

Phenomenology without Representation

Thomas Raleigh

Abstract: I criticise a recent variety of argument for the representational theory of experience, which holds that the very idea of perceptual experience entails the representational view. I argue that the representational view is not simply obvious, nor is it contained in the mere idea of the world *looking some way*. I also clarify and re-present an argument against the representational view due to Charles Travis.

1. Introduction

I will call any theory on which phenomenology is constitutively related to representational content a representational theory of experience.¹ I think it is fair to say that representational theories are the current orthodoxy in philosophy of mind. Many reasons might be advanced for preferring this model of phenomenology to rivals: such as Sense-Data, Naïve-Realist or Adverbial theories. My feeling is that perhaps the main motivation for going representational is that it allows one to hold a common-factor view of Hallucination and Perception without committing one to the ontological extravagance of Sense-Data. In the background, perhaps, is the thought that progress has been made on naturalising representational content—moreover, talk of representation is rife in cognitive science and psychology—and so there is the promise that conscious experience might also be naturalised once we understand it in terms of this scientifically kosher concept. There are other possible motivations: one might feel that the Representational view yields a neat account of perceptual justification for belief, one might be impressed by the thought that ‘intentionality is the mark of the mental’, one might think that the indeterminate nature of representational contents provides the best solution to ‘Speckled Hen’ worries. No doubt there could be yet other features of the representational view that might be thought attractive.

Recently, however, a number of representational theorists have argued not just that their theory is superior to its competitors, but that *the very idea* of perceptual phenomenology entails that such phenomenology possesses representational content. Or perhaps: that the *manifest phenomenal nature* of perceptual experience is such that we are *bound* to acknowledge its representational character. A further conclusion drawn by a number of representational theorists is that the supposed competing theories turn out not to be competitors at all, but rather to be exotic subspecies within the representational genus.² The Representational view is supposed not just to win a disagreement about the nature of experience but also to provide the framework within which any real/remaining disagreements about experience are best expressed.

My primary aim is to criticise this new, *imperialistic* strain of representational argument, which hopes not merely to defeat its enemies but to co-opt them into its territories. I will argue that it is *not just obvious* that visual phenomenology *must* be understood in terms of representational content. The representational theory does not fall out of the notion of the world *looking some way*, nor does introspection make the truth of the theory obvious.

A secondary aim will be to re-present and clarify an argument, drawn from Travis (2004), which provides reason to think that visual phenomenology *should not be understood* in terms of representational content. The two major clarifications (as I see them) that I make to Travis's original argument are to make clear that the core anti-representational point: (1) does not rule out highly indeterminate forms of representational content and (2) does not rely on making any naïve-realist or relational assumptions about the nature of experience.

The two aims are linked: even if one is not fully converted by the anti-representational argument, and I will suggest it falls short of being totally decisive, I hope my presentation of it will at least further my first aim by filling out how one *could*, why one *might*, adopt a non-representational view of phenomenology.

My aims then are entirely negative; I will not advance any positive view as to the metaphysics of experience and will provide no positive considerations in favour of any particular competitor to the representational theory.

2. Representational Imperialism

It is not uncommon to find philosophers claiming that it is *obvious* that visual experience is representational.³ For example, Alex Byrne (2001) writes:

The notion that a subject's *perceptual experience* represents the world to be a certain way—the way the world perceptually seems to the subject—should be no more controversial than the notion that a subject's belief state represents the world to be a certain way—the way the subject takes the world to be. (Byrne 2001: 201)

To be clear: holding that visual experience is obviously representational, does not yet commit one to holding that it is the phenomenology of visual experience which *makes* it so obvious.⁴ After all, it is presumably *not* the phenomenology of belief that renders uncontroversial the claim that beliefs represent. The above-quoted passage then does not yet commit Byrne to representational *imperialism* as characterised in my introduction. However, despite having claimed it should be uncontroversial, Byrne (2001) does go on to offer a brief argument in favour of the representational theory. The crucial move in this argument comes when he writes:

Assume that a subject enjoys an experience *e* that ends at *t* and then an experience *e**, and that after *t* the subject notices a change in phenomenal character . . . Then the way things seem to the subject when she enjoys *e* differs from the way things seem when she enjoys *e**. That is, the *content* of *e* differs from the *content* of *e**. (Byrne 2001: 210)

Byrne here introduces the notion of a way things seem/look to the subject. A change in phenomenology, in what it is like for the subject, is said to be a change in the way things seem (look) to the subject. This change in the way things seem/look is then *equated* with a change in representational content. Byrne wants us to understand the claim that things seem/look some way to the subject as the subject's being in a mental state *which represents that* the world is some way. Why should we accept Byrne's crucial move—from: things look some way to S, to: this way of looking represents that something is the case? In this 2001 paper Byrne does not unpack the move further, but he presumably thinks it is highly plausible. The representational theory is clearly meant to fall out pretty swiftly from things seeming/looking some way to a subject. There seem to me to be two different ways in which it could be thought to fall out.

One might think that perceptual experience is *manifestly* representational. That is to say, mere introspection, together perhaps with a moment or two's reflection, will reveal that perceptual experience is essentially representational. I think that the history of disagreement in the philosophy of perception, as well as recent work on the reliability of introspection,⁵ gives us both: (1) reason to be suspicious that this metaphysical thesis could really be so obvious or manifest, and (2) cause to be pessimistic about the efficacy of such appeals to introspection as a method for settling debates about the metaphysics of experience.

Perhaps instead then, Byrne's thought is that the very idea of *perceptual* phenomenology contains, though it may require a little unfolding, the representational thesis. Now, it would presumably be too strong to claim that *any possible* visual phenomenology would have to be representational. For surely it is at least possible (at least for some possible sort of conscious creature) to have visual phenomenology that does not have representational content at all—pure visual sensations that do not have objective purport about anything else. The narrower, more plausible claim is that *perceptual* visual phenomenology is essentially representational. That is: experiences that present (or at least seem to present) the mind-independent environment to/for the subject's conscious mind must be representing that some environmental state of affairs obtains. Or in slogan form: Presentation = Representation (experience that presents the world must represent the world).⁶

Before we go on to consider some imperialist arguments, I would like to give an analogy intended to cast doubt on the Presentation = Representation thesis—to make it seem at least non-obvious.

2.1 An Anti-imperialist Analogy

Consider the following two gifts:

- (a) I give you a square thing, an item that is actually square.
- (b) I give you a message 'There is a square thing in your environment'. (Suppose for simplicity that this message takes the form of non-square ink shapes written on a non-square piece of paper.)

In case (a), neither the gift, nor the giving, nor the receiving need embody or encode any representational content about square-ness, nor about anything else. A square object might simply be presented. (Of course, an actual square item *might* be used to represent square-ness, or to represent something else, but it need not represent anything at all.) Whereas in (b), what is given embodies a representational content about square-ness (and maybe to properly receive it *as a message* would also involve representation on the receiver's part).

There are many possible *ways* or manners of giving someone a gift. I could give it quickly or slowly. I could mail it to you, or place it in your pocket, or yell 'Heads up!' and throw it at you. I could pay someone in a gorilla suit to hand it over. Etc. Now, it is presumably *possible* that such ways or manners of giving represent something. But there seems no obvious reason to think that these different ways of giving a gift *must* introduce representation into the story.⁷ In sum: whilst it is *possible* for a gift, or the manner of its giving, to represent something, there seems no pressing reason to think that either *must* be representational.

In perceptual experience the world is, in some mysterious and difficult to describe way, *given* to us. It is *present* to, or in, our conscious awareness, available to attend to, to respond to, to demonstrate and think about. Of course, these terms 'given' and 'present' are very imprecise and murky, but they gesture at the mysterious conscious phenomenon that all parties are trying to explain. How exactly we should understand this conscious presentation of the world is what the rival theorists disagree over. Perhaps we should understand it in terms of representation. Perhaps in terms of Sense-Data, perhaps in terms of adverbial modification etc. But, as yet, there is nothing *forcing* us to understand presentation in terms of representation.

Continuing the analogy: when we see the world, it looks (appears/seems) some way to us. As with a way of giving a gift, it is not obvious that a way of looking, a way in which the world is given or presented to one, *must* introduce representation into the story. For someone as yet uncommitted to any theory, the most neutral, minimal way of understanding the phrase 'The world looks some way' (or 'O looks some way'), is simply that there is some specific phenomenal way or manner in which the world (or some particular object) figures in conscious experience. This leaves it open whether the best/correct way to understand this specific phenomenal nature of the presentation, this 'way the world looks', is in terms of representation, or in terms of Sense-Data, or in terms of a 'direct' relation of acquaintance (etc.). Of course, a representational theorist can offer further reasons why the world looking some specific way in experience is best understood in terms of content *that* the world is some specific way. (I mentioned a number of possible such reasons to go representational in the introduction.) But until such arguments are given, the representational model is not compulsory. It is not just obvious that the mere idea of the world looking some specific way should commit us to representation.

More recent imperialist lines of thought occur in Siegel (2010) and Schellenberg (2011). Siegel calls her main argument 'The Argument from Appearing':⁸

Premise (i)

All visual perceptual experiences present clusters of properties as being instantiated.

Premise (ii)

If an experience E presents a cluster of properties F as being instantiated, then:

Necessarily: things are the way E presents them only if property-cluster F is instantiated.

Premise (iii)

If necessarily: things are the way E presents them only if property-cluster F is instantiated, then:

there is a set of accuracy conditions for E such that:

the conditions are satisfied in a world only if there is something that has F in that world.

Conclusion 1: All visual perceptual experiences have accuracy conditions.

Conclusion 2: All visual perceptual experiences have contents.' (Siegel 2010: 344)

Anyone at least open to the idea of presentation without representation should, I suggest, be suspicious of the first premise. Why can't properties be presented in experience without them being presented '*as being instantiated*'? Why must a perceptual presentation of square-ness require that it be presented *as square-ness*? Recalling my analogy, I can physically present a gift of a square object, without presenting it *as being square*. That is to say, neither the presentation, nor the specific manner of presentation, need embody a *commitment about* the object's properties. One possible option then, one might think, is that experience presents a property without embodying any claim or commitment *that* the property in question is instantiated—just as it might present an object without embodying a content *that* the object is present.

Siegel clearly wants to reject this option, though her reasons for doing so are less clear:

When we see (or even when we merely seem to see) ordinary objects, such as a cube, bare particulars do not figure in visual phenomenology in any way. Properties enter the picture as well. For you to see a cube at all, **it must be part of your visual phenomenology that the cube has certain properties:** as it might be, having a certain number of facing

edges and surfaces, having a certain color, location, and so on. Most of the time, **visual phenomenology takes a stand** on which objects instantiate clusters of properties, both at a time and over time. (Siegel 2010: 346; bold type added)

Someone open to the possibility of presentation without representation can (and should) happily agree that experience does not present bare particulars, shorn of any properties, and accept that visible properties figure *somehow* in the presentation as well. But it is a further step to claim that any such presentation of properties must embody a content *that* the object instantiates those properties. Siegel, as far as I can see, provides no further argumentation for this move.

Perhaps at this point, those sympathetic to Siegel's view will demand that more needs to be said about this alleged possibility of non-representational presentation of properties before it is admitted as a genuine option. Well, how to flesh out this sort of story would depend on one's preferred rival theory. For example, a Naïve-Realist's story might be: an object's shape properties can be presented in experience as we can be (directly) acquainted with the object's visible properties as well as with the particular object itself. The property of square-ness in the environment partially constitutes the phenomenal character of the experience. There seems no immediate reason why phenomenal character being partially constituted by environmental square-ness would require that square-ness is also *represented* by this phenomenology. Whereas for a Sense-Data theorist: the object's shape, its square-ness, causes (in the right way) a specific Sense-Data array to be experienced. That is presumably what the perceptual presentation of environmental properties amounts to on a Sense-Data story. And again, there seems no obvious reason why some specific Sense-Data array caused by square-ness should have to represent *that* square-ness is instantiated. On either metaphysical story about what it is for environmental features to 'show up' in consciousness, the object's shape contributes to the specific phenomenology of the experience, but in neither case are we thereby forced to accept that this phenomenology represents, or takes a stand, that square-ness is instantiated—the phenomenology might, it seems, simply present square-ness.

It is not entirely clear to me whether Siegel thinks that *the very idea* of experiential presentation of (environmental) properties requires that experience 'take a stand' that something is the case, or whether she thinks that the *introspection of our perceptual phenomenology* makes it obvious that presentation of properties always involves representation of those properties. Siegel provides a number of phenomenological descriptions,⁹ and states: 'These considerations about the kind of visual phenomenology involved in seeing ordinary objects support premise (i)' (p. 347). So the latter might seem the correct interpretation. However, later in the paper Siegel considers whether there could be 'a reason to think that visual perceptual experience never presented objects as having properties'. She claims there are only two possible kinds of 'structure' for experience that could meet this non-representational condition:

Answer 1: Visual phenomenology is a pure raw feel, or Reidian sensation.

Answer 2: When a visual experience is strongly veridical, its visual phenomenology consists in the subject's perceiving something other than properties.

... Both Answer 1 (the raw-feel view) and Answer 2 (Radical Naïve Realism) deny that properties ever figure in experiences. (Answer 1 says the same about objects.) Phenomenologically this is highly dubious. (Siegel 2010: 355)

Whilst there might be *possible* structures of experience in which properties do not figure at all, our phenomenology reveals (or strongly suggests) that *our* experience is not structured like that. And once we have accepted that properties *do* figure in our experience, Siegel now seems to hold that there *are no other possible models* for such figuring apart from the representational model. So the role that appealing to phenomenology plays is only to show that properties do indeed figure in experience—once this much is established, the representational model is supposed to swiftly follow as the only possible explanation, not merely the best amongst competing explanations. That is, for Siegel, it is the very idea of *property presentation* that requires representation.

Let's turn now to Schellenberg:¹⁰

P1: If a subject is perceptually related to the world (and not suffering from blindsight etc.), then she is aware of the world.

P2: If a subject is aware of the world, then the world seems a certain way to her.

P3: If the world seems a certain way to her, then she has an experience with content *C*, where *C* corresponds to the way the world seems to her.

Conclusion 1: If a subject is perceptually related to the world (and not suffering from blindsight etc.), then she has an experience with content *C*, where *C* corresponds to the way the world seems to her. (Schellenberg 2011: 720)

The crucial move here is P3. Whereas in P2, 'the world seems a certain way' can be understood theory-neutrally to mean just that the subject's awareness of the world has some specific phenomenology, P3 asserts a representational understanding of the phrase 'world seems a certain way'. The neutral reading leaves it open whether or not the specific phenomenal manner in which the world is presented encodes a representational content *about* the world (*that* the world is some way). We need some reason to go beyond the neutral reading and adopt a representational understanding of 'the world seems a certain way'. Schellenberg recognises the need to rule out any rival, non-representational understandings of ways of looking, though she seems to find such a non-representational alternative hard to make sense of:

The critical question is what it can be for the world to seem a certain way to a subject without her being in a contentful mental state. As I will argue . . . the mere fact that the world seems a certain way when one perceives entails that the perception has content. I will . . . thus show that there is a notion of perceptual content that anyone should accept. (Schellenberg 2011: 723)

Schellenberg here seems to want to shift the burden onto her opponent to say what a non-rep understanding of 'world seems some way' could be. As I mentioned in discussing Siegel above, the details of such a story will depend on one's preferred theory. To repeat: According to Naïve-Realism: one is acquainted with objects and their properties from some particular standpoint/in particular conditions, resulting in a specific phenomenal manner of acquaintance with the world. For the Sense-Data theorist: objects and properties in the environment are present in experience in virtue of causing (in the right way) specific Sense-Data arrays—with the same object/properties causing different SD arrays depending on viewing context/conditions etc. On both metaphysical stories, the specific phenomenology of experience is the joint upshot of the environmental scene and the conditions of viewing. And in both stories there seems no obvious reason why the world being presented in a specific phenomenal guise *must* involve representation that something is the case. (I hope that the discussion of Travis's argument, below, will further flesh out the availability/possibility of a non-representational understanding of 'the world looking/seeming some way'.) A theory-neutral understanding of 'the world seems a certain way' is not committed to any particular account of what metaphysically constitutes/explains phenomenology—neither the representational story, nor either of the non-representational stories I have just sketched. It is simply committed to the world showing up in an experience that has some specific phenomenology.

Though Schellenberg does not provide much supporting argument, she does label the imperialistic thought underlying P3:

Let's call this connection between content and the way the world seems *the seems-content link*.

. . . If we recognize the seems-content link, then the idea that the environment can seem a certain way to a subject without her being in a contentful mental state becomes impossible. (Schellenberg 2011: 724)

Notice, as with Siegel, the desired, imperialist conclusion, is not just that the representational model is correct, but that there is no other *possible* understanding of the world seeming some way in experience. The very idea of apparently world-presenting experience *entails* that such experience is representational. Schellenberg does say a little bit more in support of the 'seems-content' link, but as this argument is interwoven with her criticisms of Travis's argument against such a link, I will defer further discussion of Schellenberg until section 3.4 below.

Byrne, Siegel and Schellenberg all move from the idea that the world looks some way, to the idea that the way of looking (seeming) encodes a content that

the world is some way. In each case this move is apparently meant to be obvious, intuitive etc.—support for the move consists either in appealing to introspection or to the very idea of the world looking some way. I have suggested that such support is weak—the move is not obviously compulsory.

Although it is not explicit in Byrne, Siegel or Schellenberg, I think it is useful to frame a tempting argument that might be thought to implicitly underlie their discussions and explain why they take the crucial move—from ways of looking to representation—to be so obvious/plausible.

2.2 Tempting Imperialist Argument

- (1) When things look/seem some way to S, there is some predicate F such that it can be correctly said that things 'look/appear/seem F', to S.
- (2) We can then ask whether the things S sees are in fact F.
- (3) So: The way things look to S can be assessed as accurate/inaccurate (true/false, veridical/illusory), depending on whether things are in fact F.

This argument provides a bridge from ways the world can *look/appear* to ways for the world *to be*. The conclusion, (3), is just the idea that the way things look bears representational content with truth-conditions/correctness-conditions. Breckenridge (2007) rejects the move from (2) to (3) on the following grounds. In general: when O Phi's in some specific way W, where it makes sense to ask whether O is in fact W or not, this does *not* show that the Phi-ing represents that O is W (nor that the Phi-ing is correct/incorrect depending on whether O is W). Otherwise, representation would become implausibly ubiquitous. For example, when storm clouds gather in a tropical way, we can ask whether or not the clouds are in fact tropical. But their gathering in this way is not assessable for accuracy/correctness—it does not represent that the clouds are tropical. So the fact that an object looks/appears some way—e.g. square—and we can ask whether or not the object is in fact that way, does not in itself show that the way the object looks is assessable for correctness, nor that it represents.

I will provide further criticism of this argument in section 3.3.

3. Travis's Argument

As with most philosophical orthodoxies, there are a number of anti-representational arguments in the literature on experience.¹¹ Whereas some of these arguments aim to show that the representational view has certain problematic consequences, or struggles to accommodate some feature or role of experience, Travis's argument directly attacks the core idea that experience is representational. My impression is that it is widely agreed that 'The Silence of the Senses' is a rich and important paper, but also that it is difficult. I will not attempt to capture all the richness in Travis's paper, but I do intend to clarify what I take to be the central anti-representational point.¹²

Travis's challenge to the intentionalist position, as I present it, is based around a relatively simple point about the nature of experience and phenomenology. It is *not* fundamentally a point about what the phrase 'looks F' or 'appears F' (looks like F, is looking F etc.) can mean. (This may not be so obvious given the amount of space that Travis devotes, in 'Silence of the Senses', to considering linguistic matters.) However, there is a need for some consideration of phrases such as 'looks F'; firstly just to clarify that it is visual experience/visual phenomenology that we are primarily concerned with. But more importantly, to understand how these phrases can lead one astray and so to understand what is wrong with the 'Tempting Imperialist Argument'.

3.1 'Looks'-Claims

Much could be said about different uses of 'looks' and 'appears' in English. Many different philosophers have offered different taxonomies of these uses.¹³ For our purposes, we need not consider all the fine distinctions between possible uses of such terms as 'looks', 'appears', 'seems' etc. in English. The only distinction required for the anti-representational point is between epistemic uses and phenomenal uses. Sometimes when we talk of how things look/seem we are talking about what we might judge on the basis of visual (sensory) experience. (Indeed sometimes entirely non-sensory). We might be speaking of our own actual inclinations to judge based on vision, or our what our inclinations would be if we were only to go by visual experience, or perhaps what would be rational to judge based only on exp, etc. But in any case, we are going *beyond* simply describing the phenomenal nature of the experience itself, and speaking of cognitive reactions to the experience. These are *epistemic* uses 'looks'/'appears'.

In contrast, sometimes when we speak of 'looks' etc. we are speaking of the experience itself and saying nothing about what we judge, or would judge, or would be rational to judge etc. We are simply describing the experience itself, the manifest phenomenal way of looking we are presented with. Following Chisholm (1957), both Byrne (2009) and Schellenberg (2011) think it is important to distinguish between comparative and non-comparative senses of 'looks'.¹⁴ I will discuss the (alleged) non-comparative sense in section 3.4. For now, I just note that both of these kinds of uses of 'looks' would count as phenomenal 'looks'-claims insofar as they are used to describe phenomenology itself rather than what the phenomenology might indicate.¹⁵

We are concerned with the nature of phenomenology and so we are primarily interested in the phenomenal sense of 'looks'. Unless specified otherwise, when I speak of how things look to S, I am speaking in the phenomenal sense of 'looks'—I am speaking of the specific phenomenal nature of their experience.

3.2 The Basic Anti-representational Point

It is a long-known fact of optical science that indefinitely many different possible environmental scenes could reflect light onto the retina in exactly the same way.

It should be uncontroversial then that it would be possible to devise various quite different perceptual scenarios that a subject will not be able to distinguish by looking. For example, we could, with sufficient ingenuity and patience, create one scene in which the subject is looking at a medium-sized red circular disc in the middle distance from head-on, and we could create another in which the subject is looking at a medium-sized red ellipse in the middle distance from an angle, such that the subject cannot tell the two scenes apart by looking—she would do no better than chance at telling which is which. We could also create a scene in which the subject is looking at a smaller red disc at closer range or a larger red disc at greater distance. Of course, it would take some clever lighting and adjusting etc., but again the subject, in principle, would not be able to tell any of these scenes apart by looking. We could also use a white disc that is lit with a red light, and we could use all sorts of intrinsically different-shaped ellipses at various angles etc. It is highly plausible to think then that there is an entire range of different scenarios that will look the same phenomenal way to a subject when viewed from a given viewpoint.¹⁶

So the representational model faces a question: when things look a certain phenomenal way to me, a way of looking that is bound to be shared by all sorts of very different perceptual scenarios, why think that this way things look *represents that* any one in particular of these scenarios is the actual environmental scene, rather than any of the other scenarios? Why think that any one in particular of these scenarios, as opposed to all the others, is the way the environment *should be* in order for the way things look to *correctly match up with* the way things actually are? For example, say I am visually presented with things looking the phenomenal way that is shared by all the scenarios I mentioned above—the various red and white discs and ellipses at various distances and angles from the subject. Which of these scenarios would have to be the case (be the one I am in fact confronted with) in order for the look to be ‘veridical’? So far it is not just obvious why any particular one scenario actually obtaining should be the one to make the way things look ‘veridical’ whilst the other scenarios would render the way of looking ‘illusory’.

But the point is not merely that the representational view would have to provide a convincing rationale for choosing some one determinate possible state of affairs to be the content/subject-matter of the experience. The point is that all these scenarios (or at least the vast majority) are intuitively *normal perceptual* scenarios. So we do not *want* to have to rule out all but one of the scenarios as illusory, faulty, misfiring etc. For example, suppose one thought that the first scenario I mentioned above—a medium-sized red circular disc, at middle distance, viewed head on—is the way the environment should be according to the phenomenal look. Then, on this representational way of thinking, when I see a smaller red disc closer to me, a situation which shares the phenomenology in question, I must be counted as suffering an illusion. But why think that my experience of the smaller, closer disc is any less ‘veridical’ than my experience of the medium-sized, middle-distance disc? Isn’t the manifest way that the smaller, closer red disc looks just the way that it *should* look? How else should

or could the small, near red-disc manifestly look so that this manifest look would count as 'veridical'? How else should or could an ellipse viewed from an angle look? If we take the medium, middle-distance red-disc scenario as the one that the manifest way of looking represents, it then makes it impossible to have a veridical experience of *any* of the other scenarios in the range. And that seems a highly counter-intuitive cost for a theory. When I'm looking at any of these other scenarios my visual system is working just fine and I am seeing things looking just the way that they do in fact look from that perspective. Intuitively, these are all *normal perceptual experiences*. The shared phenomenal way of looking just is how a large distant red disc looks, *and* how a small close red disc looks, *and* just is how all sorts of different ellipses at a various angles look etc. We do not *want* to rule all but one of these perceptual episodes as illusory, so we do not *want a theory* which allows only one of them as veridical.

We now have a positive reason to reject the whole idea that phenomenal ways of looking can match or fail to match up with a determinate state of affairs. The range of scenarios that would all instantiate a particular look can be radically different from each other—they may involve very differently shaped and differently coloured objects in very different lighting conditions at very different distances from the subject. Yet intuitively they are all, or at least most of them, *normal perceptual* scenarios, scenarios in which one sees things looking just how they should and do look from that perspective, in those conditions. It seems arbitrary and unmotivated for a theory to rule that one scenario in particular is the 'objective purport' of the look. If so, then the phenomenal way things look to a subject makes no claim that any particular scenario in the range obtains—the look is, as it were, *indifferent* between all of the scenarios that could instantiate it.

Here's a summary of the argument:

- (1) A particular phenomenal look can be instantiated by a whole range of indefinitely many perceptual scenarios that involve intrinsically quite different environmental scenes.
- (2) According to the Representational theory: a phenomenal look embodies a content *that* a particular environmental scenario obtains.
- (3) (From 1 and 2) So according to the Representational theory: all of the range of possible scenarios that can instantiate the phenomenal look, apart from one, are illusory/inaccurate/faulty.
- (4) BUT! All (or at least most) of the scenarios that instantiate the phenomenal way of looking are *normal perceptual* scenarios—we *do not want* them to count as illusory/inaccurate/faulty.
- (5) (From 3 and 4) So we should not accept the Representational theory.

Clarification 1

I hope it is clear that as I have presented it, the argument does not rely on any Naïve-Realist assumptions about the structure of experience. It does not depend

on any particular metaphysics for experience—an Adverbial or Sense-Data theorist could happily accept this argument whilst holding that phenomenal looks are constituted by Sense-Data or Adverbial modifications etc. In Travis's original presentation he uses the term 'demonstrable', as opposed to 'phenomenal', looks for he wants to insist that the way O looks to me from here is something publicly/interpersonally accessible rather than something inner. But this is, I claim, an inessential extra commitment. Whether a phenomenal way of looking is out in the world or inside my head, the point remains that it is 'indifferent' between indefinitely many environmental scenes.

Clarification 2

As I have presented it, this argument leaves open that visual phenomenology might embody representational content that is *highly* indeterminate or disjunctive. For all I have said, it might be claimed that the phenomenal look shared by all the above-mentioned scenarios possesses the content: that there is *either* a small red circle nearby *or* a large red circle in the distance *or* a small nearby ellipse at an angle *or* a large distant ellipse at an angle etc. Making this move would be to reject premise (3) but accept (4): for *any/all* of the range of perceptual scenarios would be included in the massively disjunctive content. And so the phenomenal look would count as veridical in *any/all* of the perceptual situations that instantiate it. Travis seems not to consider this option:

A peccary, confronted in the right way, may look exactly like a pig . . . It may also look like a tapir, a clever dummy pig, a wax imitation peccary, and so on. Experience cannot coherently represent it to us as both a peccary and wax (and a pig, and so on). (Travis 2004: 73)

But might experience represent it as *either* a peccary *or* a wax imitation *or* a pig etc.? Perhaps the reason Travis does not consider this option is that it is not an option endorsed by any intentionalist, so far as I can tell, in the literature. I have emphasised the *high* degree of indeterminacy, to make clear that this would be a far greater degree of indeterminacy than any representational theorist would be happy to countenance. One might think that Peacocke's (1992) scenario content—'those ways of filling out the space around you which are consistent with the veridicality of your experience' (Peacocke 1992: 111)—is a theory along these indeterminate lines. However, looking at the details of Peacocke's proposal, it is clear that the set of ways of filling out the space that he has in mind are much more limited in range. Representational theories typically allow that there is *some degree* of indeterminacy: e.g. two lines that differ in size by tiny amounts might look exactly the same to S, and so S's experience is said to represent that the lines are of a determinable length where the range of permitted lengths according to the experiential content is, say, a few millimetres.¹⁷ The set of ways of filling in space that Peacocke has in mind is a small range of very similar scenarios determined by this sort of limit on a subject's perceptual acuity.¹⁸ In

contrast, the sort of indeterminacy being bruited here would be vastly greater in order to accommodate the claim that phenomenology is indifferent between a range of scenarios involving items of radically different lengths and shapes at all sorts of distances and angles.

But whether or not anyone has actually endorsed it, is there a decisive objection to treating experiential phenomenology as embodying this kind of indeterminate content? I cannot see that the Travis argument offers one—nor will I attempt to provide any additional argument against it. (Though one might wonder what the motivation for such a view is and whether such highly indeterminate content could play all of the roles—e.g. epistemological—that experiential content is typically asked to play.)

However, so far as representational imperialism is concerned, it hardly seems *mandatory* to think of phenomenology as embodying this kind of highly disjunctive/indeterminate commitment. The option remains open to think of phenomenology as just non-committal presentation (revelation) of the environment. A particular type of perceptual phenomenology can in fact be a presentation of any of a huge range of intrinsically different environmental situations. Nothing so far *forces* us to treat this phenomenology as embodying a commitment or message *that* some or other of the situations in the range obtains. At the risk of extending my analogy beyond its usefulness: a certain mechanism/method/manner of gift-giving could be a way of giving any of a wide range of intrinsically different gifts. But this does not *force* us to treat this method of gift-giving as embodying a claim/commitment about the gift (*viz. that* it is a member of the wide range of gifts).

3.3 How Talk of 'Looks' Can Mislead

A natural response to Travis's argument, I think, is to insist: but of course it makes perfect sense to wonder whether the way things look to me is the way things actually are. How else can we ask and understand perfectly sensible questions of the form 'O looks F to me, but is O actually F?', and perfectly sensible replies of the form 'O is/is not the way it looks'? Recall the tempting argument in section 2: A phenomenal way the world looks can be correctly described as 'looks F', so the way of looking can be assessed as accurate/inaccurate depending on whether the environmental object is F or not. We can now see what is wrong with this line of thought.

A particular phenomenal look can be instantiated by a whole range of very different perceptual scenarios. And so the look could, in principle, be quite correctly picked out by mentioning *any* of these possible instantiating scenarios. Now, as soon as *we refer* to this phenomenal way of looking *by mentioning* a particular scenario in the range, then there is a perfectly good question as to whether the actual environment matches *the mentioned scenario*. That is, once someone uses a particular description, then one can quite sensibly wonder if the world is actually as in *the description*. For example, I might describe the manifest

way that things look to me by saying: 'It looks to me like there is a medium-sized red circular disc in the middle distance'. Or in less committal terms: 'It looks to me the way that a medium-sized red circular disc in the middle distance looks'. Once this specific situation has been invoked, there is then a perfectly good question as to whether the environment in front of me actually contains a red circular disc in the middle distance.

However, I might equally and quite correctly have said: 'The way things look to me is like there is a small red disc quite close in front of me', or: 'It looks to me the way that a red ellipse standing at a 60 degree angle before me would look', etc., in order to pick out *just the same* phenomenal look. And having mentioned these different possible scenarios there would then be *different* perfectly good questions as to whether the actual environment matches these *different* possible scenarios. That is, a single phenomenal look can correctly be described using many different predicates: 'looks F', 'looks G', 'looks H' etc., where these predicates specify (when not embedded in a 'looks ...' claim) incompatible environmental properties. The shared manifest way of looking *in itself* does not specify any one particular possible situation for the actual environment to match, nor does it specify one of many incompatible predicates for the environment to satisfy.

Notice that all of the above applies to 'basic visible' properties/predicates. This may not be totally clear in Travis's original presentation, as his examples are often of the form: 'O looks like a Vermeer' or 'O looks as if it is a peccary' where the property is not obviously something that is simply *visible*. This seems to have led Byrne (2009) to suggest Travis's challenge can be avoided if we stick to 'O looks square', 'O looks red' etc. But I hope my presentation has made clear that the phenomenal look of a square thing looked at from head on is shared by all sorts other shaped things looked at from all sorts of other angles. The phenomenal way that a square surface looks from head-on can be described using the phrase 'looks square', but might equally be described using indefinitely many other phrases of the kind 'looks rhomboidal at an angle'. It should not be assumed that this phenomenal way of looking, though quite correctly described with the phrase 'looks square', is committed to square-ness being in the environment rather than all sorts of other shape properties that would also result in that very same phenomenal look.

3.4 Schellenberg and Non-comparative 'Looks' Claims

Schellenberg concedes ('for the sake of argument') that Travis's point—that ways of looking do not determine a content—may apply when we understand 'looks' in an epistemic or comparative sense. But once we get clear that there is a non-comparative sense of looks, it supposedly becomes clear that Travis's point does not apply—non-comparative looks clearly do determine a content, the 'seems-content link' becomes obvious.¹⁹ Other than insisting on the availability of this non-comparative usage, Schellenberg does not provide further argument in favour of the 'seems-content link'.

The force of the indeterminacy objection relies on 'looks' being understood comparatively . . . For if 'looks' is understood noncomparatively, then the way things look fixes the content of experience. (Schellenberg 2011: 723)

I suspect that Schellenberg may have something like the tempting argument of section 2 in mind here. That is, the sort of non-comparative use she has in mind are simply looks claims such as 'O looks square', 'O looks red' etc. And her thought is that if such non-comparative claims accurately characterise the way of looking, then the way of looking *must* bear content about square-ness or red-ness etc. I have explained what I think is wrong with this line of thought in the previous subsection (3.3).²⁰ Schellenberg does not actually provide a concrete example of 'looks' being used in this non-comparative sense, though she does provide the following characterisation:

Following Chisholm (1957: 50–3), we can understand the noncomparative use as pertaining to cases in which appearance words are used to pick out or refer to particulars, such as objects or property-instances, without thereby making comparisons to other particulars. Cases include uses of demonstratives, such as 'that shade of blue', 'that shape', and 'this high pitch'. (Schellenberg 2011: 723)

It is not totally clear to me what Schellenberg means here, but presumably it is something like: 'O looks *THIS* way', 'O looks like/to be/as if it is *THIS* shape', 'O looks the way *THAT* colour looks'—where the demonstratives are referring to the current object/property of perception. If this is what she has in mind, it is not at all clear how this evades the problem of indeterminacy. Any non-comparative or demonstrative *means of referring* to the phenomenology in question are a red herring. No matter *how* we identify or pick out the phenomenology—comparatively or non-comparatively, demonstratively or descriptively—the fact remains that it can be instantiated by a range of very different (but quite normal) perceptual situations, featuring very different environmental properties. When we pick out the phenomenology by specifying an environmental scene or property that can produce that phenomenology—even when this environmental feature is singled-out demonstratively—the problem remains that this is just one of many, incompatible environmental scenes/properties that can give rise to that very phenomenology. So we still lack a reason to think that the phenomenology is about the mentioned scene/property rather than any of the other possible instantiating scenes/properties.

Now perhaps there is a way of picking out the phenomenology in question without specifying *any* environmental feature whatsoever—we would speak of the phenomenology *directly*, without specifying any possible instantiating scenario. It is not clear to me whether normal English has any such usage, but perhaps we could stipulate such a usage into existence. I could attend to the specific phenomenal way that the world is presented to me right now and dub it PHI. So I can now make such claims as: 'Things look PHI to me' etc. But this gets us no closer to a determinate representational content. Once more: this PHI

way of looking can be instantiated by indefinitely many normal perceptual scenarios. So we still lack any basis for thinking that this phenomenal look embodies a content about some one particular, determinate environmental state of affairs.

4. Some Possible Responses

- (1) At this point it might be suggested that whilst the visual phenomenology in itself does not narrow down the range of possible perceptual scenarios enough, perhaps there is some other factor in play that does. For example, there are various theories—e.g. teleo-semantics,²¹ Fodor's 'causal asymmetry'²²—which seek to provide a basis for ruling out abnormal causes of conceptual tokenings—e.g. cow-shaped horses causing a tokening of the concept COW—as erroneous, so they do not form part of the content of that concept. Perhaps then one might likewise appeal to, say, a teleo-semantic story in order to rule out most of the possible perceptual scenarios as abnormal/erroneous, leaving only one (or only a small range) which forms the representational content of the experience.

But there is a crucial difference between the conceptual case and the experiential case. With concepts, we *want to rule out* all the abnormal causes from determining the content of the concept. It is intuitively clear that a tokening of the concept COW is a misfiring if it results from a cow-shaped horse. And so we *want* a theory that provides a rationale for ruling out such a tokening as incorrect. Whereas, the force of Travis's point, as I have presented it, is precisely that *we do not want to rule out* nearly all of the perceptual scenarios that can give rise to a certain manifest look as being illusions, or malfunctions of the visual system. Most of the range of scenarios that can give rise to a manifest look are perfectly normal perceptual situations in which our visual system is apparently functioning quite normally; they are not what we want to consider a misfiring of the visual system. For example, it would seem quite arbitrary that when we see, say, a medium-sized disc in the middle distance our visual system is functioning correctly, whereas when we see a large distant disc or a small near disc or an ellipse at an angle etc. our visual system is misfiring. To repeat: the basic point is *not just* that visual phenomenology does not, by itself, distinguish between any of the possible scenarios that could have given rise to it. Once we consider the range of intrinsically quite different, but all apparently legitimate perceptual scenarios that can give rise to a way of looking, we realise that we *don't want* to have a narrowly determinate scenario chosen as the 'objective purport' of the phenomenology. For any such choice would arbitrarily and implausibly rule a whole range of normal perceptual scenarios as being erroneous/illusory/faulty.

It might be responded to this charge of arbitrariness, that a convincing explanatory story concerning the source/origin of experience's content—e.g. a teleosemantic theory—would precisely provide *motivation* for narrowing down

the range of possible scenarios, and so remove the feeling of arbitrariness. Well, I suppose one should concede that this is possible. A successful theory of the origins of content *might* be so convincing that we are untroubled at having to treat a wide range of apparently normal perceptual experiences as being misrepresentations. Nevertheless, until such a satisfying theory is provided, it should be considered a heavy cost of this sort of approach that so many apparently normal perceptual experiences would have to be counted as misperceptions, as illusions (see section 5 below). Notice also that neither teleo-semantic nor causal approaches to the origins of intentionality look like they would provide the right sort of basis for narrowing down the indeterminacy. For example, the proper function of our visual systems is presumably not to detect, say, medium-sized red discs *rather than* large distant red discs, or red ellipses viewed from an angle etc. Our visual systems are presumably functioning *normally* when we see any/all of these perceptual scenarios.

Moreover, if the representational theorist does try to go in this direction, finding some further factor to determine a representational content, additional to the manifest nature of phenomenology, then we have already moved away from the idea of a tight constitutive relationship between visual phenomenology and representational content. It is then no longer so clear what the explanatory role of representational content is vis-à-vis conscious phenomenology.²³ Certainly, as far as representational *imperialism* is concerned, appealing to factors that go beyond the manifest nature of perceptual phenomenology, such as the teleo-history of the visual system, to determine content is to concede that the idea of representation does *not* after all fall out of the idea of the world looking some way.

- (2) A similar sort of response is to point out that some of the possible instantiating scenes for a given phenomenology are more likely or more probable than others. The phenomenology then provides evidence (or better evidence) for one possible instantiating scene rather than others. But it is important to be clear that probabilistic indication that something is the case does not thereby amount to representation that something is the case. (Otherwise representation would be ubiquitous—for anything that plays any kind of causal role can provide evidence about its likely causal antecedents and descendents.)

The (phenomenal) way that things look to me on some occasion can be 'misleading' in the following sense: it would be reasonable to judge that the manifest look, in this context, is an instance of a perceptual situation that is not in fact the actual perceptual situation. The way things look can, in some context, reasonably be taken to provide evidence that something is the case, which is not in fact the case. But that the phenomenal look provides misleading evidence that something is the case does not show that the look is a kind of *claim* or *message that* something is the case. Evidence can be misleading without being an instance of misrepresentation. For example, the pattern of burns inside a house might

reasonably indicate arson, when in fact they were the result of lightning plus freakish, improbable wind conditions. The burn marks might be misleading but they are not false; they do not represent anything. Likewise, visual phenomenology might be evidence, might indicate, that the environment is some way, without embodying any representational claim about the environment—any more than the pattern of burns embodied a claim about arson.

It is also important to realise that a phenomenal way things look only amounts to evidence about the environment *given the surrounding context* in which the look occurs. A way of looking may, in one sort of context, be most likely to be instantiated by a perceptual scenario of kind S_1 , whilst in another context it is more likely to be instantiated by some other scenario S_2 . So the way of looking *in itself* (independent of context) does not even specify a particular scenario as the one that is most likely. For example, in a context in which small red discs are commonplace but large red discs are not, the manifest way things look to me might amount to things indicatively looking to be a small red disc close to my eyes. In this context it would be reasonable to judge, on the basis of the manifest look, that I am confronted with a small red disc nearby. But in another context it might be folly so to judge. In another context, giant distant red discs might be ten-a-penny, whilst small discs are extremely rare. So the one same phenomenal way of looking can have quite different evidential bearings depending on the context.

- (3) Another sort of reaction, I think, is to insist: well, I don't know about *your* visual experience, but *my* visual phenomenology is damn well committed to there being a normal-sized chair a few feet distant, rather than a tiny miniature chair in front of my eyes or a bizarrely distorted chair-object at an angle etc.

The first thing to say here is to repeat that it is an optical fact that, in theory, one could construct indefinitely many different physical scenes, intrinsically very different, that are perfect ringers for this one—such that you could not do better than chance telling them apart by sight. If it was actually demonstrated in this way how all sorts of intrinsically different scenes give rise to *THIS* very same phenomenology, it would, I suggest, come to seem much less obvious that the phenomenology in itself is committed to there being a normal sized chair in the middle distance rather than a tiny close chair or etc. etc.

Of course, *given* knowledge of one's actual situation—given a preceding course of experience of walking into a normal-sized room, one's sensorimotor interactions with the normal-sized furniture, one's memories of having seen the room and its contents before etc.—it will be perfectly obvious that *THIS* phenomenology is in fact instantiated by the perceptual presentation of a normal-sized chair, a few feet away. But this is a matter of *taking one's experience* in a certain way *given* one's epistemic situation; such specificity is not in the visual phenomenology itself. If we remove or alter these contextual/epistemic factors it will not be at all obvious that the visual phenomenology *in itself* is

committed to the presence of a normal-sized chair rather than the other possible scenarios. For example, if the course of experience leading up to the phenomenal look in question, had been a series of interactions with tiny model furniture positioned right up close to one's eyes, then it will not seem that the phenomenal look in question is committed to a normal-sized chair, a few feet away.²⁴

Perhaps then one could retreat to the idea that the representational content of an experience partly depends not only on phenomenology but also on such contextual factors as one's preceding experiences, one's memories, one's cognitive dispositions etc. But this would just be to admit that visual phenomenology *in itself* does not embody a determinate representational content.

- (4) My discussion has implicitly assumed that there is a clear division to be drawn between *visual phenomenology* and a subject's cognitive reaction to, or take on, this visual phenomenology. But perhaps this assumption could be denied. The idea would be that there is a sort of intermingling and fusing of the phenomenology of visual experience and one's judgements about that experience.

The issues raised by this sort of response are too large for me to deal with adequately here. All I can do is baldly state that I find the division between what is visual phenomenology and what is cognitive reaction to be intuitively compelling and for the most part perfectly clear and useful. And so while there are no doubt all sorts of potentially problematic cases, I feel this division should not be given up lightly when theorising. (I hope to be able to say something more satisfactory on this issue in future work.)

In summary: whilst Travis's anti-representational argument puts a lot of pressure on the representational theory, it does not provide a decisive refutation. In particular, one remaining option is to ascribe experience a highly indeterminate content (section 3.2, clarification 2). Nor have we totally ruled out the possibility of discovering some further future theoretical basis for ascribing experience a determinate content (section 4, response 1)—though I think the argument puts a lot of pressure on the plausibility of such an approach.

But whilst representational theories may not have been refuted, I hope the discussion has also clarified why we should reject representational *imperialism* by clarifying the non-representational alternative. At the very least, Travis's argument shows that a representational understanding of 'the world looking some way' is hardly mandatory or obvious.

5. Some Final Remarks on Illusion

In addition to her 'Argument from Appearing', Siegel (2010) also claims that it is 'easy', 'natural' and 'pre-theoretic' to classify our experiences as hallucinatory, illusory or veridical.²⁵ Siegel claims that *the best explanation* for these allegedly intuitive/natural classifications is that the experiences embody representational contents that are accurate or inaccurate (to varying degrees).²⁶

Similar claims are made by Byrne (2009) and by Pautz (2009):²⁷

Sticking with vision for simplicity, one *veridically perceives* an object iff one sees it, and it is the way it appears or looks. One *non-veridically perceives*, or *is illuded by*, an object iff one sees it, and it is not the way it appears or looks. **No great weight is being placed on the vocabulary of 'sees' and 'appears/looks'. This is merely intended to be an intuitive gloss on a distinction that we can recognize from a range of examples,** situations like seeing a lemon on a table in daylight (veridical perception), seeing the Müller-Lyer figure (non-veridical perception or illusion), and so on. (Byrne 2009: 436; bold type added)

I shall stipulate that an experience is accurate if and only if its object has the property it looks to have. (Pautz 2009: 489)

To repeat my refrain in section 2: it is *not* an innocent assumption that visual phenomenology, i.e. what is described with a phenomenal looks-claim, encodes a claim *that* an object has some property, or is some way, rather than simply presenting an object + properties (in some specific manner/way). Pautz, however, claims that this is a 'theory-neutral' way of classifying experiences as accurate/inaccurate. Which leads him to make the imperialistic claim that this notion of accuracy allows for a thin notion of the 'content of experience' that *all theorists must/should accept*.

... who could deny that experiences can be classified as accurate or inaccurate in these thin senses?

Indeed, even disjunctivists, who often say that they are opposed to the notion that experiences have contents, must recognize that they have contents in the senses specified by the different versions of the accuracy conception. For instance, must they not recognize that experiences may be classified as accurate or inaccurate? After all, when these concepts are introduced to us, we catch on fairly quickly. (Pautz 2009: 489–90)

The common idea here then is slightly different from Presentation = Representation. The slogan here would be Illusion = Misrepresentation—i.e. the idea of perceptual illusion must be understood in terms of an experience with an inaccurate representational content.

Let's allow for the sake of argument, without actually doing any 'X-phi', that non-philosophers would reach some broad agreement over the kinds of episodes they would classify as illusory or not. The problem is that it is not at all obvious, indeed it is *quite implausible*, that these classifications would be in line with the 'intuitive', 'easy to recognise/catch-on-to' gloss of illusion/inaccuracy offered by Byrne and Pautz—roughly: O looks F but O is not F. For in a vast range of everyday experiences, something can aptly/correctly be described as 'looking F', where that thing is not in fact F, but we *would not*, I suggest, find it easy or intuitive to classify these experiences as illusory or inaccurate. A few examples:

- I see a circular penny at an angle to me, such that I might naturally and correctly describe it as 'looking elliptical'. But it is not at all natural/easy/intuitive to classify such an experience as 'illusory' or 'inaccurate'.
- I see two identical chairs, one of which is closer to me than the other, such that I might naturally and correctly say that one 'looks smaller than the other'. It is not at all natural/easy/intuitive to classify this experience as illusory/inaccurate.
- I see a wall painted a uniform colour that is illuminated by less than perfectly uniform lighting, such that I might naturally and correctly say that some areas of the wall 'look darker coloured' whilst others 'look lighter coloured'. It is not at all natural/easy/intuitive to classify this experience as illusory/inaccurate.

(All of these examples are meant to be cases of seeing something in plain view in quite normal circumstances.)

Note: I am not suggesting that it would *never* be natural to classify such experiences as illusory, only that *in general, in normal contexts*, it would not be.²⁸ Nor am I suggesting that such cases by themselves immediately rule out any definition along the lines that Byrne and Pautz propose. I am only pointing out that this gloss on 'illusion'/'inaccurate' is *not* so intuitive and easy, something theory-neutral that everyone should clearly sign up to. Now, perhaps Representational theorists could bite the bullet and insist, against the pre-theoretic grain, that nearly all experiences are illusory/inaccurate. Or perhaps they can tweak the gloss (as Byrne does later in his paper, p. 440) by insisting that 'looks' is understood in some more restricted, technical sense—a 'non-comparative' sense. I argued against this sort of proposal in section 3.4. But here all I am claiming is that any such proposal is hardly just an 'intuitive gloss' in which 'no particular weight' is placed on 'looks'/'appears'.

If we look to actual non-philosophical definitions of illusion, it is noticeable how few of them specify, as Byrne and Pautz do, a contrast between a 'way of looking' and reality. It is also noticeable that they very frequently mention belief, judgement, interpretation based on sensory stimulation, as part of the definition. (I include an appendix with a selection of definitions from medical, psychological and psychiatric textbooks, as well as from the standard English language dictionaries.)

One moral of the Travis argument was that Representational theories are committed to classifying most (all but one, all but a few) situations that give rise to the same type of phenomenology as being illusory/inaccurate despite the fact that these intuitively seem to be quite normal perceptual situations. And in this final section I have suggested that the 'intuitive gloss' many rep theorists give as to when an exp is illusory/inaccurate is far from intuitive, for it would apparently rule far too many everyday normal experiences as illusory. So the Representational theory account faces serious issues concerning its account of illusions.

As the imperialist theorists are well aware, there are non-representational accounts of illusion on offer in the literature: e.g. Brewer (2007, 2011), Fish (2009) and Travis (2004). The rough idea of these non-representational accounts is that

illusory experiences are those that have strong tendency to produce false judgements downstream. To finish, I just want to make a last, perhaps rather obvious dialectical point. You may not think these non-representational accounts of illusion are *good* accounts. And it is certainly true that with the more 'optical' illusions (Muller Lyer, Flag-lag effect etc.), there seems more intuitive plausibility that the fault lies in the experience itself, not just the subject's downstream judgements or dispositions. But even supposing one can raise severe problems for non-representational accounts of illusion, this would not provide any answer to the problems facing the Representational account. The Travis argument raises a significant problem that Representational theories would need to answer even if there were no other viable competitor theories.²⁹

Thomas Raleigh

*Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
NTNU Dragvoll
7491 Trondheim
Norway
thomas.raleigh@ntnu.no*

Appendix: Definitions of 'Illusion'

This appendix provides thirteen definitions of the term 'illusion' from a number of well-known psychiatric, psychological and medical dictionaries, as well as from the standard English language dictionaries. It is notable how many of these definitions mention false belief or misinterpretation of a sensory stimulus. Whereas only one of the definitions—(10) Collins Dictionary—uses the term 'looks'. These definitions do not, I suggest, provide much support for the claim that non-philosophical usage lines up with the sorts of philosopher's definitions provided by Byrne and Pautz (considered in section 5).

- (1) Campbell's Psychiatric dictionary 8th edition, OUP 2004, ed. Robert J Campbell:
'An erroneous perception, a false response to a sense stimulation; but in a normal person this false belief usually brings the desire to check or verify its correctness, and often another sense or other senses may come to the rescue and satisfy the person that it is merely an illusion. . . .
The absence of a sense stimulus places the reaction in a different class from those cited above—it is a hallucination.' (p. 328)
- (2) American Psychiatric Glossary, 8th edition, American Psychiatric publications, 2003, eds. Narriman C. Shahrokh, Robert E Hales.
'A misperception of a real external stimulus. For example, a person may misperceive the rustling of leaves as the sound of voices.' (p. 99)
[The same volume has as its definition of 'Hallucination':

- 'A sensory perception in the absence of an actual external stimulus; to be distinguished from an illusion, which is a misperception or misinterpretation of an external stimulus . . .' (p. 91)]
- (3) A Historical Dictionary of Psychiatry, Edward Shorter, OUP 2005
[From the entry on 'Psychosis: Emergence of Concepts']
'Differentiating illusion from hallucinations (1832). Esquirol (Etienne Esquirol) described illusions as a symptom of psychosis: 'Illusions, so frequent among the insane, deceive these patients about the qualities, the meanings and the causes of impressions currently being received, and give rise to false judgements about their internal and external sensations; reason does not rectify the error' ('On Illusions' ['Des illusions'], p. 204). Esquirol employed here the modern sense of the term: distortion or misinterpretation of a real perception. Normal people can commit these misinterpretations as well, without a predisposition to illness, but they are more frequent in people with mental illness' (p. 240)
- (4) Dictionary of Psychiatry, Ed. H. Walton, Blackwell 1985.
'A distorted perception which is a misinterpretation of a real external stimulus.' (p.78)
- (5) APA (American Psychological Association) Dictionary of Psychology, APA press, 2007. Gary R VandenBos chief Ed.
'Illusion *n*.1. a false perception. Illusions of the senses, such as visual (or optical) illusions, result from the misinterpretation of sensory stimuli. For example, parallel railroad tracks appear to meet in the distance.'
- (6) The Dictionary of Psychology, Ed. Raymond J Corsini, Brunner-Routledge, NY, 2002
illusion 1. Seeing one thing but interpreting it as something else (for example, in the dark, a coat is mistaken for a dog). 2. A misinterpretation of sensory stimuli (for example, the impression that railroad tracks come together in the distance). 3. A positive idea or false belief, often shared by others or other groups, which is false. (p. 472)
- (7) Oxford Medical companion, Eds Walton, Barondess & Lock, OUP 1994
'A misinterpreted perception. An idea with no substance in fact or no rational basis.' (p. 398)
- (8) Dorland's Illustrated medical dictionary 31st edition, Saunders/Elsevier, 2007
illusion: a false or misinterpreted sensory impression; a false interpretation of a real sensory image. (p. 928)
- (9) OED (shorter): illusion 2. A thing that deceives or deludes by giving a false impression . . . 3. The fact or condition of being deceived or deluded by appearances . . . 4. (An instance of) the sense-perception of an external object suggesting a false belief as to its nature.
- (10) Collins Cobuild, Collins, 1987
illusion 1. An idea or belief which you think is true but is in fact false. 2. Something that looks like one thing in appearance but which is another thing in reality, or is not really there at all.

- (11) Chambers dictionary, Chambers Harrap, 2003
 'deceptive appearance; an apparition; a false conception or notion; delusion; a false perception due to misinterpretation of stimuli from an object.'
- (12) Webster's dictionary, Collins, 1978
 '1. A false idea or conception; a belief or opinion not in accord with the facts.
 2. an unreal, deceptive, or misleading appearance or image.
 3. a false perception, conception or interpretation of what one sees, where one is etc.'
- (13) Longman Dictionary of the English Language
 '1. a false impression or notion; misapprehension
 2a(1) a misleading image presented to the vision
 a(2) something that deceives or misleads intellectually
 b(1) perception of an object in such a way that it presents a misleading image to the eye
 b(2) a hallucination.'

NOTES

¹ Whether representational content is entirely or only partially constitutive of phenomenology is then a further debate within the representational framework. Likewise, which direction the constitution/explanation runs: from content to phenomenology or vice versa (or perhaps there is no metaphysical priority). There are possible positions on which phenomenology is only *contingently* representational—i.e. an experience's representational properties are not essentially determined, even partially, by its phenomenology. As I am using 'representational', such a theory would not be a representational theory, for whilst the experience represents, this representation does not metaphysically determine/get-determined-by the phenomenology.

² For example, Alex Byrne writes of sense-data theories: 'A red* sense-datum seems or appears red*. So it is represented as red*. The sense-datum theorist simply has a strange view about the content of experience . . .' (Byrne 2001: 225) Susanna Siegel likewise writes of Naïve-Realism: 'it is hard to see the daylight between standard Naïve Realism and the claim that strongly veridical experiences are accurate.' (Siegel 2010: 362) And: 'it seems clear that Naïve Realism and the Content View are compatible . . .' (Siegel 2010: 365)

³ A couple more examples:

If perception were the only mental state under discussion, intentionalism would not be a controversial thesis. (Crane 2001: 4)

That at least some conscious states are representational ones will presumably be granted by everyone. The most obvious examples are visual experiences of the environment . . . (Rowlands 2001: 198)

⁴ Thanks to an anonymous referee for forcing me to clarify this point.

⁵ See e.g. Schwitzgebel (2011).

⁶ What exactly perceptual 'presentation' amounts to is what the rival theories of experience disagree over—as I say in the main text below. I am using the term just to mean that *somehow or other* the environment shows up in conscious experience—the world appears to the subject in some way.

⁷ Notice: the alleged 'Transparency' of experience should not obscure the difference between the two kinds of gift. Suppose, for whatever constitutional reasons, I am quite unable to gain awareness of any of gift (b)'s properties—the shape of the paper, the colour of the ink etc.—*apart from* the content of the message. Perhaps then we might want to say that I 'see right through' the gift itself, my mind being directed only at the environmental property of square-ness that is represented by the gift. Nevertheless, it is perfectly clear that, transparency or no-transparency, what you have been given is still a message/claim about square-ness and that this is quite different from being given an actual instance of square-ness, which need embody no message/claim about square-ness nor about anything else.

⁸ Siegel also offers a preliminary 'Argument from Accuracy', but says of this argument that it is 'not good enough' as it does not establish that the representational content of experience is suitable to be 'conveyed to the subject in experience' (Siegel 2010: 342)—which I understand to mean that the argument does not establish that the alleged content of experience is phenomenally embodied by the experience.

⁹ For example, 'Suppose you see a cube, and it looks red and cubical. Here your experience presents it as being the case that there is a red cube before you. . . . when such a property cluster (redness, cubicality and being nearby) figures in visual perceptual experience, the experience presents it as being the case that a red cube is nearby.' (Siegel 2010: 347)

¹⁰ I have quoted only the first half of Schellenberg's 'Master Argument', as this already reaches the representational thesis as its conclusion.

¹¹ For example, Campbell (2002), Brewer (2011), Martin (2002), Logue (2012).

¹² I hope that my presentation of what I am calling Travis's point is faithful to the spirit of the original, but if not, so be it. My ultimate aim is not to clarify Travis but to clarify the debate about whether experience is representational.

¹³ See e.g. Chisholm (1957), Jackson (1977), Maund (2003), as well as Byrne (2009). Martin (2010) provides an exhaustive account of the different uses of 'looks' in English.

¹⁴ Byrne and Schellenberg also both identify Travis's terms 'demonstrative' and 'indicative' with, respectively, Chisholm's terms 'comparative' and 'epistemic' and then allege that Travis's argument fails to take account of a 'non-comparative' sense/use of looks-claims—see section 3.4.

¹⁵ Notice: the same one sentence might be used to make either an epistemic or a phenomenal looks-claim. For example 'The penny looks circular'—this sentence might be used to claim that going by the penny's manifest appearance, one would judge it to be circular (epistemic use). Or, it might be used to describe the manifest appearance itself—the penny looks the way that circular things, inter alia, generally/standardly look, where no claim at all is being made as to the reasonableness of judging that the penny is actually circular (phenomenal use).

¹⁶ I say only that it is *plausible* that the phenomenology is the same when perceptual scenarios are indistinguishable. Sameness of phenomenology is not simply *entailed* by indistinguishability—for there could be, for all I have said, subtle phenomenal differences that are too slight for the subject to use to reliably differentiate the scenes. Likewise there can be cases of inattentional blindness, aspect-shifts etc. However, I don't think this complication affects the overall argument. Representational theorists would surely accept

that in general, absent any reasons to think there is some strange inattentive condition, indiscriminability is a pretty good sign that two perceptual experiences have the same representational content—or at least highly similar contents. For simplicity, I will continue to assume that all the scenarios, in which light is reflected onto the retina in the same manner, share the same phenomenology—although strictly speaking it would be better to assume only that the phenomenology is highly similar.

¹⁷ Brewer (2011)—see chapter 4.3, pages 78–91—argues that even this much generality prevents the representational orthodox view from being a theory on which everyday physical objects are presented to us in perception.

¹⁸ Peacocke says that for each point in egocentric space we need to specify: ‘Whether there is a surface there, and if so what texture, hue, saturation . . . The orientation of the surface must be included. So much more in the visual case . . .’ (Peacocke 1992: 107) In a footnote Peacocke allows that: ‘Strictly, in giving the content we should consider a set of ways of filling out the space.’ But this is only to take into account degrees of perceptual acuity as mentioned above. ‘Greater acuity corresponds to restriction on the set of ways of filling out the space whose instantiation is consistent with the correctness of the representational content.’ (ibid.: 107, footnote 1)

Peacocke also gives the following illustration of spatial perceptual content: ‘Suppose we prescind from qualifications about perceptual acuity. Then we can say that one and the same restriction on the distance between the sides of the table, one and the same restriction on the ways in which the space around the perceiver can be filled consistently with the experience being fully veridical, is given by doing these two things: saying that the sides are 39.4 inches apart and saying that they are 100 units apart.’ (ibid.: 112) This passage makes clear that Peacocke is thinking of the content of the experience as narrowing down the range of possible environmental scenes to those in which there is a table with a width of 100 cm—give or take if we allow for less than perfect acuity. So the scenario content specifies a much more determinate way that the world ought to be according to it, than the sort of *highly* indeterminate content I am considering.

¹⁹ Byrne (2009) makes essentially the same response to Travis as Schellenberg, but for reasons of space I only discuss Schellenberg. I take my criticisms of Schellenberg to apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to Byrne also.

²⁰ And as mentioned back in section 2, Breckenridge 2007 also provides criticism of this sort of argument for Representationalism.

²¹ See e.g. Millikan (1984) or Papineau (1984).

²² See Fodor (1987).

²³ And this may also prove to be problematic in terms of the justificatory role of experience—if the content of our visual experience is not something that is just revealed to us in the conscious phenomenology, then it becomes less clear how the alleged *non-phenomenological* content of experience provides rational justification to believe in *that* content, rather than in some other content.

²⁴ See Gupta (2006) for a more detailed non-representational account of how a particular experience’s evidential bearing will depend on the prior course of the subject’s experiences.

²⁵ Though pre-theoretically we might not use this last *label*, it is, according to Siegel, a *category* we easily and naturally recognise.

²⁶ Notice, Siegel is not here arguing we are *forced* to treat experience in terms of accuracy conditions—her claim is only that this is the best explanation. At this point, Siegel is still allowing some possibility of an alternative, non-representational explanation—though she thinks this possibility will be ruled out by her Argument from Appearing:

'One might try to argue that the only classifications of accuracy in the vicinity are classifications of judgments downstream of experiences. This alternative will bring us straight to the heart of the controversy over the Content View, and it will be useful to have the second argument for the Content View on the table before exploring it.' (Siegel 2010: 341)

²⁷ Pautz also quotes Siegel's (2006) very similar definition of an inaccurate experience: 'an experience is accurate if its object has the properties it looks to have and is inaccurate if not' (Siegel 2006: 363).

²⁸ I suspect that people's classifications of their experiences as illusory or not, are sensitive in particular to whether the experience led them into false *judgement/belief*. For example I suggest that it would not be at all intuitive/easy for people to classify the experience of watching television as an 'illusion' or as an 'inaccurate experience'. However people might be prepared to accept, if prompted, that they experience the 'illusion of depth'. And if the television screen is embedded in a misleading, *trompe-l'oeil* context, then the same kind of experience of seeing the screen might more naturally be described as 'an illusion'.

²⁹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at: King's College London, University of Essex, University of Hertfordshire, as part of their conference on Phenomenal Qualities, and at the Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas, UNAM. I am grateful to audience members on all these occasions for their questions and comments. I am especially grateful to David Papineau for many helpful discussions and, of course, to Charles Travis whose work was the original inspiration for this paper.

REFERENCES

- Breckenridge, W. (2007), 'Against one Reason for Thinking that Visual Experiences have Representational Content', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 21: 117–23.
- Brewer, B. (2007), 'How to Account for Illusion', in F. Macpherson and A. Haddock (eds) *Disjunctivism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 168–80.
- (2011), *Perception and its Objects*. Oxford: OUP.
- Byrne, A. (2001), 'Intentionalism Defended', *Philosophical Review*, 110: 199–239.
- (2009), 'Experience and Content', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 59: 429–51.
- Campbell, J. (2002), *Reference and Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chisholm, R. (1957), *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Crane, T. (2001), *Elements of Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fish, W. (2009), *Perception, Hallucination and Illusion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fodor, J. (1987), *Psychosemantics: The Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gupta, A. (2006), 'Experience and Knowledge', in T. S. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds) *Perceptual Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 181–204.
- Jackson, F. (1977), *Perception: A Representative Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Logue, H. (2012), 'Why Naïve-Realism?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 112: 211–37.
- Martin, M. G. F. (2002), 'The Transparency of Experience', *Mind and Language*, 17: 376–425.
- (2010), 'What's in a Look?', in B. Nanay (ed.) *Perceiving the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 160–225.
- Maud, B. (2003), *Perception*. Chesham: Acumen Publishing.

- Millikan, R. (1984), *Language, Thought and Other Biological Categories*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Papineau, D. (1984), 'Representation and Explanation', *Philosophy of Science*, 51: 550–72.
- Pautz, A. (2009), 'What are the Contents of Experience?', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 59: 483–507.
- Peacocke, C. (1992), 'Scenarios, concepts and perception', in T. Crane (ed.) *The contents of experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 105–35.
- Rowlands, M. (2001), *The Nature of Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schellenberg, S. (2011), 'Perceptual Content Defended', *Nous*, 45: 714–50.
- Schwitzgebel, E. (2011), *Perplexities of Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Siegel, S. (2006), 'Subject and Object in Visual Experience', *Philosophical Review*, 115: 355–88.
- (2010), 'Do Experiences Have Contents?', in B. Nanay (ed.) *Perceiving the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 333–68.
- Travis, C. (2004), 'The Silence of the Senses', *Mind*, 113: 57–94.