

Perceptual Episodes Do Not Have Intentional Content

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CURRENTLY, the orthodox position in philosophy of perception is that perceptual experiences are bearers of intentional or representational content.¹ The thesis I will call minimal intentionalism is that perceptual experiences, which have phenomenal character, always have representational content. All proponents of intentionalism accept this thesis.² I will first formalize the thesis of minimal intentionalism: all perceptual experiences have intrinsic intentional content, specifiable in terms that are independent of what is going on in the external world. What I mean by “intrinsic” is what Charles Travis means when he says, “The idea is that any perceptual experience has a face value, at which the perceiver may take, or refuse to take, it” (“The Silence of the Senses” 59). The work this content

¹ I mean the same thing by “intentional” and by “representational” and use the terms interchangeably in this paper, treating any difference between them as merely terminological.

² There is, however, internal disagreement regarding, for instance, the relationship between the phenomenal character of experience and its representational character, the structure of representational content, and the properties representational content captures in perceptual experience. Peacocke believes that representational content consists of proto-propositional and scenario content. Some, like Stalnaker, believe that representational content is sets of possible worlds. Others think they are Fregean or Russellian propositions. For reviews of different kinds of intentionalism, see Siegel’s “Which Properties are Represented in Perception” and Chalmers’ “The Representational Character of Experience.” Note that it is Chalmers’ and Crane’s (see “The Intentional Structure of Consciousness”) versions of weak intentionalism that I am addressing here, which are different from the supervenience claim that the phenomenal character of experience supervenes on the representational content. See Tye’s “Representationalism and the Transparency of Experience” for that version of intentionalism.

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does is often elucidated in terms of accuracy conditions or conditions of satisfaction—experience, after all, supposedly represents the world faithfully or fails to do so.³ I will then take an epistemic strategy and argue by way of a thought experiment inspired by Anil Gupta and Charles Travis's intuitions in favor of anti-intentionalism: that isolated perceptual episodes have no such content because they have no epistemic contribution to make on their own.

Intentionalism

In general, the claim of minimal intentionalism is that a perceptual episode has a phenomenal character, and this phenomenal character either is or determines the representational content of that episode.⁴ Usually, the further claim is that this latter part—the representational content—determines the conditions of satisfaction for that perceptual episode. These conditions of satisfaction specify what has to be the case in order for that experience to be accurate or veridical. The interpretation of minimal intentionalism I am most interested in is Lycan's formulation: "qualitative states have representational content."⁵ All perceptual experiences have intrinsic intentional content and phenomenal character, though the phenomenal character may outrun whatever can be accounted for by representational content.

Chalmers characterizes phenomenal properties as those that "characterize aspects of what it is like to be a subject . . . or what it is like to be in a mental state . . ." (154–55). A representational property is "the property of representing a certain intentional content," but more importantly, "intentional contents have *conditions of satisfaction*: they are the sort of thing that can be satisfied or can fail to be satisfied by states of the world" (155). Thus when experiences (for the intentionalist) have representational properties, I understand this to mean that experiences have derivable conditions of

³ For arguments providing grounds for criticising some of the basic assumptions of intentionalism, see Breckenridge's "Against One Reason for Thinking that Visual Experiences Have Representational Content," Brewer's "Perception and Content" and "Realism and the Nature of Perceptual Experience," Campbell's *Reference and Consciousness*, Gupta's "Experience and Knowledge," Leddington's "Perception without Representation," Martin's "The Limits of Self-Awareness," McDowell's "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge" and *Mind and World*, and Travis's "A Sense of Occasion" and "The Silence of the Senses."

⁴ Some theses of metaphysical determination claim that the intentional or representational content of a perceptual episode *fixes* the phenomenal character of it. The stronger view of intentionalism will maintain that the phenomenal character of experience can be characterized solely in terms of its intentional content.

⁵ For other formulations, see Crane's "Intentionalism" and "The Intentional Structure of Consciousness," Tye's *Ten Problems of Consciousness: A Representational Theory of the Phenomenal*, and Peacocke's *Sense and Content*.

satisfaction. When representational content is said to determine accuracy conditions or conditions of satisfaction, it means that this content specifies the conditions—the way the world would have to be—for an experience to be “correct,” “accurate,” or “veridical.”

Let us spell out the minimal intentionalist thesis. Conscious perceptual experience involves instantiating phenomenal and representational properties, i.e., there is something it is like to be in that mental state, and that mental state represents the world as being one way or another. If part of what a perceptual episode involves is that one’s mental state performs the act of instantiating phenomenal properties, or essentially manifests a “seeming,” the intentionalist claims that this act also is one of instantiating representational properties. We need not make explicit reference to mind-independent reality. Here is our first version of the intentionalist thesis, call it “(IT’)”:

(IT’) If one enjoys a perceptual experience, then one’s experience has intentional content.

(IT’) is an extremely weak claim: if there is a mental act such that it involves instantiating phenomenal properties—it follows that there is an act that involves instantiating representational properties.⁶ (IT’) rules out the possibility of meaningful perceptual experience that is purely sensational. Since our domain of discourse is very narrow, involving only the mental realm, we can ascribe a stronger thesis to the minimal intentionalist, for she believes that the instantiation of representational properties is something intrinsic to experience. If there is a mental event such that it involves the instantiation of phenomenal properties, then one single mental act involves instantiating of *both* phenomenal *and* representational properties.

Call this stronger thesis “(IT),” which will entail (IT’):

(IT) If one enjoys a perceptual experience, then one’s experience has intentional content that is intrinsic to the phenomenology of the experience.

In other words, within the phenomenology of such an episode, within the sum-total of all the mental acts involved, there is an act that is both a phenomenalizing act and an intentionalizing one. With (IT) we can capture what it means for representational content to be *intrinsic* to the phenomenology of experience, not just something that happens to come piggybacking on it. The phenomenal properties of experience account for the mind as

⁶ This is compatible with there being phenomenal properties that are non-representational, with strong intentionalist views that essentially equate all acts of phenomenalization with those of intentionalization, and with the determination claim that facts about representational content fix facts about the phenomenal.

a flux of states of sensory awareness, and the representational content of experience relates those states with the world in a logical manner. Only where there is space between (1) the world, and (2) the phenomenal character of experience and the satisfaction conditions of the representational state attendant to it is representational content intentional in the minimal sense. Only then can we speak of our perceptual episodes making claims, some right and some wrong, about the world.

Anti-intentionalism

There are, however, reasons for thinking that the view I have just presented is incorrect. For example, one might reject the crucial assumption that perceptual episodes make determinate claims about the world in virtue of intrinsic intentional content.⁷ We might doubt that perceptual episodes have representational content by assuming that experience makes a hypothetical instead of a categorical contribution to one's epistemic landscape. Gupta's account is a reaction against the Cartesian strain of thought in the notion that "the given in experience is propositional" (188, italics removed). Instead, experience plus a "view" yields perceptual judgments, as "[experience] has no vocabulary of its own. It uses the vocabulary of the view that we bring to bear on it" (195). Perceptual experiences are judgment-making opportunities—but judgments are possible only with a view.⁸ When we

⁷ One metaphysical strategy is to maintain that environing objects figure into the contents of experience—the position known as naïve realism. Take, for example, Brewer's anti-intentionalist Object View: "What it is like for a person, perceiving the world as she is, is to be characterized by citing the perceptible features of the specific mind-independent empirical things that are accessible to her in perception, given her point of view on the world and the relevant perceptual conditions" ("Realism and the Nature of Perceptual Experience" 69). This is contrasted with the idea that "perceptual experience is to be characterized, at least in part, by its *representational content*, roughly, by the way it *represents* things as being in the world around the perceiver" ("Perception and Content" 165). Thus the phenomenology of experience is in some sense externalized. Campbell expresses his relationalism similarly as: "the qualitative character of the experience is constituted by the qualitative character of the scene perceived . . . only this view, on which experience of an object is a simple relation holding between perceiver and object, can characterize the kind of acquaintance with objects that provides knowledge of reference" (114–15). He relies in part on some kind of argument from transparency in order to show that a relationalist view, as opposed to a representationalist or intentionalist view, is the correct one. The relational view maintains that experience, insofar as we are explaining how we cognitively grasp the world—which for Campbell is explaining our ability to deploy demonstratives—is an irreducible relation between perceiver and object perceived, period. The point of these views seems to be that whenever there is a content with a certain phenomenology and no other, such that it could determine a representational content, that content cannot be merely mental and intentional in the sense described—that it could be what it is and function the way it does though its veridicality conditions are not satisfied.

⁸ Gupta further elaborates on what he does consider to be the *categorical* aspect of experiences, though we must take care to distinguish that Gupta's "categorical" is not Campbell's "categorical." Gupta maintains that the logical relationship between the hypothetical given in experience and

are wrong, when our perceptual judgments are wrong, that is just as well a matter of our employing a defective view. However, there is nothing about an experience as such that is right or wrong.

Travis shares Gupta's pragmatic concerns that, as we might say, there is more to experience than the experience itself. Gupta maintains that we bring to bear upon experience a body of knowledge and beliefs, an entirety of propositional contents. Travis's view differs in that a selective part of that entirety, depending on the context, is brought to bear upon experience: "What might be thus depends . . . on how things are. . . . But it also depends on what is (needs) to be treated as fixed in how things are, and what is allowed to vary" ("A Sense of Occasion" 302).⁹ While discussing the word "looks," Travis often invokes the notion of *factive meaning*. One set of circumstances factively means another set of circumstances if when the first set obtains, the second does as well. Furthermore, what factively means what depends on the context.¹⁰ To generalize Travis's intuitions, it would seem firstly that the extraction of "looks" and "seems" statements from our experiences is not intrinsic to the experience at all—such articulation requires that we already approach the experience with a view (and which part of a view it is depends on the context). Secondly, what it factively means for things to "look" or "seem" a certain way is not dictated solely by the experience either, but again is dependent on a view and context.

Travis and Gupta argue that experiences are not determinate without something like a view, but neither are they determined by the view. Given that whatever has accuracy conditions must be of a truth-evaluable form, experiences in themselves do not exhibit the kind of form that would make them intentional. Whatever form they do receive is view-related, and thus extrinsic. (IT) and (IT') imply that when we undergo perceptual episodes, our experiences are constituted in part by the claims they make about the world, which when given as conditions of satisfaction are evaluable for accuracy or inaccuracy. If a pragmatic approach like Gupta's or Travis's is correct (and the mind and the world are related in this way), then it is a

the perceptual judgments justified by experience is *convergence*. The revision process generated by experience and certain initial views will be convergent in the long run, resulting in a set of propositions that is a constituent of all the views that have survived the revision process generated by experience. The categorical in experience is thus obtained in that "our [rational, imaginative, experiencing individual] has no obligation to accept the judgments on which the surviving views differ, but she does have an obligation to accept the massive core on which the views agree. *Convergent processes generate absolute rational obligations*" (Gupta 198). Thus the categorical takes on a pragmatic dress of the Peircean sort, and as we can see it is not dictated by anything intrinsic to the experience.

⁹ Similarly, "what counts as evidence for what depends on the occasion for saying what is evidence for what" (Travis, "A Sense of Occasion" 300).

¹⁰ "Factive meaning . . . is an occasion-sensitive notion" (Travis, "A Sense of Occasion" 302).

mistake to think that perceptual claims are unproblematically assessable as a result of the availability of representational (intentional) content.

Let the following be the first version of our strong anti-intentionalist thesis, (AIT'), suggested by the alternative views just indicated. Their general lesson seems to be this:

(AIT') It is not the case that when one enjoys a perceptual episode, one's experience has representational content.

(AIT') is simply the negation of (IT). However, (AIT') entails the following thesis:

(AIT) When one enjoys a perceptual episode, one's experience does not have any representational content intrinsic to the phenomenology of the experience.

(AIT) also entails (AIT'), given that the individual is enjoying a perceptual experience, i.e., there is a mental event involving the instantiation of phenomenal properties. (AIT) explicitly claims that, taking the mental realm as the domain of discourse, there is nothing in the experience that entails anything being both phenomenal and representational. Because our domain is restricted enough, (AIT) claims that there is nothing intrinsic to the phenomenal character of experience that makes claims on the world. If (AIT) holds, then (IT) is false.

One rationale for holding either (IT) or (AIT) is epistemological. Our perceptual experiences undeniably contribute to our epistemic lives by enabling us to entertain thoughts about the environment. The disagreement between (IT) and (AIT) is rather on how we cognitively access external reality.¹¹ (IT) is the claim that our perceptual episodes make or are determinate claims about the world, which turn out to be accurate or inaccurate depending on the way the world is, whereas (AIT) states that such claims are not intrinsic to our perceptual episodes.

(IT), if true, establishes a necessary relation between experience and object experienced via intentional content represented. From it, we should be able to derive conditions of satisfaction for the contents of experience. We are supposed to be able to evaluate intentional content against how the world is, which is neither phenomenal nor representational as it is outside the space of the mental. Intentional content, specifiable independent of the way the world is, is supposed to account for the fact that one can be in some kinds of mental states—namely those that involve things seeming a

¹¹ This can be elucidated in several ways: our deployment of demonstratives, the explanation for the indiscriminability of seemingly identical experiences, perceptual knowledge, etc.

certain way to one—that may always fail to be connected to the objects of experience. At the same time, intentional content accounts for what would have to be the case for those mental states to be successful. My mental state can fail to connect with the world (the intentional content is false or non-veridical or inaccurate), or it can succeed in connecting with the world and its objects of experience (the intentional content is true, veridical or accurate). The upshot of this general conception of the connection between intentional content and the epistemic role of mental states is that it is only in virtue of these states' having intentional content that they can have any epistemic function for empirical knowledge.

(AIT) as a negative thesis counters that perceptual episodes do not bear intentional content that functions in this way. My strategy against minimal intentionalism and in favor of anti-intentionalism is epistemic: I suggest that there is nothing about any particular experiential episode that makes our epistemic contact with the world such that, as McDowell assumes, upon reception some ready made content is available for evaluation.¹² I agree with Travis and Gupta that no isolated perceptual episode makes any determinate claim about the world. Such an episode is epistemically neutral, without any determinate epistemic merit. What makes some experiences more epistemically robust than others is, to a great extent, a prior system of knowledge and beliefs that affects how we approach our perceptual lives. The following thought experiment and the formalization of its generalized result will demonstrate that (AIT), rather than (IT), is true.

A Thought Experiment in Favor of Anti-intentionalism

Suppose I submit myself to the experiment of a mad scientist, who has constructed a machine that simulates the experiences of my hometown and various activities that I engage in. That is, my experiences of real-Chicago and simulated-Chicago are subjectively indistinguishable to me. Sometimes I am hooked up to the machine, and sometimes I am not. The scientist delivers me at random back and forth between real-Chicago and the laboratory, perhaps when I am sleeping or he might render me unconscious for the transition. In any case, at any given moment in time, I do not know whether I am hooked up to the machine or not.

At some time during the experimentation, I find myself (or at least seem to find myself) walking down Michigan Avenue. Now it is perfectly reasonable for me to think to myself, "It seems to me that this is Michigan

¹² "That things are thus and so is the content of the experience, and it can be the content of a judgment: it becomes the content of a judgment if the subject decides to take the experience at face value" (McDowell, *Mind and World* 26).

Avenue.” I also happen to know that I may or may not be hooked up to the machine. My reasoning would run as follows:

- (1) I am either hooked up to a reality-simulation machine or I am not.
- (2) I do not know whether I am hooked up to a reality-simulation machine or not.
- (3) At any given moment, there is no good reason to believe that I am not hooked up to the reality-simulation machine.
- (4) It currently seems to me that this is Michigan Avenue.

Is (4) a good reason for forming the belief that this really is Michigan Avenue? My intuition is that it is not. In fact it would not figure as a reason at all, but rather would be some commentary on what my experiences seem like to me while not really making any claim on what the world is like. (1), (2), and (3) override (4) as a reason for forming the belief that this is Michigan Avenue. My background beliefs and knowledge come into play whenever my experiences present themselves as opportunities to form beliefs, reject possible beliefs, or revise previous ones.

The issue here is also that this sort of reasoning prevents me from making any kinds of knowledge claims as to what the world is like. But note that my inability to formulate knowledge claims is because of background knowledge, in particular (1) and (2). I am therefore not interested in issues of skepticism here, but in the conditions that some knowledge imposes on the possibilities of other knowledge claims. In this case, (4) does not come into play as a reason for belief about anything save for beliefs about *merely* how things seem. Background knowledge and beliefs completely override whatever offering a perceptual experience might have—or more correctly, the perceptual episode has *no* offering to make.

What about the case where things are the way they appear? That is, when we perceive and apprehend the fact of the matter? Suppose I am not hooked up to a reality-simulation machine. Of course, Michigan Avenue *looks* like Michigan Avenue. Upon encountering Michigan Avenue whilst traipsing through Chicago, I think to myself, “This looks to be Michigan Avenue.” Now, I have correctly identified Michigan Avenue and apprehended the fact. It is reasonable to suppose that sometime before my encounter with Michigan Avenue that I knew some things about it. Perhaps I had been there before, I had seen it in photos, or I knew of some landmarks there, such as the Sears Tower, and so forth. Now is its looking to me to be Michigan Avenue a good reason to believe that it *is* Michigan Avenue?

My intuition is that the answer here is yes, because my reasoning goes something like this:

- (1) I know what Michigan Avenue looks like (from photos), or I know of some landmarks that are unique to Michigan Avenue (i.e., given some looking around, I could possibly identify Michigan Avenue).
- (2) This looks to be Michigan Avenue.

(1) and (2) entitle me to the belief, perhaps even knowledge, that this is Michigan Avenue, and there is no reason for me to suppose otherwise—e.g., there was no stage prior to this one at which I had any reason to entertain the belief that I might not be in real-Chicago, but simulated-Chicago instead. But it is extremely implausible that (2) could possibly spring out of nowhere and entitle me to a genuine claim about the world without coming along with something like (1).

McDowell assumes that

it must be possible to decide whether or not to judge that things are as one's experiences represents them to be. How one's experience represents things to be is not under one's control, but it is up to one whether one accepts the appearance or rejects it. (*Mind and World* 11)

But an isolated experience does not alone represent *anything* that might then be rejected or accepted. There is nothing intrinsic to a particular perceptual episode that allows it to make a claim about the world's being one way or another. In a non-veridical case, such as being hooked up to a simulation machine, one cannot accept nor reject a perceptual episode's intrinsic, determinate claim because these perceptual episodes as such make no claims about what the world is like. Likewise, in a contrasting scenario where one is enjoying a veridical experience, there must be heavy background knowledge and beliefs in place before any looks-statement can be a reason for believing that the way things looked is the way things actually are or put me in a position to know that things are some particular way.

Results and Concluding Remarks

I have indicated that there is nothing in a given perceptual episode on its own that amounts to a determinate content. Some experiences have been discounted as having any epistemic contribution whatsoever and some have epistemic contribution only on the background of other knowledge and beliefs. That a perceptual episode even so much as has an epistemic contribution is something that is licensed by *us*. Perceptual experiences, properly

understood this way, provide opportunities for manipulating one's existing body of beliefs and knowledge—one may expand it, one may revise a belief here or there, some knowledge may cease to be knowledge, or any number of things—resulting from the evaluation of one's prior beliefs and knowledge. It also offers several possibilities as to what can be done with new experiences. This includes rejecting them as having any epistemic contribution.¹³

I now want to explain the logic of this position further. The point of the view, however, should be clear: insofar as one's mental state involves the instantiation of phenomenal properties, nothing yet is to be said with respect to either content or epistemic role. It is rather arbitrary to require, as intentionalists do, that in order to play an epistemic role, a perceptual episode must be equipped with a separable intentional content, which in turn amounts to the "face value" or set of accuracy conditions intrinsic to the phenomenal in experience. If perceptions are merely opportunities for content or epistemic role, other factors need to be in place, together with which we can then form a judgment. The gist of the following account is, following Gupta, to take judgments as the bearers of content and epistemic role and to deny that perceptual experiences already are of this form.

For the purposes of exposition, I will use the following notation: Let " Σ " stand for the body of beliefs (and knowledge) a person has at time t_0 . Let "E" stand for the union of ordinary language propositions corresponding to the instantiations of phenomenal and representational properties spoken of in our formulations of (AIT) and (IT). Thus, E is the sum-total of information that an experience at t_1 provides and potentially provides, granting that it can be exhaustively specified by propositions. There are two kinds of propositions E includes, and let us label them with " E_1 " and " E_2 ." Let E_1 be the set of those propositions which are simply descriptive and include "it seems that" in their formulations— E_1 is intended to capture the phenomenal in experience. E_2 is that subset of E that consists of the embedded propositions within the E_1 propositions, namely those given by the "that" clauses— E_2 is intended to capture the intentional in experience. To borrow from set theory, E_1 is the set that contains all the elements of E not in E_2 , and E_2 contains all the elements of E that are not in E_1 , but E_1 and E_2

¹³ See Gupta's "Experience and Knowledge," from which I borrow the Σ -notation, and Travis's "The Silence of the Senses." These two authors share the idea that given some experiential episode, one must bring a view to bear on it such that the combination of the experiential episode plus some take or view on it will yield judgments. That is, both are essentially arguing for the hypothetical instead of the categorical contribution that experiences have. Travis, for instance, argues that experiences do not as such represent anything determinate. Although he is often cited as an anti-intentionalist, I am not sure this characterization is correct. He might be understood as arguing to some extent convincingly that there is not *as such* determinate content, but this leaves open the possibility that there still may be something like indeterminate representational content. My thanks to Axel Mueller for this clarification.

exhaust all the elements of E . Thus, $E_1 = E \setminus E_2$ and $E_2 = E \setminus E_1$, and $E_1 \cup E_2 = E$. What I mean is this: E is the body of propositions that one might be willing to accept while undergoing a certain experience with the knowledge that one is not hooked up to a reality-simulation machine, hoodwinked, etc. In the situation when I am hooked up to a reality simulation machine and I am aware of the deception, the totality of information potentially available would look something like this:

$$\Sigma + E$$

The information that is actually retained from that totality would be as follows:

$$\Sigma + (\text{some descriptions of one's phenomenal experience})$$

Notice that if all we have is the previous set of knowledge and beliefs and some description of what it is like for one to undergo an experience, there is not much epistemic contribution.

To take our earlier example, let Σ contain the propositions “I am either hooked up to a reality-simulation machine or I am not,” “I do not know whether I am hooked up to a reality-simulation machine or not,” and “At any given moment, there is no good reason to believe that I am not hooked up to the reality-simulation machine.” E consists of “It seems that this is Chicago” and “This is Chicago.” “It seems that this is Chicago” is an E_1 -proposition, but “This is Chicago” is an E_2 -proposition.

In the case of the reality-simulation machine, E_2 -propositions are given no weight at all, insofar as we consider them as merely possible additions to the original belief-and-knowledge-set Σ . This can now be shown as follows. If p is a proposition, let “ \underline{p} ” signify the epistemic weight of p . The epistemic weight of p is the answer to the question, “On a scale from 0 to 1, how seriously am I entertaining p with respect to its possible integration into Σ ?” A proposition that is given a weight of 1 is fully rejected or accepted, and a proposition that is given a weight of 0 is not entertained for that practical purpose at all. Then we get something like this. Consider the set E without the subset of descriptive E_1 -propositions. This is the set $\Sigma \cup (E \setminus E_1)$, or equivalently $\Sigma \cup E_2$. We let $\underline{\Sigma}$ be the sum-total of the epistemic weights of the propositions in the set of pre-existing beliefs and knowledge—trivially, each one already has a weight of 1—and let \underline{E} be the sum-total of the epistemic weights for each E -proposition. Let us assume that all E_1 -propositions are each given a weight of 1.¹⁴ As I have explained

¹⁴ That is, I have ruled out those situations where things might not even *seem* determinately so at a given time. One may not be *sure* as to how things seem to one, for instance. That is, it may be indeterminate whether “It seems to me that it is cold” or “It seems to me that it is not cold” is appropriate. Usually, however, we just mean that we are not sure whether it is cold or not.

before, each E_2 -proposition has no epistemic weight because by merely being apprised of each of them as such I am not in any position to consider accepting or rejecting them as true or false. Thus, \underline{E}_2 —the sum-total of the epistemic weights of all the E_2 -propositions—will be 0. As a result, we get the following situation:

$$\begin{aligned} & \underline{\Sigma} + (\underline{E} \setminus \underline{E}_1) \\ = & \underline{\Sigma} + \underline{E}_2 \\ = & \underline{\Sigma} \end{aligned}$$

This means that as long as the potential perceptual contents, namely the E_2 -propositions, appear embedded in “seems that”-clauses (i.e., are represented by their phenomenalized counterparts), the epistemic role they might have in un-embedded form is neutralized. As I have illustrated here, all the E_2 -propositions that are claims about the world, e.g., “This is Chicago,” are rejected as propositions that I may even so much as consider as candidates for beliefs or knowledge because given the circumstances, Σ contains overrides for each member of E_2 .

This thought experiment has the consequence that under such Σ , no experience as such is a reason against or a reason for any belief and leaves the acquisition of empirical knowledge a mystery. “It seems to me that a is F ,” for instance, is not any kind of reason to seriously entertain the belief that a is F . In order for me to be in the position to seriously entertain that belief, I require a whole smattering of other beliefs and a whole smattering of absences of belief. The moral is that some experiences might be taken to have no significant epistemic contributions, and that in general no particular experience on its own should be taken to have any significant epistemic contribution. If that is correct, however, then it does not seem that such experiences are equipped with specific accuracy conditions. They might, however, acquire them when we proceed to make a judgment as to how the world is, given Σ and E .

So, if intentional content—the supposedly informative feature of experience—were always given as embedded within the “it seems that/this looks to be x ”-locution, the consequence would be that every experience has the same epistemological import under every circumstance, namely none. There is nothing about any particular experience or another that gives it genuinely informative features in some circumstances rather than others.

If intentional content is intrinsic to each perceptual episode in this way, and the epistemic weight of an isolated perceptual episode’s putative content—the E_2 -proposition embedded within the E_1 -proposition—is nil (or indeterminate), then no experience (reasonably) impacts our system of beliefs in any assignable way. Hence, phenomenologically given perceptual episodes are in themselves epistemically inert and do not amount

to (determinate) content. If no experience *can* reasonably impact one's system of beliefs, the relationship between one's epistemic life and one's perceptual life is lost. If content is understood as giving and being given to us in our mental experiences as accuracy conditions, then content must be determinately true in certain situations rather than others. But no experiential episode—nothing given in a “seems that”-locution under the discussed circumstances—actually makes a claim, true or false, on the world.¹⁵

Since, according to what was just said, isolated perceptual experiences do not have determinate intentional content—because they fail to make any epistemic contribution to our system of knowledge and beliefs, and therefore are not equipped with any information about conditions they would have to be accurate representations of—we should reject thinking of perceptual experiences as having intrinsic content at all. Therefore (AIT), interpreted as an epistemological claim, is true, and (IT) must be rejected.

¹⁵ Nes, in a response to Travis's “The Silence of the Senses,” says “if demonstrable looks, on the anti-representationalist view, are not capable of being paraphrased away as ways things look, and can be neither non-physical particulars nor physical particulars nor universals, the reasonable conclusion is that they are nothing” (Nes 53). My argument is that it is precisely the case that (isolated cases) are, in a sense, nothing. But this is not to also endorse Nes's conclusion that Travis seems committed to an unnatural account of demonstrable looks in lieu of the natural reading that having a demonstrable look is a matter of things just looking a certain way—demonstrable “looks-facts” as qualitative looks-facts (e.g., something looks *F*) and comparative looks-facts (e.g., something looks like *F*). I agree with Travis that “no demonstrable look, nor any look in our first sense, *has* any intrinsic import” where the sense of look in “*a* looks *F*” means “*a* looks the way things that are *F* look” (“The Silence of the Senses” 81).

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