

Philosophy 136

The Philosophy of Perception

Handout 20

Tuesday 8 November 2005

1. *How Do Propositional Contents Relate to Perceptual Consciousness?*

If one thinks that all intentional states have propositional or intentional contents, then the state of affairs which makes:

(1) John wants a sloop
true requires that John have a propositional attitude of desiring related to some proposition (concerning, say, the possession of a sloop).

Likewise, we can think of the truths about sensory experience which appear to be relational in form being true in virtue of the experience being a relation to some propositional or intentional content.

The sense-datum theorist supposes that when one is in the position of seeing a red square, or having the hallucination of such the following is true:

(2) *S* is aware of a red square
and the sense-datum theorist claims that (2) is true in virtue of there being some entity, a sense-datum with which *S* stands in the relation of awareness.

An adverbial theory of sense experience (cf. Michael Tye, 'The Adverbial Approach to Visual Experience' in the reader) denies that there is any relation here. One is simply sensing redly.

However, that description of the situation does not fit how we conceive of our situation when having a sense experience. For it is as if something was there for us to be aware of, or attend to. Cf. Strawson on the objects of perception.

The intentional theory does not deny that it seems as if there is an object of awareness; it agrees that it is as if there is something to attend to.

Anscombe captures this by talk of 'intentional objects' of psychological verbs – when one is hallucinating a red square, 'a red square' in (2) picks out an intentional object. But, she claims, intentional objects are not *entities*, rather it indicates the grammatical function of the phrase 'a red square'.

Someone who ascribes a propositional or intentional content to the sense experience will explain this so:

- i.) (2) and sentences like it articulate or describe the subject's experience, they give *the content of consciousness*;
- ii.) such sentences can be true even when there are no entities with which one stands in a relation of awareness (i.e. in the case of hallucination);
- iii.) (2) is therefore not made true by the subject standing in a relation of awareness to any entity
- iv.) (2) is made true by the subject being in an experiential state with a propositional or intentional content, i.e. by standing in an experiential relation to some proposition or content that things are thus and so

Rather than *identifying* the *contents of consciousness* with the *intentional content* of experience, the intentional theory claims that what we are aware of in having experience is determined or constituted by its having an intentional content.

2. *Pure Representationalism & the Sensational*

Corresponding to the historical distinction between sensation and perception, we can draw a distinction between sensational and representational properties of experience. Representational

properties will be properties an experience has in virtue of features of its representational content; while sensational properties will be properties an experience has in virtue of some other aspects—other than its representational content—of what it is like to have that experience. (C. Peacocke, *Sense & Content*, Ch.1 p.268 in reprint in *Vision & Mind*.)

One endorses an intentional theory of perception if one claims that *there are* aspects of the contents of consciousness which are determined by the intentional content of sense experiences.

One endorses a *pure* intentional theory of perception if one claims *in addition* that there are no other aspects of sense experience.

Harman and Tye both endorse *pure* intentional theories of perception. Peacocke in this passage does not deny that there are intentional aspects of sense experience, he adopts an intentional theory, but he insists that there are other aspects in addition.

Reasons for supposing that there are non-intentional elements of experience:

(a) 'Introspection'

It just seems to us that there are elements of sense experience which are not bound up with the perceived environment.

...what is it that philosophers have called qualitative states?: As Louis Armstrong said when asked what jazz is, "If you got to ask, you ain't never going to get to know." (N. Block, 'Troubles with Functionalism', *Readings in the Philosophy of Psychology*, ed. N. Block, p.278.)

Harman and Tye both deny that there are any such evident elements:

When you see a tree, you do not experience any features as intrinsic features of your experience. Look at a tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree...

The sense datum theorist's view about our immediate experience of color is definitely not the naïve view; it does not represent the viewpoint of ordinary perception. The sense datum theory is not the result of phenomenological study; it is rather result of an argument, namely the argument from illusion. But that argument is either invalid or question-begging... (Harman, 'The Intrinsic Quality of Experience', p.39.)

It was the content, not anything else, that was immediately accessible to my consciousness and that had aspects that were so pleasing... (Michael Tye, 'Visual Qualia and Visual Content', in T. Crane, ed., *The Contents of Experience*, p. 160.)

(b) *The inverted spectrum*

Locke introduced the idea that the way in which the colour of something appears to me might differ from the way in which that colour looks to you without that difference being detectable in our manifest behaviours – for example in our use of words, or in the kinds of discrimination we can make in sorting objects by colour.

Why should this be inconsistent with an intentional view? If the intentional content of one's psychological state is determined by its functional role, then it is possible two beings are functionally identical but differ in their phenomenology.

(iii) Peacocke's 'additional characterization' challenge (see *Sense & Content*, Ch. 1 in *Vision & Mind*, and see the Harman for a response).

3 kinds of example:

a.) seeing objects as being the same height at different distances from one; there is a difference in addition in the way one experiences each object, in addition to the sameness in height;

b.) there is a difference in visual experience of depth between monocular and binocular vision although both can represent the distance of an object;

c.) there can be a difference in the way a scene is perceptually organized without a difference in the elements of the scene.