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THE CONTENT AND PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

abstract

The paper's main target is strong and reductive "representationalism". What we claim is that even though this position looks very appealing in so far as it does not postulate intrinsic and irreducible experiential properties, the attempt it pursues of accounting for the phenomenology of experience in terms of representational content runs the risk of providing either an inadequate phenomenological account or an inadequate account of the content of the experience.

keywords

Representationalism, particularity, phenomenological indistinguishability, phenomenal character

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1. Introduction

Perceptual states exhibit a double nature, both representational and qualitative: they represent the world as being a certain way and they also make a peculiar qualitative effect on the experiencing subject. If their representational nature has to do with what is presented to the subject in a given sensory modality, their qualitative nature has to do with "what it is like" for the subject to undergo the peculiar perceptual experience she is undergoing. The standard way in which this point is expressed is in terms of properties. To say that perceptual states have a representational nature amounts to saying that they have *representational properties*, whereas to say that perceptual states have a qualitative nature amounts to saying that they have *phenomenal properties*. The co-presence of these two kinds of properties raises the philosophical question of their relation. Within the philosophical debate on the topic, one can distinguish three main stances which differ as regards the position they take towards the issues of dependence/independence, reducibility/non-reducibility of one kind of property to the other. According to one position, phenomenal properties are independent (both for their existence and for their nature) of representational properties and irreducible (both explanatorily and ontologically) to them. This position, which has come to be known as the "two-realms conception", conceives of the mind as a non unitary domain constituted by two non overlapping kinds of phenomena: on the one side the purely representational ones (typically: propositional attitudes such as beliefs and desires) and on the other side the purely qualitative ones (*qualia*) such as proprioceptive states, moods, tickles, itches and the likes. According to a second position, phenomenal properties depend on (or at least co-vary with) representational properties, but are not reducible to them. The third position adds a reducibility claim and maintains that phenomenal properties are not only dependent on (or co-variant with) representational properties, but also reducible to them. The last two positions are varieties of what is called "representationalism" in the recent philosophical debate on consciousness. As the label suggests, representationalism gives to the notion of (mental) representation the highest place of honor in the account of the mind: the mind is conceived as a unitary field of homogeneous phenomena and what accounts for this homogeneity is precisely the representational nature of all mental items. Representationalism comes in many different varieties. An important distinction is that between strong and weak versions of the doctrine: whereas strong representationalism defends an equivalence/identity claim according to which phenomenal properties are but a kind of intentional properties

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(typicallyrepresentational ones),[1] weak representationalism restricts itself to defending a mere supervenience claim according to which two mental states cannot differ in their phenomenal properties unless they also differ in their representational properties.[2] Other distinctions which are drawn are: pure/impure; narrow/wide; reductive/non reductive. *Pure* representationalism claims that phenomenal properties are identical to "pure representational properties" (properties of representing a certain intentional content), whereas impure representationalism claims that phenomenal properties are identical to "impure representational properties" (properties of representing a certain intentional content in a certain manner of representation such as in a visual perceptual way, in an auditory perceptual way and so on). Narrow/wide has to do with whether the relevant representational properties are taken as internal or external (where a property is internal/external if it supervenes/does not supervene on the intrinsic, non relational properties of an entity). The last dichotomy has to do with whether the representational properties to which the phenomenal properties are claimed to be identical can be understood and explained without appeal to phenomenal notions: reductive representationalism answers in the positive, whereas the non reductive variety of the doctrine answers in the negative.[3]

Here we shall confine our attention to strong and reductive representationalism which, according to may people, constitutes the most appealing version of the doctrine in so far as it avoids any kind of commitment towards intrinsic, irreducible properties of the experience. The main question we shall address is whether strong, reductive representationalism provides a satisfactory account of perceptual experience.[4] The critical point we shall raise against this position is that even though it looks extremely attractive, in so far as it avoids any kind of commitment towards intrinsic, irreducible, qualitative properties of experience (*qualia)*, nonetheless the attempt it pursues of accounting for the qualitative/phenomenological dimension of perceptual states only in terms of representational properties ends up, in our view, to promote either an inadequate phenomenological account or an inadequate account of content. We shall structure our criticism in the following way: (§1) we shall start

1 Supporters of strong representationalism are for example Dretske (1995); Lycan (1996) and Tye (1995).

2 For this position see e.g. Block (1996) and Chalmers (1996).

3 For more on these distinctions see Chalmers 2004.

4 It is worth stressing from the very beginning that our considerations are primarily meant to apply to perceptual experiences in the visual modality. So, from now on, when we talk of perceptual experience we will always mean visual perceptual experience. Even though we think that most of our remarks can be generalized to other modalities, in the context of this work we prefer to remain neutral on the more general issue.

by presenting a test of explanatory adequacy which amounts to a number of requirements which, along with other people in the debate, we take to be minimal, non negotiable *desiderata* for any theory of perceptual experience. The ultimate upshot of our criticism to representationalism is that this position should be revised, if not utterly rejected, in so far as it doesn't pass the adequacy test. This conclusion will be reached in two steps in which we will respectively confront with one of two possible varieties of representationalism which differ as regards the issue as to whether a perceptual state has only one content (§2) or rather a multiplicity of contents or layers of them (§3). What we shall claim is that even though the second variety (multiple content representationalism) looks better than the other (unitary content representationalism), it also fails in so far as it proves unable to satisfy all the requirements stated. This negative part will be followed by a positive one in which we shall provide a sketch of our suggested proposal. In this part (§4) we shall revive a distinction (namely: that between representational and presentational properties), which, while being generally acknowledged and actually widely present within the phenomenological tradition, has mostly been ignored within the debate on consciousness in the more or less recent analytic tradition.[5] With this distinction in place, we shall show how one could meet the explanatory adequacy test.

2. The Explanatory Adequacy Test

A good way to critically assess a theoretical position (here: strong, reductive representationalism) aiming at providing a given explanation (here: the nature of visual perceptual experience) is to lay out a set of requirements which can reasonably be taken as minimal,[6] non negotiable conditions of adequacy for any such account. This is what we shall do in this section where we shall formulate what we call the "explanatory adequacy thesis" (EAT) for any account of perceptual experience. According to this thesis, any adequate theory of perceptual experience should satisfy (at least) two requirements which we shall label the "particularity requirement" (PR) and the "phenomenal indistinguishability requirement" (PIR). In this paper we shall assume the validity of (EAT) without providing any argument in its support.[7]

5 But see Chalmers (2004).

6 We use the qualification 'minimal' in order not to rule out the possibility that other requirements are actually needed for assessing the adequacy issue.

7 Actually, that an adequate account of perceptual experience should satisfy both requirements is a point which has been recently defended by many authors. This point is explicit in Schellenberg who says: "any account of perceptual experience should satisfy the following two desiderata. First, it should account for the particularity of perceptual experience, that is, it should account for the mind-independent object of an experience making a difference to individuating the experience. Second, it should explain the possibility that perceptual relations to distinct environments could yield subjectively indistinguishable experiences" (Schellenberg 2010, 19).

Let us clarify the two requirements starting from the second one. Phenomenal indistinguishability amounts to the idea that a subject could undergo different experiences in different times/places and, despite these differences, be utterly unable to tell one experience from the other in so far as the way in which things appear to her on those distinct occasions is, from her perspective, the same. An example will clarify the point: let our subject S be confronted in two situations with two numerically different, but qualitatively indistinguishable apples (apple1 and apple2). Even though the two apples are numerically different, they appear to S to be identical in so far as they have the same look (the same "appearance properties" as someone would say)[8]: they both present the same shade of red, the very same shape, they are of the very same size and so on.[9] To put this point in more formal terms let us say that two experiences *e1* and *e2* are phenomenally indistinguishable for a subject S if and only if S is not able to tell *e1* from *e2*, that is if and only if she cannot know, by introspection alone, that they are not the same.[10] The adverb 'phenomenally' used to qualify this kind of indistinguishability has to do with the fact that what grounds the subject's "feeling" of identity in these cases is the way in which her experiences present themselves to her. What this first requirement states is that an adequate theory of perceptual experience should not only allow for such a possibility (which, as a matter of fact, no one is willing to deny), but also provide an explanation of it. Let us now consider the other requirement (PR). As things stand, even though a subject could be unable in a given situation to tell one of her experience (say, *e1* in which she is confronted with apple1) from another qualitatively identical one (say, *e2* in which she is confronted with apple2), nonetheless what the subject is presented with in the two cases are different particulars, namely: apple1 and apple 2 respectively. When S looks at apple1 what she is presented with is apple1 itself and nothing less than that. In other words, what she is perceptually aware of is not the fact that there is something having certain perceptual features (redness/roundness/brightness) in her immediate surroundings, nor the fact that there is at least one apple in that area exemplifying those features. Rather, she is presented (and it also seems to her to be presented) with that very thing in front of her which looks to her to be an apple. We could rephrase this point by saying that the subject's perceptual experience is always an experience *of*

8 See e.g. Shoemaker (1994).

9 Another example of indistinguishability can be provided by considering a veridical perception and a hallucination. A hallucinatory experience may be, from S's lights, indistinguishable from a veridical experience of her and yet the two experiences are different in so far as only one of them is veridical or correct.

10 For this "epistemic" characterization of the notion of phenomenal indistinguishability, see Williamson (1990).

particulars in the world.[11] Under this respect perceptual experiences differ from propositional attitude states such as beliefs and desires. Take a desire for example. If in this case one's desire can be either particular (S desires a particular item, say: that very tulip in front of her) or general (S desires an item of a given kind, say: a tulip of a given shape and color), in the perceptual case only the first situation can arise. True enough, if one sees a particular tulip, then there is a tulip that one sees. But what one sees is always something particular (a tulip which is not this or that particular tulip is not an object one can see).

In what follows we shall distinguish two senses of particularity which will be put to use in our criticism of representationalism. We shall label them, following a current usage,[12] the relational and the phenomenological sense. The relational sense of particularity is that according to which a perceptual experience is a relational state one of whose *relata* is the experienced object itself. The object a given experience is of is what is relevant to the characterization of the state's correctness/veridicality/accurateness conditions.[13] If it visually looks to me as if there is a red apple in front of me (apple1, say), my experience turns out to be veridical/unveridical according to how things are with apple1 itself (it turns out to be veridical if apple1 is red, false otherwise), notwithstanding how things could turn out to be with any other apple no matter how similar in appearance it could be to apple1 itself. In order not to trivialize the particularity requirement in its relational sense, it is important to distinguish a weak and a strong reading of it and link the requirement with the strong one. That an experience (at least when veridical) is always of something is a point which everyone in the debate is willing to concede. A more substantial point has to do with whether the object a given experience is about plays a role in individuating the experience.[14] The particularity requirement in the strong reading of the relational sense (PRrs) is the claim that an adequate explanation of experience should account for the role which the object a given experience is of plays as regards the individuation of the experience.
Let us now move to the phenomenological sense of the particularity requirement (PRps). When one enjoys a given experience (when one sees apple1,

11 See Soteriou (2000, 173).
12 Actually, of the two senses we shall distinguish, the phenomenological one has not been widely acknowledged within the philosophical literature except for a few remarkable exceptions such as: Martin (2002); Montague (2011), Schellenberg (2010).
13 In what follows we shall use these expressions interchangeably.
14 To claim that the object a given experience is of plays a role in individuating the experience is to claim that if the subject were confronted with a different, albeit qualitatively identical object, she would enjoy a different experience with different veridicality conditions.

say) one not only happens to be related to apple1; rather, one's being so related is something that figures in the very phenomenology of one's experience (one seems to be presented with *that* particular thing which looks to one to be an apple). To put it in different terms, we can say that the particularity that one's experience involves is reflected in the way in which things phenomenally look to one (to use Jackson's terms we could say that the experienced particularity is part of the "phenomenal look" of one's experience).[15]

Even though the distinction between the two senses of particularity looks plausible and also fairly clear, one could wonder why some such distinction ought to be drawn in an account of perceptual experience. In my view there are at least two reasons. A first one is that, while in general the two senses are jointly satisfied, there are cases in which only one of them is present. As for the case in which only the phenomenological sense is exemplified, one can think of hallucinations. In one such case, even though it may seem to the subject as if she is presented with a particular object (and so there is phenomenological particularity), there actually is no real object with which that experience is related (and so no relational particularity is involved). As for the specular case, one can consider a cognitive (that is, non sensory) state such a belief for example. While a *de re* belief (a belief about a given item being thus and so) may be taken to exemplify the particularity requirement in its relational sense (because what makes that belief the belief it is is its standing in an appropriate - maybe, as Burge claims,[16] contextual, non conceptual - relation with the particular item the belief is about), the phenomenological sense of the requirement does not seem to apply.[17] A second reason of why such distinction should be drawn has to do with the different epistemic status of our judgments concerning the instantiation of particularity. As far as phenomenal particularity is concerned, we cannot be wrong in ascribing it to a given mental state we are enjoying: if it seems to one to be presented with a "this-such", then it is true that one is so presented. By contrast, as to the other sense of particularity, there is always the possibility of getting wrong in one's

15 See e.g. Jackson (1982). In an analogous way, Schellenberg presents the distinction between the two senses of particularity in the following way: "a mental state instantiates *relational particularity* if and only if the experiencing subject is perceptually related to the particular object perceived. A mental state instantiates *phenomenological particularity* [...] if and only if the particularity is in the scope of how things seem to the subject, such that it seems to the subject that there is a particular object or a particular instance of a property present" (Schellenberg 2010, 22-23).

16 See, e.g. Burge (1977).

17 Or, at least, not in the same sense in which it applies to sensory states. A distinction which could be put to use in this regard is that between sensuous phenomenology and cognitive phenomenology. For a defense of the idea that phenomenology extends far beyond the purely sensory level see e.g. Bayne & Montague (2011).

judgment about one's being related to a particular item; in this case we do not have any "privileged authority" towards judgments whose truth and falsity depend not on how things appear to us, but rather on how they actually are. Someone could concede that I am right in distinguishing among two different senses of particularity and in claiming that there are cases (like hallucinations for example) in which only one of them is present and yet object that I am wrong in claiming that there is something phenomenological going on in those cases. Couldn't it be that what is there at stake is just a belief (a cognitive non sensuous state)? As a matter of fact, the objector could claim, an analogue distinction applies outside the experiential domain. As regards thoughts, for example, there can be cases in which a subject *aims at* a particular object, but given that there actually is no real object, one has only an impression of particularity. In such cases, the impression in question can be accounted for in purely cognitive non-experiential terms ("your thought purports to refer to something" or "you, the thinker, are aiming your thought towards something");[18] that is one has a belief (as to there being an object one is thinking about) and this belief turns out to be false. My reply to this possible objection against the phenomenal nature of the sense of particularity involved is the following: if the impression of particularity in the hallucinatory case were something belief-like (as the objector is claiming), then that impression would fade out as soon as one were told that there is no object one is experientially confronted with, for this is precisely what happens with cognitive illusions (they are so to say cognitively penetrable). And yet this does not happen in the hallucinatory case. A subject suffering from a hallucination as to there being a flying horse floating in the air around her may well believe, by being told about, that there actually is no flying horse, but still go on having the impression (a strong phenomenological feeling) of there being one.[19]

Having introduced the requirements of explanatory adequacy we can now rephrase our initial question in the following way. Can strong, reductive representationalism provide an adequate account of experience and therefore, according to (EAT), satisfy both (PR), in its double sense, and (PIR)? In addressing this critical issue we shall take into account two varieties of representationalism whose main difference has to do with whether perceptual experience has only

18 For a development of this distinction between thoughts that refer to objects and thoughts that merely purport to refer to objects, see Crane (2011).

19 Actually one could claim that what accounts for this sense of particularity is something cognitive (something thought-like) and yet maintain that this does not prevent it from being fully phenomenological in so far as one gives room to the idea that besides "sensuous" phenomenology there is also "cognitive" phenomenology. The idea that not only there is such a thing as cognitive phenomenology, but that it also compenetrates the qualitative phenomenology of perceptual experience has been recently defended by Montague (2011).

one kind or layer of content (unitary content representationalism) or rather a multiplicity of them (multiple content representationalism). What we shall claim is that if representationalism adopts the unitary content thesis (the thesis according to which any experience has at most one content), then if it accounts for (PIR) it cannot account for (PR), neither in the relational, nor in the phenomenological sense. By contrast, if representationalism adopts the multiple content thesis (the thesis according to which the experience has at least two kinds or layers of content), then it can account for both (PIR) and (PRrs), but it does not succeed in accounting for (PRps). We shall deal with these two varieties of representationalism in the next two sections.

3. Unitary Content Representationalism

According to this position, perceptual experiences have only one kind of content and this content is general (i.e. a kind of content which can be specified by using only general terms, that is terms that refer to general features which several different individuals can exemplify). Let us confine our attention to this claim - which is labeled the "generality claim" (GC) - and try to articulate the train of thought which motivates its adoption. There are at least two orders of considerations normally adduced to ground (GC): one has to do with phenomenology (and in particular with the fact that it is possible for different experiences to look indistinguishable to a given subject in so far as she is qualitatively appeared to in the same way on both occasions), another one with semantics (and in particular with the fact that experiences are assessable for correctness on the ground of their having a content). That the content of perceptual experiences is general is the claim the representationalist makes in the attempt to comply with both kinds of considerations. We can reconstruct the train of thought motivating (GC) in the following way: (a) two experiences, *e1* and *e2*, which are phenomenally indistinguishable (ex: the visual experiences of two numerically different, but qualitatively indistinguishable apples, apple1 and apple2), must have the same content; (b) *e1* and *e2*, can have the same content only if the content in question is not object-involving (that is: only if the object the experience is about, apple1 and apple2 respectively, is not a constituent of the content of the experience); (c) the only non object-involving content which is suited to fix the correctness conditions of the experience is a general content (an existentially quantified content of the form "There is an x such that x is an apple and x is red"); (d) therefore the content of the experience must be general. Steps (a) and (b) are explicit in the following passage from McGinn «...the content of experience is not to be specified by using any term that refer to the object of experience, on pain of denying that distinct objects can seem precisely the same [...] we are not to say, when giving the content of the experience, *which*

book it is that is seen» (McGinn 1982, 39). Here McGinn commits himself to the claim that if two objects can seem the same, then the content of the respective experiences cannot be object-involving and must therefore be general. What grounds this claim is the idea that the perceptual content of an experience has to be a "phenomenal notion" - that is something which accounts for how the world seems to the experiencing subject. This point is explicit in this passage from Davies:

> If perceptual content is, in this sense, "phenomenological content"[...] then, where there is no phenomenological difference for the subject, there is no difference in perceptual content. If perceptual content is phenomenological content then, it seems, it is not object-involving. But from this it does not follow that perceptual content is not truth-conditional – not fully representational; for we can take perceptual content to be existentially quantified content (Davies 1992, 25-6).

The two main assumptions behind unitary content representationalism are therefore the following:

> (A1) If two experiences are phenomenally the same, their content must be the same;
> (A2) If the content of two different experiences is the same, then their content must be general in form.

Let us now consider whether this kind of representationalism is able to pass (EAT). As far as (PIR) is concerned it seems that this position has the resources to account for it in so far as it conceives of content as something that can be shared among people in different environments. Of course, one could call into question the very strategy of accounting for phenomenal sameness in terms of sameness of content, by claiming that it presupposes a substantive point left utterly unexplained, namely that the "what-it-is-likeness" of qualitative states amounts to their having a content. Even though these perplexities are not in our view completely ungrounded, we will leave them aside and grant the representationalist the ability to satisfy (PIR). What we want to assess is whether he is able to account for the particularity requirement. What we shall claim is that insofar as the representationalist adopts (GC) she cannot account neither for (PRrs) nor for (PRps). The reason why in our view it does not account for the phenomenal sense of particularity is the following: even though this picture acknowledges – and how could it be otherwise - that when a subject S sees an

object (apple1, say) it is apple1 that S sees and not a generic apple, nonetheless, in so far as what appears to her is specified by a general content to the effect of there being an apple of a given color, shape and size, this account does not succeed in acknowledging the fact that it is a particular item S is presented with in having her experience. As we shall say in a moment – and this point will require a bit more sophistication – also (PRrs) is not accounted for within this picture. Of the two failures, however, the former is in our view even more severe insofar as it comes from a position which makes use of a notion of content explicitly devised to capture the phenomenology of our perceptual experience. As a matter of fact, both (PIR) and (PRps) individuate features of the overall phenomenology of our experience; these two features, while being co-present, seem to push in different directions generating a tension within the notion of phenomenal content. The way in which the (unitary content) representationalist deals with this tension is by giving priority to (PIR), modeling the notion of phenomenal content on this requirement

Let us now move to (PRrs). That in order to account for it one has to abandon (GC), is a point which has been argued for by many people. In what follows we shall stick to Soteriou's argument in its support. According to him «Those who accept an intentionalist account of experience[20] should reject this assumption [i.e. (GC)] if they want to adopt an account of experience that fits best with our ordinary concept of perception. They should reject the generality thesis, and they should instead claim that when a subject perceives the world, the subject is having an experience with a truth-evaluable content that is object-involving » (Soteriou 2000, 175). Against (GC) Soteriou puts forward a four steps argument whose structure is the following: (1) if one allows the generality claim, then one allows the possibility of veridical hallucination; (2) if one allows that veridical hallucination is possible, one also allows that veridical misperception is possible; (3) but if one allows for this possibility, one must give up an assumption which is at the core of our very notion of perception, namely: that if some part of the subject's environment is different from the way that it is represented to be, then at least one of the conditions required for the content of the representation to be correct is not satisfied. Therefore, (4) if one wants to provide an account of experience that fits with our ordinary concept of perception, the generality claim should be resisted.

Let us consider this argument. Its first step registers a claim which almost everyone is pretty willing to concede, at least since Grice's famous paper in 1961

20 Where 'intentionalism' is characterized as the claim that a perceptual experience is a mental state with an intentional content that represents the world as being a certain way.

which represents the *locus classicus* of the discussion on veridical hallucination.[21] In that paper Grice devises a thought-experiment in which a neuroscientist makes it look to a subject as if there is a clock on the shelf in front of him by stimulating the subject's visual cortex in a situation in which there actually is a clock on the shelf. In such a situation, according to Grice, even though the world fully matches the content of the subject's experience (and on this ground those who adopt (GC) would say that the hallucinatory experience is veridical) one should not say that the subject's experience is veridical for, as a matter of fact, the subject is not literally seeing the clock.[22] The crucial step in the argument is undoubtedly the second one, so let us focus on it.[23] What grounds the move from 1. (possibility of veridical hallucination) to 2. (possibility of veridical misperception)[24] is a very straightforward consideration to the effect that

> If we allow that the question of the veridicality of a subject's experience can be settled independently of the question of whether there is an object being perceived, we thereby allow that the question of the veridicality of an experience can be settled independently of the question of *which* particular object is being perceived. And if we allow that the question of the veridicality of an experience can be settled independently of the question of which object is being perceived, we thereby allow for the possibility of *veridical* misperception (Soteriou 2000, 179).

The moral we can draw from these considerations is the following: unitary content representationalism, in so far as it adopts (GC), ends up providing verdicts of veridicality in cases in which such verdicts are not warranted.

21 In that paper Grice hinges on the fact that the adoption of (GC) implies the admission of veridical hallucination in order to argue for a causal theory of perception.

22 Grice's famous consideration in support of this claim is the following: «If X's impressions were found to continue unchanged when the clock was removed or its position altered, then I think we should be inclined to say that X did not see the clock that was before his eyes» (Grice 1961, rep. 1988, 238).

23 The third step is grounded on our ordinary concept of perception and the fourth step is a consequence of 1-3.

24 In order to understand what is meant by "veridical misperception" consider the following example provided by Tye in the context of arguing against (GC) which he labels the "existential (content) thesis": «Suppose I am looking directly ahead, and without my knowledge there is a mirror in front of me placed at a 45° angle, behind which there is a yellow cube. Off to the right of the mirror and reflected in it is a cube that is white in colour. Through special lighting conditions, this cube appears yellow to me. According to the existential thesis, in these circumstances, my experience is accurate or veridical. It 'says' that there is a yellow cube located in front of me, and there is such a cube. But I do not see that cube. I see something else, something that does *not* have the properties in question. *That* cube looks to me other than it really is. My experience misrepresents its colour. So my visual experience cannot be counted as accurate *simpliciter*, as the existential thesis requires. It follows that the existential thesis should be rejected» (Tye 2009, 544).

The reason why this is so has to do with the fact that this variety of representationalism does not account for the particularity requirement. For, what is relevant to assess an experience as veridical or unveridical is precisely how things are with the particular object one is experiencing. The conclusion of this first critical part is that if the representationalist wants to provide an account of perceptual experience which does not make violence to our ordinary notion of it (and in particular with the idea that what is relevant to assess the veridicality of an experience one is enjoying is how things are in the portion of the world that appears to one and with which one is experientially connected), then she has to account for the particularity requirement at least in its relational sense. Therefore (GC) has to be abandoned because, as we have shown, if that claim is in place, (PR) is not accounted for. But how could a representationalist make such a move while still keeping the assumption that phenomenally indistinguishable experiences must have the same content? In the next section we shall consider a possible way out that a representationalism could take.

4. Multiple Content Representationalism

It is true that experiences which are phenomenally indistinguishable must have the same content (if strong representationalism has to be true) and that in so far as the content has to be the same it cannot be object-involving (i.e. it cannot have the object the experience is about as one of its constituents). And yet from this it does not follow that experiences cannot have an object-involving content, unless one also assumes that experiences can only have one kind of content.
If that assumption is resisted and the "multiple content thesis" is adopted, one can claim that two experiences which are phenomenally indistinguishable have one and the same non object-involving content (content*) and a different object-involving one. With this distinction in place it is possible to claim that what accounts for (PIR) and (PR) are two different kinds of content, respectively: content* (phenomenal content) and content *simpliciter* (truth conditional content).
Multiple (indeed dual) content representationalism can come in at least two varieties that differ as regards which representationalist assumptions they accept as regards phenomenal content (which, in this version, amounts to a part of the whole content). While the first assumption of the doctrine (which we can now rephrase as a claim concerning only phenomenal content: (A1*) if two experiences are phenomenally the same, their content* must be the same) is accepted by both – actually, this amounts to the "non negotiable claim" of representationalism) - the second one (A2*) - if the content* of two different experiences is the same, then that content must be general in form - is accepted

only by one of them. So whereas those who accept (A2*) claim that content* is general (an existentially quantified content), those who reject it maintain that content* is somewhat analogous to the meaning of a demonstrative expression. In this way they can claim that this content (or level of content), while not being object-dependent or object-involving, is nonetheless object-related[25]. The claim that content* is not object-dependent or object-involving is what is needed to preserve (A1*). Given that our main aim here is to consider whether representationalism can satisfy (EAT), one of whose requirements is (PRps), we shall in the following confine our attention to that variety of dual-content representationalism which rejects (GC) both for content simpliciter and for content*, because this variety seems better fitted to account for (PR) in both senses. Regarding this variety we shall consider what can be labeled "Kaplanian representationalism" or "Kaplanianism" for short.[26] The rational for the qualification used is that this proposal amounts to a representationalist position widely inspired by Kaplan's theory of indexicals transposed, so to say, from the level of linguistic content to the level of mental content. As an indexical expression has a fixed character (which accounts for the cognitive role of the expression's type) and a content which (systematically) varies from one context of utterance to another (and which accounts for the contribution of the expression to the truth-conditions of the sentence in which it occurs), so an experience can have an invariant content, content* (which accounts for the state's qualitative/phenomenological dimension) and a different content that varies according to the contexts in which the experiential episode occurs (and which is relevant to account for the veridicality/correctness/accuracy conditions of the experience). That an experience can have both a context insensitive content* and context-sensitive veridicality/accuracy/correctness conditions is a point which has been paradigmatically defended by Burge. According to him the content of an experience includes a demonstrative element (*that*) whose referent in any given context is the object which the experience is of.

What we have now to consider is whether this variant of the representationalist doctrine is able to account for (EAT). As far as (PIR) is concerned, this position seems to pass muster, at least as much as the previous variety. Also as regard (PRrs) things seem, at least at first sight, fine. Even though this last claim has

25 A content is object-related if it is such that a subject could not entertain it if she didn't stand with the object the mental state is about in a peculiar contextual, informational relation. A content can be object-related without being object-involving or object-dependent (that is without having the object itself as one if its constituents). The reverse does not hold, for object-involvingness (or object-dependency) implies object-relatedness.

26 This is how Tye labels the position put forward by Burge (1991). See Tye (2009, 549-551).

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been challenged, in so far as Burge's version of Kaplanianism takes content to be constituted not by the object the experience is of, but by a demonstrative element which stays fix from one context to the other and therefore, according to some people, it is not suited to properly account for (PRrs),[27] in what follows we do not want to insist on this criticism, but to show that, even granting that this position can account for (PRrs), it does not satisfy (EAT) because it does not account for (PRps). Our rational for so claiming is the following. Even though this position is able to account for the role which the object a given experience is of plays as regards the specification of the experience's truth-conditions, nonetheless, in so far as what is here taken to characterize the phenomenological domain is anything but a "purely representational mode of presentation" (as a Kaplanian character ultimately amounts to), it follows that this account, not unlike the previous one, does not exhibit the right credentials to satisfy (PRps). For, how could a Kaplanian character, which is an abstract entity with a functional nature, be able to account for a "feeling" (in this case a "feeling of particularity") given that it does not have – and cannot have if strong, reductive representationalism has to be true - any phenomenological connotation? Here strong, reductive represetationalism faces a dilemma: to avoid circularity, representational properties have to be characterized without reference to phenomenal/qualitative properties, but if no phenomenal mode of presentation is introduced, phenomenology is left unexplained.[28] How could a strong, reductive representationalist face that dilemma in order to try to account for phenomenological particularity?

A manoeuvre that a representationalist could at this point perform in the attempt to meet (EAT) – whose three requirements, as we have seen, introduce a tension within the notion of content - is to introduce three different layers of content: one to account for (PIR), one to account for

27 This criticism to Burge is explicit in McDowell. According to him, in so far as Burge's position (which he labels the "two component picture of the mind") tries to account for the directedness of mental states to particular objects in terms of an internal component (the demonstrative element) - which is only a partial determinant of the state's aboutness (given that one needs context to fix it) - it is ultimately unable to account for (PRrs). To put it in his words: «Directedness towards external objects enters the picture only when we widen our field of view to take in more than the internal component. So on this conception there is no object-directed intentionality in cognitive space» (McDowell 1986, 165). That the only way to account for (PRrs) is to adopt an object-involving account of content treating the objects one perceives as components (constituents) of the content of one's perceptual experience is a point which has been emblematically defended by Soteriou (2000). The observation which is generally made in support of this idea is the following: (i) If I see an object, it must look some way to me; (ii) If an object looks some way to me, then it must be experienced as being some way; (iii) The object can be experienced as being some way only of it figures in the content of the experience; (iv) Therefore, the object must figure in the content of the experience.

28 That there cannot be reduction of the phenomenological domain without circularity is a point which has been defended for example by Crane (2003) and Chalmers (2004).

(PRrs) and one to account for (PRps). Since both (PIR) and (PRps) have to do with the phenomenological domain, what the representationalist needs is a two-stage view of phenomenal content,[29] with one stage (phenomenal content1) accounting for the general aspects of the experience (what a given experience can share with other experiences having the same phenomenal/qualitative character) and another one (phenomenal content2) which accounts for the "feeling of particularity" that accompanies the experience. But how could phenomenal content2 be conceived in order to account for (PRps)? A possible suggestion comes from Mike Martin. In his view, phenomenal particularity cannot be accounted for unless one treats the very object one is presented with as a constituent of the state's phenomenology. According to him, the correct move to take for a representationalist who wanted to account for "phenomenal particularity" would therefore be to make phenomenology constitutively dependent (at least in part) on the particular object perceived.[30]

In my view this possible proposal,[31] no matter how "technically" adequate it could be to account for (EAT), presents a number of problems which should discourage its adoption. First of all, even though it boasts to conform to the phenomenology of our experience, in the end it does not seem at all faithful to it in so far as our experience does not present itself to us as something having the kind of stratified structure that the proposal suggests. Secondly, in so far as this position commits itself to a very radically externalist thesis according to which the very object a given experience is of is taken as an individuative feature of the state's

29 An author who has defended the idea that representationalism needs a two-stage account of phenomenal content is Chalmers (see Chalmers 2006). According to him, there are two levels of phenomenal content which he labels "Fregean" and "Edenic". While the latter is meant to mirror phenomenal character and to constitute its fundamental nature, the former merely co-varies with phenomenal character without mirroring it and without constituting its basic nature. Of the two levels it is Edenic content the one which, in his view, best reflects our first-person phenomenal perspective on the external world, whereas Fregean content reflects it only imperfectly. It is worth stressing that Chalmers' proposal is a non reductive variant of impure representationalism.

30 Martin articulates this position (which he recommends to the representationalist and which he himself adopts while not taking himself to be a representationalist, because he denies that experiences have a representational content) in terms of the distinction between two aspects of the phenomenology of an experience which he labels "phenomenal nature" and "phenomenal character". He says: «Once we reflect on the way in which an experience has a subject matter, the presentation of a particular scene, then we need a way of making room for the essentially or inherently particular aspects of this as well as the general attributes of experience. We need to contrast the unrepeatable aspect of its phenomenology, what we might call its *phenomenal nature*, with that it has in common with qualitatively the same experiential events, what we might call its phenomenal character» (Martin 2002, 193-194).

31 I qualify this position as 'possible' because, as far as I know, it hasn't been endorsed by anyone in the literature. It can be taken as originating by combining suggestions coming from Chalmers (as regards the distinction between two levels of phenomenal content) with suggestions coming from Martin (as regards how one should conceive phenomenal content – or better, one level of it - in order to account for phenomenal particularity).

phenomenal nature,[32] it runs the risk of promoting a very implausible picture of phenomenology. For, according to this position, two experiences which are indistinguishable could nonetheless differ at a given phenomenological level (what Martin labels "phenomenal nature", to distinguish from "phenomenal character") despite not only the fact that the subject enjoying the two experiences is utterly unable to tell one experience from the other (case of epistemic indistinguishability),[33] but also, and this is far more troublesome, despite the fact that the qualitative properties which are appealed to in the two cases are exactly the same (case of ontological indistinguishability). To accept that this could be true, is to open the door to the idea that the phenomenological domain could turn out to be different from how it presents itself to the subject's introspective access. In other words, that the distinction between appearance and reality could have an application also in the phenomenological domain. But in allowing for such a possibility, one ends up departing from our very notion of phenomenology, replacing it with a very implausible surrogate. So if the representationalist wants to provide an account of perceptual experience which does not part company from our conception of phenomenology, she should refrain from adopting Martin's position.

Actually, the move that Martin suggests is in line with the explanatory strategy of strong, reductive representationalism in so far as it consists in accounting for phenomenological particularity in terms of a property, namely the property of *being about something* which, in turn, is explained in purely representational terms (i.e. as the property for a content of having the object the state is about as one of its constituents). The substance of my criticism against this move is that it ultimately ends up collapsing phenomenal particularity onto relational particularity, barring in this way the possibility of accounting for the fact that a hallucination, while not exhibiting relational particularity, exhibits phenomenal particularity nonetheless.[34] I think that Martin is right in claiming that one cannot account for phenomenal particularity in terms of a Kaplanian notion of character. And yet I think he is wrong in claiming that the "feeling of

32 This position is far stronger than the one defended by people such as Dretske, Tye and Lycan. For they, while adopting an externalistic individuation of the representational content, refrain from providing an object-involving characterization of it.

33 That two experiences can be indistinguishable for a given subject and yet imply different qualitative properties (and therefore be phenomenologically different) is attested by the phenomenon of "inattentional blindness" (a failure to notice stimuli present in one's field of vision when one's attention is distracted by some demanding task). For this phenomenon see Mack & Rock (1998).

34 For a more articulated criticism of Martin's account of phenomenal particularity see Montague (2011).

particularity" one enjoys in having a perceptual experience changes so long as the object changes. Actually, I think that the feeling of particularity which accompanies our visual perceptual experiences presents itself as a constant, even though not general, feature of our sensory phenomenology, something which has to do with the "presentingness" of the particulars we meet in our experience. In the last section I shall try to put forward how in my view such a feeling of "presentingness" could be accounted for. But let me conclude this critical section by considering what I take to be the last desperate move that a representationalist could make.

A manoeuvre that a representationalist could at this point perform in order to avoid any kind of commitment towards an implausible notion of phenomenology (as I claimed is the one that comes from Martin's suggestion) is to claim that that the objects which enter into "phenomenal content2" and which contribute to individuate the phenomenal character of a given experience are such that if the way in which a subject is qualitatively appeared to on different occasions in which she is experiencing different but qualitatively indistinguishable objects is the same, then the particular which figures within that layer of content is the same. Well, would this be a viable position for a representationalist to take? In my view even though this proposal, which is somewhat in the spirit of Martin's suggestion, if not in the letter of it, looks better than the previous one because it does not commit itself with an implausible notion of phenomenology, it meets several problems, the most serious of which is an awkward ontological commitment towards "sensory mind-dependent objects". Let me explain this point. If the object I am aware of in *e1* and *e2* is the same, then, obviously, that object (which is the one that figures in phenomenal content2) is neither apple1 nor apple2, but rather something which occurs in my experience whenever I happen to be related to something having the same "appearance properties" as apple1 and apple2. Well, insofar as this proposal would hardly avoid a commitment to a form of "sense-datum theory" of experience (for what else could this entity be if not a *sense-datum*?), I think that a representationalist could not accept it (at least if she wants also to be a materialist).

Let us take stock. What we have shown in the last two sections is that strong and reductive representationalism has problems in accounting for (EAT). It seems that the attempt to meet the requirements stated ends up either in an implausible account of the phenomenology of our experience, or in a problematic commitment towards *sense data*. Even though the representationalist could put forward an even more sophisticated account

than the ones I have here considered,[35] I think that the problems we have raised should motivate the rejection of the proposal of trying to account for phenomenal/qualitative aspects of the experience in terms of representational properties. In the next section I shall sketch an alternative proposal to account for (EAT). According to this proposal, which I shall label "Presentationalism", whereas (PRsr) can be accounted for in purely representational terms (namely: in terms of an object-dependent notion of content, along the lines indicated by Soteriou), both (PIR) and (PRps) are accounted for in terms of a kind of properties different from and not reducible to representational properties. I shall label them "presentational properties".

5. Presentational vs. Representational Properties

Presentationalism, like representationalism, is a position which aims at characterizing the nature of the phenomenological dimension (or, as people say, the "phenomenal character") of mental states, that is, that aspect of a mental state which is responsible for its "what-it-is-likeness". According to presentationalism, the phenomenal character of a mental state does not reside in the state's representational content (as representationalism claims), but rather in the way in which the content is presented to the subject; phenomenal character, according to this position, has to do not so much with what is represented, but rather with the manner in which what is represented is presented to the experiencing subject.[36] The phenomenal/qualitative properties of a mental state are therefore not representational properties (neither pure nor impure). Rather they are presentational properties of the mental state. But whose properties are these if they are not representational properties? To answer this question we need to introduce a distinction

35 A recent attempt in that direction can be find in Schellenberg (2010) who suggests a Frege-inspired picture which attempts to keep together the virtues of representationalism and direct realism.

36 The position according to which phenomenal character is to be understood not in terms of what a conscious experience represents but in terms of how it represents has been labeled by Kriegel (see Kriegel 2009) "Fregean representationalism". About this position, Kriegel claims that it is "a rubber duck" (not really a kind of representationalism). I agree with him on this point. Actually, the correct label would rather be "Fregean presentationalism". I think it is correct to qualify this position as "Fregean" because qualitative features are claimed to play the role of modes of presentation: the bluish way it is like for me to see the sky (when I look at it in a sunny afternoon) is the manner of presentation of the represented property (the way in which the color property of the sky is presented to me). And yet, even though this is a Frege-inspired position, phenomenal or experiential manners of presentations cannot be identified with Fregean *Sinne* (they play the role of Fregean MOPs, but they are not Fregean MOPs). First, because whereas Fregean senses are ways of thinking, phenomenal manners of presentation are ways of experiencing. Second, because the former are ways in which the mind presents to itself objects and their properties; the latter are ways in which the objects and their properties present themselves to the experiencing subject. Third, as we shall see in a moment, because manners of presentation do not determine what is represented in a given experiential state: two mental states may be about different objects and yet exhibit the same manner of presentation.

which is widely acknowledged within the philosophy of mind literature, both within the analytic tradition and within the phenomenological one, namely the distinction between the "matter" and the "quality" of a given mental phenomenon, otherwise labeled "intentional content" and "intentional/psychological mode" - where this latter notion concerns the modality in which a given content is entertained (for example: as a belief, as a desire, as a visual perception, as an acoustic perception and so on).[37] According to presentationalism, phenomenal properties are properties of the state's psychological mode.[38]

It is standard within the philosophy of mind literature to characterize intentional modes in purely functional terms: for a state to have a given psychological mode is just a matter of its playing a given causal role in the mental state's economy. In our view, even though the functional characterization captures a substantive part of the intentional mode of a conscious state, it does not exhaust it. Even though two mental states, one conscious and the other unconscious, may be associated with the same causal role, the intentional mode of a conscious state has also a "subjective dimension" that no non-conscious state has. If this is so, then to account for conscious mental states one needs a notion of mode "more fine-grained" than the functional/causal one.

According to presentationalism, the subjective dimension of a conscious mental state has two components which together constitute the state's phenomenal character, namely: (1) a *to-me component* and (2) an *aspectual component*.[39] Let us provide an elucidation of them starting from the former. In any conscious mental state something is presented *to* a subject; the "to-me component" is precisely this first-personal "presentingness" which accompanies any conscious mental state. This component, while accounting for what makes a state a phenomenally conscious state at all, is not responsible for a state being the phenomenally conscious state it is, because it is common to all of a subject's phenomenally conscious states. What plays that role is rather the aspectual component which captures the way in which what is represented (the state's

37 More precisely, by 'intentional mode' one means the kind of relation which holds between the subject of the mental state and its content. For a clarification of this notion and for the need to distinguish between intentional content and mode see Crane (2001) and Searle (1983).

38 The idea that the phenomenal character of a conscious state does not reside in the state's content, but in the state's mode can be traced back to David Woodruff Smith in his seminal paper "The Structure of (Self-)Consciousness" (1986), and then in his book *The Circle of Acquaintance* (1989).

39 These two components correspond respectively to Kriegel's "for-me" and "qualitative" components, in Kriegel (2009). I qualify as 'aspectual' the qualitative component of a mental state's phenomenal character because of the mode-of-presentation role which in my view it plays.

content) is (experientially) presented to the subject of the state. How something is (experientially) presented is subjectively oriented, i.e. it is presented from the point of view of the subject undergoing the experience. For presentationalism, the essence of phenomenality resides precisely in this form of "self-oriented experiential aspectuality". So, what makes the intentional modes of conscious states more fine grained than the ones of non-conscious states is the presence in the former of an (experientially self-oriented) aspectual component. This component is not something which is represented, rather it is something which enters into the manner of presentation of the content of a mental state. According to presentationalism, phenomenal/qualitative properties are therefore manners of presentation of (pure) representational properties.[40]
Let us now consider how presentationalism can satisfy (EAT). According to this position, the three requirements are not satisfied by a unique kind of properties, but by two different though related ones, namely representational and presentational properties. Whereas the former account for (PRrs), the latter account for both (PIR) and (PRps). (PIR) is accounted for by the aspectual component of the phenomenal character, whereas (PRps) is accounted for by the to-component. To illustrate this point let us consider the apples example. What accounts for the fact that what is relevant for the veridicality of *e1* and *e2* is how things are with apple1 and apple2 respectively is that the object the experience is about is a constituent of its very content. Being about apple1/apple2 is a representational property of *e1*/*e2* respectively, therefore, it is something that can be accounted for in purely representational terms. Even though the objects are different, the two states present the same manner of presentation and this is accounted for by the aspectual component of the phenomenal character which is the same in the two cases (phenomenal sameness is here accounted for in terms of sameness of manners of presentation).[41] Finally, what accounts for the "feeling of particularity" which accompanies the two conscious experience is the to-me component. Even though in the two cases I have the impression that there is something particular that is phenomenally appearing to me, this feeling of particularity does not change from one experience to the other. This point is satisfied because the to me-component stays fixed.
If what we have said so far is correct one can conclude that the whole

40 For this notion of "manners of presentation" see Chalmers (2004). The main difference between my account and Chalmers' is that whereas he claims that manners of presentation belong to the representational side of the act (while not being fully reducible to purely representational properties), I reject any such commitment. For, in my view, by introducing phenomenal elements in the state's content, one runs the risk of "subjectivizing content" in such a way as to make it impossible for different subjects to entertain one and the same content.
41 This is the third aspect of difference between manners of presentation and Fregean senses we enlightened in note 36.

representationalist project of accounting for perceptual experiences only in terms of representational properties should be rejected, because it is unable to account for some minimal requirements of explanatory adequacy which we have claimed are not negotiable. Moreover, if I am right in claiming that those requirements can be accounted for in terms of Fregean presentationalism, one can conclude that this position qualifies itself as a better candidate for explaining the "double" nature (both representational and qualitative) of perceptual experiences. The risk of putting forward an inadequate account of content or an inadequate account of phenomenology is here neutralized by introducing a distinction between two kinds of properties: whereas representational properties account for the state's representational dimension, presentational properties account for the state's phenomenological dimension.[42]

42 Previous versions of this paper have been presented at the XIX Congress of the Italian Society for Philosophy of Language, *Sense and Sensible*, Bologna, October 5-7 2012; and at the conference *Sense and Sensibility*, University Vita-Salute S. Raffaele, January 17-18 2013, Milano. I thank all the participants to these events for their important comments. I particularly thank Alberto Voltolini whose comments and suggestions have helped me a lot in getting clear on the issue of phenomenal particularity.

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