *absence*, *accuracy*, *aboutness*. Since the CV is in a position to account for such apparent properties—representations typically exhibit such features—it is a highly promising view worth taking very seriously. This is not a trivial point because, surprisingly enough, the CV is very seldom argued for as such. Rather, it is presupposed, and one or the other version of it is defended or attacked.

Finally, I consider some interesting analogies with the CV and the ordinary ways of ascribing seeing-episodes. The difference between “seeing something” and “seeing that” maps the difference between perceptually-non-conceptually representing and coming to believe by visual means that things are a certain way. I will also argue that looking-ascriptions are consistent with the representational conception of perceptual experience, and that the CV vindicates our pre-theoretical intuition that our perceptual experiences can be veridical, partially illusory or totally illusory. No non-representational account of that intuitive matching/mismatching relationship is available.

Chapters four to six are the *pars construens* core of this book, where I examine the matter and articulate a certain version of the CV (based on the options made available in the current debate, of course).

In Chapter Four, I first argue for a *two-layered* view of visual content (Part I). Beyond the scenario content, which is specified as ways of filling out the space around the perceiver and has spatial-chromatic-morphological properties, another semantic layer is introduced, the proto-propositional content. With Peacocke, I argue that the scenario content cannot capture all there is in perceptual representation; in particular, certain acts of property-recognition can be present or absent without impacting scenario content. I show that introducing a perceptual proto-propositional content between the scenario content and the doxastic content of perceptual beliefs maps the pre-theoretical necessity, testified in ordinary ascriptive practices, to distinguish *object-seeing* from *seeing-as*, and both of them from *seeing-that*. Indeed, *seeing-as* ascriptions basically ascribe visual episodes with proto-propositional content. I criticize Dretske’s theory of seeing, which distinguishes simple seeing from epistemic seeing and fatally overlooks the intermediate level of *seeing-as*, or recognitional seeing. Without that level, the semantic and epistemological transition from object-seeing to visually-based propositional knowledge



remains an unaccountable mystery.

Second, I argue for the object-dependency and singularity of visual content (Part II) and against the generality thesis held by Searle, McGinn and others. In my view, a visual experience is individuated by a *subject*, a *Content* (uppercase) composed by a perceived *object* and by a set of represented properties (the *content*, lowercase), a perceptual *mode*. I show that the generality thesis is false so the singularity thesis must be true. Visual perception involves particulars in its Content, so visual Contents are *de re*, demonstrative Contents. Then I profile the big puzzle that the singularity thesis opens with respect to hallucinatory contents since hallucinations do not have worldly particulars as constituents of their putative contents. I have labeled it the semantic gap problem, but I deal with it systematically only in the last chapter (Chapter Seven, Part II.5).

In Chapter Five, I first defend a form of *impure representationalism* about phenomenal character (Part I). In this view, the phenomenal character of a conscious perception is made out of represented properties but represented under a *mode* (e.g. the visual mode). So in my view there is a dependence-without-reduction rather than an identity between the phenomenal and the intentional, between character and content (lowercase). In particular, the object does not determine the phenomenal character (that is why a hallucination can share its character with a veridical perception); it is instead determined by the *content* (lowercase) plus the mode.

To argue for such an impure representationalist account of phenomenal character, I start by considering the phenomenon of perceptual constancy. This phenomenon seems to show that there can be a change in “look” without a change in represented properties; for example, if you tilt a coin on its side, it will “look” elliptical but it will keep *appearing* round. I reply that perceptual constancy is not an argument against representationalism—because the orientation of the coin is represented in vision, something *does* change in the represented properties. There is no phenomenal change without representational change. Nonetheless, I suggest that the phenomenology involved in perceptual constancy does show perceptual experiences to be *egocentric* perspectival representations of the world. For some, the fact that egocentric contents are represented in perception explains the perspectival phenomenology of visual experience, but egocentric *contents* (representations of the very relations between the world and the perceiver) can only partially account for the egocentric *character* of visual experience. I argue that, in order to exhaustively account for the egocentric character of visual experience, we need to appeal also to the mode. The world is represented under a mode, and this enables the experience to represent egocentric contents. Visual

representation is perspectival in a way that goes beyond representing our perspective on the world. Rather, both the world and our contingent perspective on it are perspectively represented. Thanks to the mode, perceptions represent the world “from here.”

Following this line of thinking, I consider the inverted spectrum hypothesis and the Inverted Earth thought experiment as potential objections to representationalism. I show that the inverted spectrum scenario, upon closer inspection of how our color-experience holistically involves interwoven relations between color-properties (brightness, hue, saturation), is less conceivable than it appears *prima facie*. Since each color has a place in a virtual three-dimensional space with brightness, saturation and hue as coordinates, inverting two colors would ruin all the other representable relations between colors. I also analyze Block’s Inverted Earth thought experiment and argue that it does not show that representationalism is false unless you already take it as a given: in other words, it is an interesting argument to make our intuitions explicit but it is circular in the end. I accept that the conjunction of representationalism with respect to the phenomenal character and externalism with respect to the perceptual content entails phenomenal externalism. Since I hold both representationalism (though impure) and content externalism to be true, I must accept phenomenal externalism, even though it is counter-intuitive (content externalism also sounded outrageous in the past). So I commit to phenomenal externalism.

In Part II, I examine a very important issue for the CV so as to complete my global picture of the semantic characterization of perceptual episodes: the issue of whether perceptual content is Fregean or Russellian in nature. I discuss Chalmers’s *double-content view*, the proposal that perceptual experience has two kinds of content, one Russellian and the other Fregean. Chalmers aims to save phenomenal internalism and content externalism by distinguishing a Fregean narrow content, on which phenomenal character supervenes, and a wide Russellian content. The Fregean content would be specified, for example, as the property that normally causes the phenomenal property F; the Russellian content would be what normally causes that phenomenal property in the subject’s environment. I provide many arguments against that proposal: the first being that “normal causation” entering perceptual content is implausible. Perceptual contents are not that sophisticated. Moreover, it does not seem at all likely that visual phenomenology includes the representation of properties as “being normally caused by” something. Perceptual content should be ascribed in a way that respects perceptual phenomenology. Second, Chalmers assumes that a phenomenal property can be picked out

independently on any worldly represented property, but that possibility is far from uncontroversial. In addition, I show that such a possibility would entail a separation (a totally contingent relation) between phenomenal character and representational content, therefore this view inherits the same problems typical of *qualia*-realism. Such a separation does not do justice to the transparency of visual phenomenology: our perceptual experiences seem to attribute to the surrounding world those properties we are aware of in perceiving.

In addition, references to “normality” and appropriateness of causation are highly problematic. Any normality clause on causation implicitly refers to an environment, but then the Fregean content is not narrow anymore. I show there is no normality that is not environment-indexed, so there is no narrow normality. If there were a Fregean content of perception, it would be wide, so we would be better to get rid of it and hold on to a wide external Russellian content. Chalmers’s third way is flawed.

I conclude that perceptual content is Russellian and wide and (impure) representationalism about phenomenal character is true, so phenomenal character is wide and phenomenal externalism is true.

In Chapter Six, I take a stand on the issue that properties can be represented in perception (I mainly consider the case of visual perception as a paradigm, as I do in the whole book).

In the first part, I introduce the basic terms of the debate between “liberals” and “conservatives” on perceptually representable properties.

In the second, I critically discuss the so-called phenomenal contrast method, a method of comparative introspection that is supposed to lead—according to some of its advocates, especially Susanne Siegel—to a liberal view, namely, to the idea that visual perception can well represent other “thicker” properties than colors, shapes, distances, shapes and the like. I argue that such a method is flawed because the phenomenal difference between the two contrasted experiences can also be explained within a “conservative” framework. In my experience, non-visually representing a “thick” property as a consequence of a visual episode can have a top-down effect on the “thin” properties, without the very “thick” property itself (like [being a lemon] or [being a pine tree] when seeing a lemon or a pine tree) being *visually* represented. Therefore, the phenomenal difference between an experience  $E^1$  (seeing a lemon as a lemon) and  $E^2$  (seeing a lemon without seeing it as a lemon) can be explained without accepting that [being a lemon] is a visually represented property in  $E^1$ .

In the third part of Chapter Six, I argue for a moderately liberal view on properties represented in perception on another basis than the (flawed)

phenomenal contrast method: thanks to perceptual learning, a perceiver can expand the range of perceptually representable properties beyond the range of “thin” properties (for example, in visual experience, beyond the spatial-chromatic-morphological properties). Nonetheless, such “thick” contents can outstrip visual phenomenology so they are not detectable by means of the phenomenal contrast method. I provide a criterion—based on whether the way of learning to represent a given property is purely perceptual or inferential—for determining whether a certain property is perceptually represented or not.

In Chapter Seven, I take at face value the objections to the CV typically made by those disjunctivists who advocate naïve realism.

First (Part I), I take into consideration the core idea of disjunctivism and the principles it rejects. Then I present the reasons disjunctivists provide for being against the CV: I hold that these reasons (phenomenological, epistemological, semantically, metaphysical) are all amenable to what I call the detachment problem. It seems that, on the CV, a veridical perceptual experience must be conceived of as separate from the world, characterized and type-individuated independently of its being a genuine relation to the world. Indeed, if perceptual experiences are individuated by their semantic properties or contents, and the content they possess is independent of being exemplified or not, then veridical experiences and hallucinations should be states of the same kind, and not even the first can be thought of as an essentially world-involving state. Here are the basic facets of the detachment problem. Perceptual phenomenology is presentational (phenomenological facet), perceptual knowledge entails that veridical experiences make available to us more than what hallucinations make available to us, on pain of skeptic consequences (epistemological facet); perceptual beliefs and judgments can be *de re* and anchored to the world only if perceptual experience is a direct presentation of worldly particulars (semantic facet): if veridical experiences are genuine manifestations of the world, they cannot be mental states of the same fundamental kind as hallucinations (metaphysical facet).

Second (Part II), I argue for a moderately disjunctive version of the CV, a version that should embed the demand of cognitive contact raised by the disjunctivists, so avoiding the detachment problem in all its facets. I argue that there is a conceptual, explanatory and metaphysical asymmetrical dependence between the bad case and the good case: disjunctivists are right in taking the good case as basic and in characterizing the bad case in terms of it.

I argue that, from a naturalistic point of view, mental states are to be

type-individuated according to their natural functions. I suppose that a teleo-semantic version of the CV is true. Rather than arguing for its truth (it would take another book), I show that the CV could meet the demands and the worries raised by disjunctivists, especially with respect to the good/bad asymmetrical dependence. Moreover, it would provide a naturalistic explanation of that asymmetry. A wired-in teleo-function is acquired through evolutionary selection thanks to its success and is thus defined by reference to its successful exercises, so its failed exercises are essentially a failure *of* the function they are exercises of. However, if perceptual states are teleo-functional states, a veridical experience and a deceptive experience will share their function of representing the environment a certain way, even if one is a successful exercise and the other is not. So a teleo-functional type-individuation of mental states rules out radical disjunctivism insofar as it predicts that veridical and non-veridical perceptions have relevant properties in common.

Nonetheless, I argue that we should opt for a disjunctive treatment having hallucinations and perceptual experiences (veridical or illusory) as disjuncts rather than contrasting veridical and deceptive experiences. Veridical perceptions and illusions are genuine relations to the world, they are world-involving states with *de re*, object-dependent Contents, whilst hallucinations are not relational states but states that introspectively seem to be what they are not—namely, relational states. Disjunctivists are right in thinking that subjective indiscriminability is not sufficient for sameness in kind—it is not sufficient for sameness in Content either. They are right in thinking that, for two mental states, having the same proximate causes is not sufficient to be of the same mental kind. Indeed, hallucinations are objectless states even if they could have the same proximate causes as perceptions (veridical or illusory), whereas perceptual experiences (accurate or not) are essentially relational states involving a worldly object as a target.

Next (Part III), I deal with two related apparent problems for the CV, which I shall call an item awareness problem and a semantic gap problem. The first addresses the question of what we are aware of when hallucinating; the second addresses the question of how hallucinations can be inaccurate states, as they intuitively seem to be, if they lack an object the represented properties could match or mismatch. Concerning the first problem, I rule out the Meinongian proposal according to which hallucinations have non-existent particulars as genuine objects. I argue against the extravagant idea that hallucinatory objects are genuine particulars but have the bizarre property of not existing; if it were so, then hallucinations would be *a priori* true. Indeed, the hallucinated pink rat *is*

pink even though it lacks existence. In this way not only is the inaccuracy of hallucination not vindicated, it even becomes impossible. Then I consider a more promising option—when hallucinating, we are aware of structured complexes of instantiated properties (property view) even if we wrongly seem to be confronted with particulars. After raising some perplexities about this proposal, I consider a more radical alternative to it; i.e., the idea that while hallucinating we are not aware of *anything*, neither of particulars nor of properties (no-item view). For property view, the conscious character of our state depends on the mode and represented properties, but a conscious state's representing certain properties does not entail that state's involving the awareness of these properties. I do not adjudicate between the property view and the no-item view; rather I point at the virtues and weaknesses of both, and then I conclude that one of them must be true. I also point out that the item awareness problem is not a problem peculiar to the CV. It is shared by other views on perception so it cannot be held against the CV. Anyway, the second issue of the semantic gap of hallucinatory contents is independent of whether we prefer the property view and the no-item view. In neither case would we be aware of these particulars so no worldly object can work as a truth-maker or as an accuracy-maker for hallucinatory states. My dealing with the problem consists of dropping the intuition of inaccuracy of hallucinations and explaining its origin and its apparent force on us. Hallucinations are not inaccurate states; rather, they are states that seem to be worldly particular and seem to have accuracy-conditions but are neither accurate nor inaccurate. Intuition, on the contrary, depends on the hallucinations having immediate cognitive effects. These are inaccurate so we tend to project their inaccuracy (of beliefs or belief-like states) onto the hallucinations that normally produce them.

Finally, I go back to the original detachment problem to show that the CV can avoid it. The presentational phenomenology, the justificatory power of the veridical perceptions, the possibility of having demonstrative thoughts about the surrounding world, the relational metaphysics of veridical perceptions can all be vindicated by my version of the CV.

Let us begin our journey into the CV!

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE SEMANTICS OF *SEEING* AND RELATED “EXPERIENTIAL” PREDICATES

### Introduction

This chapter is divided into five parts.

Part I is introductory and presents the general aim of the chapter, which is that of producing a taxonomic survey of the ordinary ascriptions of episodes of “seeing” as well as of episodes of seeing-experiences like “seeming,” “appearing” and “looking.” The methodological sense of such a survey on ordinary language is also made clear. Although my central concern is the perceptual phenomenon itself rather than the typical ways it is ordinarily characterized in everyday language, an analysis of the logical behavior of ordinary ascriptions of perceptual experiences seems to be a privileged starting point to make our basic intuitions concerning the phenomenon explicit. Maybe a substantial theory of seeing and perceptual experiencing will correct or even eliminate the intuitions underlying those ascriptive uses, but there is no other way to start shaping a positive theory than articulating its putative objects as they are manifest to us in ordinary experience and language. To recall an Austinian saying, although ordinary language is not the last word, still it has to be the first.<sup>1</sup> Addressing the preliminary question “what do we ascribe when we ascribe an episode of seeing (or  $\psi$ -ing)?” *can* at least shed light on the much more relevant question: “what does seeing (or  $\psi$ -ing) *consist* of?”

In Part II, a list is drawn up of necessary and sufficient conditions for an ordinary seeing-ascription to be true in non-abnormal contexts. Second, the logical behavior of basic *seeing-X*-ascriptions is analyzed, where the verb is used as an objectual attitude without clauses according to the

---

<sup>1</sup> See Austin 1961.

simple two-place scheme: “S sees (an) O” like “Fido sees a tree”; “Diego sees a table” and the like.

Part III concerns the ascriptions of *seeing-that* cases, which behave like propositional attitudes according to the scheme “S sees that P”; “Diego sees that the table is brown” and the like. I argue that such ascriptions are factive and logically opaque just as propositional attitudes are, but they are not only ascriptions of perceptual episodes. Rather, they are ascriptions of certain empirical propositional knowledge acquired as consequences of perceptual episodes.

Part IV takes into account *seeing-as* ascriptions; i.e., ascriptions of a *sui generis* three-place relation—S sees O as (an) F—whose logical behavior is irreducible to either the objectual seeing-O or the propositional seeing-that-P. Such ascriptions are neither factive nor logically transparent, and presuppose the ascription of a certain “cognitive stand” by the perceiver, like recognition or a categorization of some sort. I will argue that this is the only context of ascription where the perceptual *mistake* can come into play. Neither seeing-O episodes *as such*—unless they are constituents of *seeing-as* episodes—nor *seeing-that* episodes can be incorrect, false, mistaken and the like. Either you see an O or you don’t. You just cannot falsely see an O (given *ex hypothesi* that we are not talking about seeing the O *as* something). Likewise, you cannot falsely see that P, because this is a factive ascription, just like “knowing.” The reciprocal relations between three distinctive ascriptions (seeing O, seeing O as an F, seeing that O is F) will be carefully articulated.

Part V will change the focus from the seeing-predicate to some basic experiential predicates such as “seeming,” “appearing” and “looking.” They will be considered as they behave in paradigmatic ascriptive constructions like “seeming-that,” “looking-like,” “looking-as-if,” “looking-as-though,” “appearing-that” and the like. Such verbs do not just ascribe perceptions (as “sees,” “hears,” “smells” do); they ascribe conscious perceptual experiences. As in the previous cases, I will critically discuss the relative literature on the matter.

At the end of the chapter, I will provide a summary of the results of each part and summarize the results in concise points.



## PART I

### A METHODOLOGICAL REMARK

What do we ordinarily ascribe when we ascribe or self-ascribe an episode of seeing something, a case of seeing that something is such and such or an episode of seeing something *as* something? What do we ascribe to S or to us when we say that it *seems* to S (or to us) that such and such is the case, when we say that an O *looks* F to me, that this O *appears* F to her or that this *looks* like that and so on?

Some find it plausible to categorize visual perceptions and visual experiences under natural kinds. Aren't those phenomena distinctive byproducts of the biological evolution of certain animal species? So it may well be that the rough and intuitive individuation-criteria, applied by those who ordinarily ascribe such mental states, actually pick out a cluster of different phenomena whose ordinary grouping does not genuinely "track" the objective division into natural kinds. Maybe the superficial properties exhibited by the ordinary referents of "seeing"-episodes ascriptions are not shared by other genuine cases of seeing. Maybe very different natural kinds happen to be the referents of people's ascription of seeing. Were this the case, only scientists of vision (for example) would know the real reference and the genuine extension of the term "seeing." Ordinary people would just be able to vaguely fix the reference through attaching the meaning of the term to a cluster of manifest, superficial and non-essential properties.<sup>1</sup> Just as speakers can successfully refer to water without knowing at all the nature of water (be it H<sub>2</sub>O), so too can they successfully master and apply terms like "seeing," "visually experiencing" and the like without knowing the nature of the phenomena they ascribe. Even so, that view would not *per se* entail the uselessness of a systematic consideration of the ordinary uses as well as the related shared intuitions underlying these uses. Generally speaking, any explanation must have the individuation of an *explanandum* as its inevitable starting point. In order to

---

<sup>1</sup> That is, at least, the Kripke-Putnam theory about the reference of natural kind terms. See Putnam 1975.

meaningfully ask, for example, “what is seeing?” the very question must make sense before the answer (the *explanans*) can be obtained, before coming to know what seeing is. What are we asking if not about the manifest phenomenon we can intuitively pick out as folk speakers in the first place? Even if discovery of the nature of X can give feedback on the starting characterization and reveal it as flawed (confusing, naïve, illegitimate, to be abandoned), nonetheless its status as a starting point of the inquiry would be a precondition of the final cognitive success. Therefore, a reconstructive taxonomy of the basic ways of ascribing visual perceptions and experiences, a survey on the related vocabulary, is methodologically useful at least in order to make explicit our unreflected intuitions on the matter. Although the ways certain paradigmatic expressions behave in ordinary language should not be considered as normative to establish the way things are,<sup>2</sup> still a reflective analysis of those ways could successfully orient and prepare the substantial inquiry as its preliminary rough material.

---

<sup>2</sup> This was the “quietist” way some Oxford linguistic philosophers seemed to consider their language analyses. For example, see Malcolm 1942, Moore 1962.

## PART II

### SEEING SOMETHING

#### II.1 Basic Conditions

We consider cases of seeing as perceptual episodes occurring to a subject in an environment. “Seeing” is a determinate of the determinable “perceiving” (as “hearing,” “tasting” and so on). Are there necessary and sufficient conditions for truly ascribing to S an episode of seeing something? Which contexts and circumstances are ordinarily and implicitly *taken* to entitle a speaker to say that she or someone else is seeing something? First of all, seeing-something is a certain sort of real dyadic relation involving a perceiver and an environment as *relata*. Here is a list of trivial conditions for seeing-X:

*S sees X if*

- a) S is a perceiver with a visual apparatus
- b) X is there in the S’s surrounding environment
- c) Through the very episode, S discriminates X in some way from the environment
- d) X causes the very episode of S seeing-X
- e) Such a discrimination must involve a presentation with a phenomenological salience; it must give rise to a “looking” or a “seeming.”

You cannot see X if you are blind or do not possess a perceptual-visual apparatus. You cannot see X if X is not there. You cannot see X if you do not discriminate it in *any* way from its surrounding environment. You cannot see X if X does not provide any causal contribution to your seeing it, and you cannot see X unless X looks some way to you. On the other hand, if you have a working visual apparatus, and X’s impact on it causes your discrimination of X in such a way that X looks some way to you, all this is intuitively sufficient for you to see X. In short, seeing (X) is a certain *episode* consisting of a *discrimination*-relation between a *perceiver*

and an *environmental object*, where the object is *causally* responsible for being discriminated through appropriately impacting on the subject's *visual apparatus* in such a way that the object *looks* to S a certain way. Let us recap the basic meaning underlying the points listed above (a-e):

Point (a) captures the trivial reference to eyes implicitly involved in the very mastery of the folk *seeing*-concept;

Point (b) captures the so-called *implicativity* of *seeing*: “S sees O” presupposes that O is there to be seen (differently from “S wants O”, for example);

Point (c) depends on *seeing* being a *success verb*,<sup>1</sup> as other perceptual verbs are. Perceiving something is certainly a kind of cognitive achievement, the occurrent exercise of a dispositional capacity to achieve a certain positive state;

Point (d) is meant to capture what has been notoriously emphasized by the causal theories of perception:<sup>2</sup> perceptions are episodes appropriately caused by the perceived environment itself. Perception can provide a form of contact with the world insofar as it consists of a certain sort of world-to-subject causal impact;

Point (e) involves that object-seeing has some minimal phenomenological constraints to the effect that in understanding “S is seeing-X” uttered in non-abnormal contexts, a speaker is entitled to take it that there is a way X looks to S.

## II.2 Some Objections

Now I will consider some possible objections to the above conditions for S to be seeing something and I will briefly reply to them.

Challenging the *a*-condition are the well-known experiments of prosthetic vision, which realize cases of “vision-through-touch” (Bach-y-Rita 1972), reported and discussed by Dennett<sup>3</sup> among others. A device involving a small low-resolution video camera was mounted on eye-glass frames so that the signal from the camera—an array of black-and-white pixels—spread over the back or the abdomen of the subject in a grid of vibrating tinglers. Surprisingly, subjects were able to interpret the patterns of these tingles on their skin after a few hours of training: they recognized

---

1 Ryle 1949, Austin 1962, Armstrong 1968.

2 See Grice 1961, Strawson 1974, Lewis 1980.

3 See Dennett 1991, 337-344. On tactile-vision substitution systems (TVSS), see also Back-y-Rita/Kercel 2003.

a face, identified objects and so on. Were they *seeing* those objects despite no sight being involved? Let us assume that it was a case of vision. First, we should consider that part of the prosthetic device—the camera—may be taken as an artificial visual apparatus. After all, it is causally sensitive to light-waves and carries a signal consisting of a certain distribution of gradients of light-energy, just like biological retinas and animals' eyes. Therefore, the “no eyes-no vision” principle embodied in condition *a* is respected. Second, the capacity of seeing-with-touch comes with training that necessarily involves the exercise of canonical vision in order to match certain tactile information with a certain visible scene. Such a capacity is therefore parasitic on proper vision and can be ascribed only to subjects endowed with a working visual apparatus. Third, it is no surprise that such an artificial integration of our natural biological capacities could constitute a borderline case (both of vision and of touch), but the existence of borderline cases does not undermine canonical demarcations. Finally, and most importantly, at this stage of our inquiry we are talking about the *ordinary* concept of seeing and its folk application in normal contexts. We do not learn to master the concept of *seeing* and ascribe cases of *seeing-something* by being shown abnormal contexts like prosthetic tactuo-vision. If a speaker does not know that seeing something presupposes using one's eyes, we would not ascribe to that speaker the mastery of the concept of *seeing* or of the respective word “seeing.”<sup>4</sup> There may be dark samples of H<sub>2</sub>O and maybe that unusual circumstance is known to a scientist who claims to know the nature of water—the real reference of “water”; nonetheless, the *ordinary* concept of water involves transparency as a superficial reference-fixing property.

Condition *b* could raise perplexities insofar as some ascriptions of seeing-*X* cases do not seem to be captured by *b*. For instance, where *X* is known to be not there, like “Mary sees phantoms” or “Even if he's in front of his wife, Mister P. keeps seeing a hat.” To address this objection, we should consider that apparently simple *seeing-X* ascriptions can be elliptic ascriptions of more complex cases, like cases of *seeing-as* or *seeing-that*, which we will carefully treat below. Mister P does *not* see any hat at all. He sees *his wife as* a hat; he actually mistakes his wife for a hat. Therefore, the above case is a case of *seeing-as* not a basic case of seeing something *simpliciter*. Likewise, Mary cannot see a phantom unless there is a phantom there to be seen. Rather, Mary sees something that looks to

---

4 I am making the plausible assumption that ascribing the mastery of a certain word in ordinary-language contexts is sufficient for the mastery of the relative concept. A subject's using, understanding and correctly applying the word “water” is sufficient evidence for crediting the subject with the concept of *water*.

her as if it were a phantom, or she hallucinates a phantom and falsely takes her subjectively seeing-like experience as an episode of seeing. In both cases, Mary just *believes* she sees phantoms, but she doesn't. Harman distinguishes "seeing" (implicative) and "seeing\*" (intentional):<sup>5</sup> whilst *seeing* is implicative and presupposes the existence of the seen object, *seeing\** can have non-existents as complements, like "Jack sees a unicorn." As we have noticed, though, Harman stipulates *seeing\** as not the simple "seeing" we are talking about here. The very fact that he needs to introduce a special stipulation (\*) entails that he is not talking about the ordinary application of seeing-something ascriptions. Furthermore, we should not be misled by the fact that sentences like these sound fine and in order. The superficial grammatical form of "seeing-X" can hide the contraction of more complex ascriptions. By nominalizing the complement, I can treat *any* form of *seeing* as a case of object-seeing: "S sees the train's stopping at the station at 8 o'clock"; "S sees the difference between a phantom on his right and a unicorn on her left" and so on. But now we are treating object-seeing in a more specific sense, where "object" is not meant in such an abstract way or in a superficially grammatical sense.<sup>6</sup> As Heil remarks,<sup>7</sup> when an episode of seeing-X is ascribed, the X-complement can be meant to express either the *object* or the *content* of the ascribed perceptual episode. Up to now we have been considering the object rather than the content so we are interested in the direct complement of *seeing* on the objectual interpretation. For example, one can ask: "Can you see the boat there in the distance?" meaning "can you recognize a boat in *that* which you are seeing?" This would be a case of seeing-as, not just a case of seeing-X. Likewise, we are not concerned with cases where "X" is a propositional clause, be it nominalized or not. "I saw the cat running away from a dog" is not just an example of object-seeing, at least under the most natural interpretation of it, because it is a case of seeing a fact having one or more objects as its constituents (see below). Some think that perceptions have certain objects *in virtue* of having certain contents. Be this the case or not, perceptual object and perceptual content should not be

---

5 Harman 1990, 36ff. On the intentionality of seeing, see Anscombe 1965, Travis 2011.

6 Dretske (2000a, 117) refers to this as the difference between "concrete" and "abstract" objects of seeing. Abstract objects of seeing are grammatical objects as abstract noun phrases (seeing the bus arriving, seeing the difference, the number, the answer), interrogative nominal clauses and so forth.

7 See Heil 1991, p. 9.