

Philosophy 136
The Philosophy of Perception
Handout 22
Tuesday 15 November 2005

1. How does the inverted spectrum bear on intentionalism about perception?



Pure Intentionalists claim that the character of sense experience is determined entirely by the representational or intentional content that it possesses.

(PI) If x and y have sense experience with the same intentional content, then x and y have experiences with the same phenomenal character

Inverted Spectrum scenario:

There is no difference in the physical environment of A or B . Each will be correct in the judgements he or she makes about what to call the items seen, and what belongs with what.

(IS) A and B are in states with the same intentional content

If (IS) is true, and A and B are inverted with respect to each other, then (PI) is *false*.

Options:

- (i) Deny that the spectrum inversion hypothesis is really possible;
- (ii) Deny that A and B are in psychological states with the same intentional content

Are we so sure that we can determine the possibility of the inverted spectrum hypothesis in contrast to an alternative hypothesis which from the perspective of how we imagine things would strike us as the same?

One imagines from the inside that the world is presented a certain way, and then imagines third-personally that certain conditions necessary for the representational content to be one way rather than another are not met. Why should one's powers of conception reveal that these two things can really go together?

(For more see: Alex Byrne's v helpful discussion: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qualia-inverted/>)

2. Peacocke's 'additional characterization' challenge

3 kinds of example:

- a.) seeing objects as being the same height at different distances from one; there is a difference in addition in the way one experiences each object, in addition to the sameness in height;
- b.) there is a difference in visual experience of depth between monocular and binocular vision although both can represent the distance of an object;
- c.) there can be a difference in the way a scene is perceptually organized without a difference in the elements of the scene.

Focus on (a).

Note that Peacocke's method is not as straightforward as the inverted spectrum: we could show that sense experience is not purely representational if there are differences between two situations

which are the same with respect to representational content. But Peacocke's examples do not give us experiences which are exhaustively the same with respect to representation. Additional grounds are needed to show that the features he singles out are non-representational.



The two trees seen at different distances from one are experienced as being of the same height. Yet there is a difference in how one experiences them which involves the nearer one in some sense seeming larger (cf. Hume's argument about the table).

Why is this feature not representational?

- a.) If the feature is the size of the trees as represented, then the experience has a contradictory content (the nearer tree is both experienced as of the same size and as larger than the further tree);
- b.) What other feature could thereby be represented?

Harman suggests that 'Eloise's visual experience does not just present a tree. It presents a tree as viewed from a certain place... The tree is presented as "in front of" and "hiding" certain other trees. It is presented as fuller "on the right". It is presented as the same size "from here" as the smaller tree' (p.38). That suggests that there are certain relational features in the world which the experience presents. Is this an adequate response?

3. *Intentionalism & Pure Intentionalism*

If the fundamental concern with sense-datum theories is a phenomenological worry, then this may support intentionalism but not obviously pure intentionalism.

One may agree that sense experience must have intentional content if it is to present the mind-independent world to the subject.

Do we think of sense experience as giving us a purely representational encounter with the perceived world?

Not only is the visual experience a conscious mental event but it is related to its condition of satisfaction in ways which are quite different from beliefs and desires. If, for example, I see a yellow station wagon in front of me, the experience I have is directly of the object. It doesn't just "represent" the object, it provides direct access to it. The experience has a kind of directness, immediacy and involuntariness which is not shared by a belief I might have about the object in its absence. It seems therefore unnatural to describe visual experiences as representations, indeed if we talk that way it is almost bound to lead to the representative theory of perception. Rather, because of the special features of perceptual experiences I propose to call them "presentations" (John Searle, *Intentionality*, p.46.)

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