Are the Senses Silent?

Travis's Argument from Looks

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1. Introduction

Echoing Kant's remark that "[t]houghts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (Kant 1998: A51/B75), Charles Travis (2004; 2013a) argues that perceptual experiences are not only 'blind', but 'silent' in that they have no representational content at all. For Travis, the role of perceptual experience—by which he means *conscious* perceptual experience—is to present aspects of the world upon which truth may turn. "In perception," he says, "things are *not* presented, or represented, to us as being thus and so. They are just presented to us, full stop" (Travis 2004: 65). According to Travis, then, perception is presentational in that it makes perceptual objects—for example, a sunset, or the sun's setting—available to consciousness, but it is not in the business of representing *that* the sun is setting. The latter, being propositional, is not an object of perceptual awareness, but rather of thought or judgement (Travis 2013b). While propositional content may be constitutive of cognitive states typically thought of as 'downstream' from, or causally dependent upon, perceptual experience, assimilating perception to a state of this kind involves a kind of category mistake that renders thought's purchase on the world unintelligible

(Travis 2007).

The view that perceptual experience is representational is common within both philosophy and cognitive science. However, it is rarely explicitly argued for in any detail.[1] According to this view, for *S* to perceptually experience the world in some sensory modality, or combination of modalities, is for *S*'s experience to *represent* the world as being some particular way. That is to say, perceptual experiences have representational content. In 'The Silence of the Senses', Travis challenges this orthodoxy by arguing that experiences do not represent the world as being any particular way, since they are, in an important sense, equivocal or indeterminate between contents. Accordingly, though perception presents objects in an extensional sense by making them available to a conscious subject, it does not present them *as being some way or other*, and so is not a representational or intentional phenomenon (Travis 2004: 93).

In this paper, I examine one of Travis's arguments—the *argument from looks* (§2)—for the above claim in order to clarify the nature of the challenge that it poses for the representational view, as well as to highlight several possible lines of response. My aim here is not to defend Travis *per se*, but rather to elucidate the details of his argument in a way that avoids various misunderstandings which, I argue, have become prevalent in the literature (§3). Once these misunderstandings are corrected, the argument can be seen to pose an important and, in my view, unresolved challenge for many (though not all) forms of representationalism (§4). As such, Travis's argument from looks puts pressure on representationalists to explain not only how experiences come to have representational content, and what that content is, but the explanatory role, or roles,

[1] Examples of recent attempts to do so include Byrne (2009), Siegel (2010), Schellenberg (2011a; 2011b) and Brogaard (forthcoming).

that such contents are supposed to play, along with how—or indeed whether—they are available to perceivers in thought and reasoning (§5).

2. Perceptual Representation

In 'The Silence of the Senses', Travis (2004; 2013a) targets the view that visual perceptual experience (hereafter: 'experience') constitutively involves, or is reducible to, the representation of mind-independent objects and their properties. The view that experiences have representational content—variously known as *representationalism*, *intentionalism*, or *the Content View*[2]—are often contrasted with the view that such experiences fundamentally involve a primitive or unanalysable relation to the objects of experience. Variations on the latter view—known as *relationalism*, *Naïve Realism*, or *the Object View*—differ in emphasis, but share a common commitment to the essentially relational nature of experience.[3] Many relationalists deny that experience can be analysed in representational terms, claiming either that experience is non-representational, i.e. *anti-representationalism*, or that the resulting content is explanatorily redundant. A third family of hybrid or 'mixed' views holds that experience possesses both representational and relational elements, thereby combining aspects of each of the preceding views. I do not consider such hybrid views in detail here except to say that insofar as they posit a representational element to experience, they are also targets for Travis's argument.

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[2] Not to be confused with the distinct, but related, view that the phenomenal character of experience supervenes upon, or is identical to, its representational content, also commonly referred to as 'intentionalism' or, less frequently, 'representationalism'.

[3] Campbell (2002), for example, characterises experience as a three-place relation between subject, object and some particular standpoint or perspective, whereas Martin (2002, 2006) emphasises the constitutive role of external objects in experience.

The notion of representation that Travis opposes—or *p-representation*, as I will call it, intended to be suggestive of 'perceptual representation'—may be contrasted with other forms of representation that he explicitly allows. Causal covariation, for example, as occurs when light falls upon the retina forming an image of some external scene, might be thought to constitute a kind of representation, albeit one that is incapable of misrepresenting except by externally imposed convention (see below). Similarly, the rings in a tree's trunk might be said to represent the tree's age, though the content of this representation is imputed by us, as conscious observers, and not by the tree or its rings. Here again it seems inapt to talk of misrepresentation if—due to freak weather conditions, for example—the tree's age and number of rings fail to coincide. Rather, the rings might simply be said *not* to represent its age. Alternatively, *we* might represent the tree's rings as not indicating its age, where this further representation is distinct from the rings themselves. In any case, 'representation' functions here as a kind of shorthand that indicates the presence of a particular kind of cause. Call such forms of representation *effect-representation*.

The possibility of misrepresentation typically involves an appeal to some kind of standard function, or norm. Scientific explanations of the workings of various parts of the brain, such as the visual cortex or optic nerve, might invoke the notion of representation in describing states or processes that carry information about some external stimulus or subsystem. Here, the relevant brain system may enter a state normally associated with a specific cause as a result of a deviant chain of events—for example, by direct stimulation with an electrode—thereby creating the possibility for misrepresentation. Even where such representations casually impact upon the subject's experience, however, their contents need not feature as the content of any personal-

level cognitive state; i.e. they may be entirely sub-personal. Travis's argument does not rule out the existence of sub-personal representations, nor is his view (*pace* Burge 2005) incompatible with modern psychological or neuroscientific explanations of perception. Rather, the argument targets a distinctly philosophical conception of representation that is held by many, though not all, philosophers who take conscious perceptual experience to be representational.

To gain a clearer understanding of the kind of representation that Travis has in mind, it is helpful to examine the conditions by which he characterises it, which he summarises as follows (Travis 2004: 63; the labels are my own):

(i) *Objectivity:* "The representation in question consists in representing things as so (thus, truly/veridically, or falsely/non-veridically)."

(ii) *Face Value:* "It has, or gives perceptual experience, a face value, at which it can be taken or declined (or discounted)."

(iii) *Givenness:* "It is not autorepresentation [*representation-by* the subject]. (It is allorepresentation [*representation-to* the subject], though here, not crucially.)"

(iv) *Availability:* "When we are thus represented to, we can recognize that, and how, this is so; most pertinently, we can appreciate what it is that is thus represented to us as so."

These necessary, though not sufficient, conditions are intended to capture the particular flavour of representation that Travis attributes to his opponents, who include Martin Davies, Gilbert Harman, John McDowell, Colin McGinn, Christopher Peacocke, John Searle, and Michael Tye, to name but a few (*ibid.* 58). To this we might add Byrne

(2009), Siegel (2010) and Brogaard (2010), as well as Schellenberg (2011a, 2011b), who defends a hybrid view comparable to Tye's (2007) phenomenal externalism.

Travis's use of "representing things as so" in (i) might be taken to suggest that p-representation must be conceptually structured, rather than non-conceptual. However, since two of his stated targets—namely, Peacocke (1992) and Tye (1995)—endorse forms of non-conceptual content, we can assume that Travis intends for his argument to apply to both conceptual and non-conceptual views. Similarly, while the wording of (i) and (ii) might suggest that perceptual content must be propositional, i.e. assessable for truth or falsity, a broader interpretation of *Objectivity* admits of any form of content possessing accuracy conditions—a notion that admits of varying degrees—in relation to the states of mind-independent objects and their properties.[4, 5]

In what follows, I will be primarily concerned with Travis's *Face Value* and *Availability* conditions, both of which are central to his argument from looks. Before presenting the details of this argument, it will therefore be useful to examine these conditions in greater detail, along with some of the considerations that motivate them.

2.1. Face Value

Part of representationalism's appeal stems from the intuitive idea that every experience has a single and determinate 'face value' at which it may be accepted or declined, as captured by Travis's *Face Value* condition.[6] It follows from this conception of experience

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[4] For a representationalist view that denies this broader interpretation, see Glüer (2009).

[5] I examine whether the argument may be successfully extended to non-propositional content in §3.1 below.

[6] 'Determinate' is used here in the sense that is opposed to *determinable*, and concerns the assignment of contents to experience, rather than the determinacy of that content. The above claim is therefore compatible with the contents of experience being indeterminate in the sense that they have vague, i.e. non-determinate, accuracy conditions.

that experiences must convey some particular 'way', or state of affairs, that things are perceived as being, i.e. a representational content, capturing the conditions according to which that experience may be considered accurate or veridical. To accept an experience at face value is to judge that things are the way that they appear. To decline its face value, or to withhold judgement, is to doubt or remain neutral about the veridicality of one's experience, respectively—as might occur after having knowingly taken a hallucinogenic drug, or when wearing inverting lenses, for example. Such content is typically thought of as being systematically related, or identical, to the contents of perceptual judgements or beliefs that it would be natural for the subject to form of the basis of that experience (cf. Siegel 2010: 51). Crucially, however, perceptually *experiencing* the world as ϕ does not commit the subject to *believing* ϕ, though it might predispose them towards forming such a belief. On the present view, then, experience is distinct from judgement and belief *simpliciter*, and functions as a non-factive propositional attitude in its own right (Byrne 2009: 437).

The idea that experiences have face-value content might seem so obvious or compelling to some that it can be difficult to understand how it could possibly be false. One way of rejecting *Face Value*, however, is to deny that experience has content in favour of the view that such content only arises when a subject judges, or otherwise interprets, her experience as indicating that something is the case. Such a view need not deny that perceptual beliefs have contents which are derived from, or causally dependent upon, experience. Rather, the claim is that the resulting content is not derived from, or identical to, a content of *experience*, since experiences are not themselves representational. Thus, whatever tokening of content the representationalist takes to occur at the level of experience may be taken by the anti-representationalist to

occur 'downstream' of experience at the level of judgement or interpretation.[7] On the standard assumption that belief is explanatorily subsequent to experience, then the latter has no content independently of the former. This is Travis's view.

A second way of rejecting *Face Value* is to deny that experiences have only one such content in favour of them having many contents; i.e. *content pluralism* (cf. Chalmers 2006; Crane 2013). In this case, Travis's argument may be applied iteratively to each individual content that the content pluralist takes experience to have. Alternatively, one might hold that experiences have disjunctive contents—for example, that a given visual experience represents there to be a reddish-roundish-patch *or* a ball *or* a tomato, and so on, where each disjunct specifies some particular way that the world might be. This view, however, is compatible with *Face Value*, since the entire disjunction as a whole may form the face-value content of experience, and so what is 'given' in perception. Whilst Travis (2004: 72–73) raises doubts as to the aptness of the disjunctive characterisation, his argument may also be taken to target views according to which experiences have disjunctive contents (cf. §3.1).[8]

2.2. *Availability*

Travis's notion of "recognizing", or *availability* as I will call it, is undoubtedly the most contentious of his four conditions, and admittedly less precise or explicit than one might hope. I take it, however, that this condition is motivated by constraints arising from *Face Value* and *Givenness*, since for an experience to have a face value that is given to the subject in perception, its content must in some sense be cognitively available to that subject such that they can accept or decline it. Were this not the case then,

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[7] *Mutatis mutandis* for non-conceptual and/or non-propositional contents.

[8] Not to be confused with *disjunctivism*, which Travis endorses.

assuming that they were able to form any beliefs at all, subjects would simply find themselves 'saddled with' (to borrow McDowell's term) beliefs about their perceptual environment without any means of consciously registering or reflecting upon the content of their experiences, thus making accepting or declining that content impossible. Aside from special cases such as blindsight, this is not how perceptual experience strikes us, and, more importantly for present purposes, it is not how proponents of representationalism characterise their view, since it effectively collapses p-representation into a form of sub-personal effect-representation.

Availability, then, has two main features. First, it requires the face-value content of experience to be "recognizable", or cognitively available, to the subject on the grounds that "you cannot represent things to people as so in a way they simply cannot recognize as doing that" (Travis 2004: 63). By extension, then, experiences recognisably involve some form of representation. Moreover, such content cannot be the result of the subject representing to themselves that something is so—what Travis calls "autorepresentation" (*ibid.* 61)—as in judgement or belief. Rather, the content is supposedly 'given' to the subject in perception, i.e. "allorepresentation" (*ibid.*), as per Travis's *Givenness* condition. Precisely what the relevant availability amounts to requires further specification, but I take the minimal requirement to be that, for any given experience, perceivers must be capable of grasping how that experience represents the world as being—or, to put it another way, what it would take for that experience to be accurate or veridical. P-representational content is therefore content *for the subject*.

The second notable feature of *Availability* is that it requires the content of experience to be available (in the relevant sense) to the subject in virtue of the

corresponding experience. This qualification is intended to rule out conscious availability through some further state, such as a judgement or belief, that is independent of, or explanatorily subsequent to, the experience in question. As noted above, it is entirely compatible with Travis's view that judgements or beliefs have representational content, though those contents do not constitute p-representation since they contravene *Givenness*. Rather, what is at issue is whether experience *per se* possesses content, since if such content were only recognisable in virtue of some further non-experiential state, then it could equally be claimed that the relevant content should be attributed to that further state and not to experience.

Availability does not, however, require subjects to be routinely aware that they are being represented to, nor that they are capable of reporting the nature or contents of their experiences—something that clearly requires a degree of philosophical and conceptual sophistication that may be lacking in many, or indeed most, subjects. Nor does it require perceivers to be capable of accurately determining whether the relevant accuracy conditions obtain, since they may be subject to some systematic practical or epistemic disadvantage, such as experiencing a persistent illusion or hallucination. Rather, in order to p-represent that x is ψ, the subject must be capable of grasping both (i) what it would be for x to be ψ, and (ii) that the relevant experience conveys that x is ψ, even if on reflection they go on to judge things to be otherwise. The relevant grasping may be tacit or implicit, and need not involve any explicit thought or knowledge that is attributable to the subject. Nevertheless, content must be tokened in a way that is capable of featuring in the subject's reasoning such that they could form a conscious judgement or belief, or rationally justify such a belief, on the basis of it if required.

The precise formulation of this requirement is delicate since one would not want to rule out the use of, for example, introspection or conceptual capacities, the exercise of which enables subjects to token or introspect the contents of experience, provided that such capacities were not themselves what gave experience its content independently of perception. In particular, subjects should not merely *infer* the contents of experience on the basis of, for example, background beliefs or prior learning in a way that is compatible with the denial of representationalism. To avoid such problems, we can gloss Travis's condition as follows:

> *Availability*:* The representational nature and content of p-representations must be "recognizable", or cognitively available, to the subject solely in virtue of the corresponding perceptual experience, along with the operation of those non-representational capacities necessary to facilitate such availability.

It remains an important question whether a version of the above condition would be acceptable to Travis's opponents, since much of his argument depends on it. However, some version of the condition does feature in many representationalist accounts of experience. According to Siegel's 'Content View', for example, "the contents of an experience are conveyed to the subject *by her experience*" (Siegel 2010: 28; emphasis added), whilst Byrne (2009: 443) takes experiences to be belief-like states whose contents are available to the subject on the basis of how things non-comparatively look (see §4.3). Nevertheless, it remains open to the representationalist to reject this condition, perhaps on the grounds that it over-intellectualises the nature of perception (cf. Burge 2010), thus generating a possible response to Travis. I discuss the consequences of this view in §5 below, though Travis (2004: 84–93) also gives a separate

argument against such views that I do not discuss here.

For the sake of argument, however, I will assume the above reading of *Availability*, though the details are no doubt controversial and may require further glossing to make this condition acceptable to proponents of the target view. However, since *Availability*, or something very like it, is entailed by *Face Value* and *Givenness*, then the onus lies with the representationalist to give a satisfactory account of it.

3. The Argument from Looks

Travis's *argument from looks*, as I will call it, is just one of the arguments in what is an extremely rich and complex paper (Travis 2004; 2013a). In it, Travis aims to demonstrate that the notion of p-representation that I sketch above can play no role in a satisfactory philosophical theory of perception. If effective, this has the potential to rule out a range of widely held views concerning the role and existence of representational content in visual experience, and by extension all other forms of perception. Note that this leaves it open whether other forms of representation, such as effect-representation, may be attributed to perceptual states (though not to experiences, since it is the attribution of content at the conscious level to which Travis is opposed). Nevertheless, such a position would constitute a substantial weakening of the target view, and so still represents an important victory for Travis. The argument thus poses an important challenge to the representational view, though one that, as I argue in §5, may ultimately prove surmountable.

Travis's argumentative strategy is relatively straightforward. Representationalists, he claims, are committed to experiences being p-representational. The evidence for this comes from representationalists' own descriptions of the view, which I will not rehearse here (see Travis 2004: 58–60). However, Travis argues, the

conditions for p-representation cannot be jointly satisfied, since *Face Value* and *Availability* are mutually incompatible. Hence visual experiences cannot be p-representational, and so representationalism is false.[9]

The argument itself is as follows:

P1 If visual experiences were p-representational then their content would be recognisable in virtue of how, in experience, things perceptually appear, or look [to the subject].[10] (*Looks-indexing*)

P2 Visual looks are incapable of making p-representational content recognisable since they are comparative and so equivocal between multiple contents.

P3 Thinkable looks are incapable of making p-representational content recognisable since they are not wholly perceptual.

P4 There is no further notion of looks that is both wholly perceptual and capable of making p-representational content recognisable.

C1 *(From P2 through P4)* The content of visual experiences cannot be recognisable on the basis of how things look [to the subject].

C2 *(From P1 and C1)* Visual experiences are not p-representational.

Travis's first premise makes the *pro tem* assumption that the most plausible way

[9] For alternative formulations of the argument, see Brogaard (forthcoming) and Raleigh (forthcoming).

[10] Slightly different versions of the argument may be derived depending on whether or not appearances or looks are taken to be subject-specific, as indicated by the bracketed phrase in P1 and C1, with versions of the following responses and objections similarly derived for each.

for the representationalist to satisfy *Availability* is for experiential content to be recognisable to the subject—or "indexed" to use Travis's term (*ibid.* 63)—on the basis of how things visually appear, or look.[11] This suggestion has *prima facie* plausibility since how one tells what the face-value content of one's experience is presumably depends upon the look, or visual appearance, that is manifested via the phenomenology of experience. That is not to say that appearances must be representational, or are to be identified with the contents of experience. Rather, the suggestion is that looks enable us to *recognise* such contents, in turn making them available to consciousness. Thus, what fixes or determines p-representational content and what makes that content recognisable may be two different things—the former consideration being semantic, the latter epistemic. Whilst Travis does not always adequately distinguish between these two aspects of experience, *Availability* and *Looks-indexing*, i.e. P1, clearly concern the latter.

Premises two through four are concerned with the various kinds of looks that might perform such indexing, thereby making the resulting content available to the subject in the sense described above (§2.2). Here, Travis identifies two distinct notions of appearance: "visual" and "thinkable" looks,[12] arguing that neither is capable of making p-representational content recognisable since the former contravenes *Face Value* (P2) and the latter *Availability* (P3). From this, along with what Travis takes to be conflicting constraints arising from those two conditions (P4), he concludes that experiences cannot be looks-indexed (C1), and so visual perception is not p-representational (C2). Assuming that vision provides the strongest case for the

[11] I take looks to be visual appearances, and so use these terms interchangeably.

[12] I use the revised terminology of Travis (2013a) in preference to "looking like" and "looking as if" (Travis 2004) for reasons described in §4.3 below.

attribution of p-representational content, this result may be taken to generalise to all forms of perceptual experience, though Travis leaves this final step implicit.

The argument from looks thus aims to present the representationalist with the following dilemma. To defend their view, they must either:

(a) elucidate some notion of looks that is capable of making the relevant content available—something that Travis argues is impossible—by rejecting one of P2 through P4, or

(b) reject *Looks-indexing*, or one of Travis's other conditions for p-representation, resulting in a substantial weakening of, and potentially undermining, their view.

To understand why this dilemma is pressing, however, it is necessary to gain a clearer understanding of Travis's notions of "visual" and "thinkable" looks, along with the reason why he thinks that no other notion of looks is capable of meeting the representationalist's requirements.

3.1 Visual looks

Visual looks, or *looks*$_v$ for short, are characteristic ways of appearing exhibited by objects in virtue of their visual effects upon the perceiver. Looks$_v$ thus identify some visually detectable appearance that is generated by all of the things which share a given look (Travis 2004: 69–70). For an object to *look*$_v$ *like a lemon* is therefore for it to have the characteristic visual look that lemons typically (though not always) have—call this *looking lemonish*. Since looks$_v$ may be characterised in terms of an implicit or explicit comparison between objects that look like, or resemble, one another, they are commonly described (e.g. by Chisholm 1957: 45) as *comparative looks*.

To see why this yields a problem for the representationalist, consider the

following example. Many things, not all of which are lemons, share the property of looking lemonish. Moreover, anything that looks$_v$, in the relevant respect, like a lemon also looks$_v$ like a wax imitation lemon, or, to the untrained eye under appropriate circumstances, like an unripe lime, a lemon-shaped bar of soap, a hollowed-out lemon façade, a cartoon drawing of a lemon, and so on. Thus, for all that something might *look*$_v$ lemonish, there are innumerable ways that the world might actually *be*, all of which share that same visual appearance. Crucially, such resemblance relationships are symmetrical. Thus, if something looks$_v$ like a lemon, then a lemon also looks$_v$ like it. Each of these alternatives corresponds to a set of conditions under which the experience may be considered accurate or veridical, and so constitutes a distinct representational content in its own right. As far as visual looks go, then, the same experience might equally be said to represent any, or indeed all, of the innumerable ways in which it can look$_v$ to me *just like* there is a lemon before me; e.g. that there is a wax lemon, hollowed out lemon-façade, and so on.

It follows from this, argues Travis, that nothing about an object's *looking*$_v$ ψ can identify the content of that experience as *representing* ψ; e.g. that something *is* a lemon, as opposed to one of its visually indistinguishable alternatives, or 'ringers'. What goes for lemons goes for peccaries, ovals, and blueness (Travis 2004: 73). In each case, the relevant look$_v$ is also exhibited by a host of ringers, which in the preceding cases would include pigs, circles seen obliquely, and white things cleverly illuminated by blue light, respectively. Thus, looks$_v$ "do not decide any particular representational content for any given experience to have" (*ibid*. 69), and so fail to satisfy *Face Value*. Rather, visual looks are equivocal between contents, and so incapable of making any one such content recognisable, as per P2.

One possible response to this line of argument is as follows:

> *Response 1:* Experiences do not represent concrete states of affairs—for example, there *being* a lemon, something yellow, ovoid, etc.—but rather something's merely *appearing* lemonish (yellowish, ovoid, etc.) in a way that may be satisfied by any sufficiently lemon-like object, or combination of objects, that exhibits the relevant appearance.

One way to flesh out this response would be to posit a notion of appearances that lay somewhere between a purely subjective effect upon the perceiver, which violates *Objectivity* (see below), and the representation of the appearance-independent properties of external objects, such as their shape, colour, and so on.[13] Consequently, the resulting content relates to what we might call *appearance properties*: *looking lemonish*, *looking yellow*, and so on. Such properties are strictly neutral on which external objects and properties give rise to the appearance, thus severely limiting what perception can tell us about the external world. This approach also contradicts the standard representationalist account of appearances, according to which for some object *o* to look *F* is for the subject to represent *o* as *being F*, rather than representing *o* as having the property of (merely) *appearing F*—call this *F'*. Thus, rather than appearances being a function of the relevant propositional attitude, e.g. seeing or experiencing, they enter into the content of the experience itself. Arguably, such content can tell us little about the appearance-independent properties of external objects since any object can, with sufficient setup, instantiate *F'*, even if it doesn't instantiate the property that typically causes it, namely *F*. Even if the response works, then, which is doubtful, it comes at considerable ontological and epistemic cost.

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[13] Travis goes on to deny that there could be any such intermediate notion (see §3.3).

Alternatively, if looks$_v$ are taken to be purely subjective, this raises the question of which cases are to count as veridical. If experiences merely represent that, for example, *o looks F*, then this will be true, and so veridical, of any object exhibiting the relevant look, potentially extending to cases of illusion and even hallucination (assuming that the latter are taken to represent some non-standard object, such as a brain state). This again weakens the explanatory role of p-representation, in the worst case making the relevant content necessarily veridical, since every case in which an object looks$_v$ *F* to *S* will be one in which it is (veridically) represented by *S* as having the property of *looking*$_v$ *F*, i.e. *F'*. In the absence of some further factor or mechanism that determines how the world would need to be in order for that experience to be veridical, such contents are effectively self-verifying. As such, they are only capable of indexing 'thin' or narrow content concerning the state of the subject's visual system, or visual phenomenology, and not some state of the external world, thus contravening *Objectivity* (cf. Byrne 2009: 449–50). But this what looks$_v$ were supposed to be doing, so either they are redundant, since they fail to explain how *Availability* can be met, or, if they do not do this job, then they are a form of sub-personal effect-representation. Either way, *Looks-indexing* fails.[14]

A more palatable alternative is that just one of the many possible contents—*being a lemon*, for example—is somehow singled out as the face value of the relevant experience. In this case, the representationalist needs to explain what privileges that content over all of the visually indistinguishable alternatives, or indeed the disjunction of all these alternatives, as *the* content of experience. Moreover, this explanation must make it possible for the subject to recognise that their experience represents *this* and

[14] A similar argument may be found in Travis (2005: 310) concerning the extension of the concept *red*.

not some ringer, and so can presumably can only draw upon facts that are available to subject at the first-personal level. Either way, what started out as the seemingly intuitive and straightforward notion that experiences 'represent' the properties of objects in the world requires considerable further explanation and/or theoretical machinery to ground the relevant content in information that is perceptually available to the subject, if indeed this is possible (see §5).

3.2 Thinkable looks

Whereas visual looks relate to resemblances between objects, thinkable looks are "very much a matter of what can be gathered from, or what is suggested by, the facts at hand, or those visibly (audibly, etc.) on hand" (Travis 2004: 76). Thinkable looks, or *looks*$_t$ for short, are *epistemic looks* (cf. Chisholm 1957: 44). These relate to some particular way that the world could be that is associated with the relevant visual appearance, and so are ideally suited to making p-representational content recognisable. Indeed, looks$_t$ arguably just *are* those contents that visual experiences incline a perceiver to judge or believe under the circumstances (cf. Travis 2004: 77). It is doubtful, however, that the contents which are indexed by, or identical to, looks$_t$ are apparent to the subject solely in virtue of what is perceptually available in experience, as *Availability* requires.

For example, if Arvo sees what he takes to be a lemon in front of him, then the relevant object looks$_t$ to him as if it is a lemon. But for all that, he might equally have taken the same object to be a lemon-shaped bar of soap had he enjoyed a qualitatively indistinguishable experience of it in a different context—upon walking into a chemist's shop, for example. This is presumably not due to any difference in visual information about the object that is available to him in the relevant experience, but a matter of what he takes to be the case on the basis of that visual information. (That both objects look to

Arvo *like* lemons is irrelevant here, since this is a fact about Arvo's subjective experience that is not answerable to any mind-independent property of the external world, and so fails to satisfy *Objectivity*, as discussed above.) Rather, what differs between the two situations is not how things *perceptually* appear to Arvo, but what he is inclined to *infer* on the basis of his total evidence under the circumstances. Such inferences are arguably a matter of judgement or interpretation, and not of experience, which can (according to standard assumptions) only convey how things visually (audibly, tactually, etc.) appear. It is therefore difficult to see how experience could enable the subject to discern which of these perceptually indistinguishable possibilities is represented therein.

Looks$_t$ are a form of representation whose contents, Travis (2004: 76) argues, cannot be 'given' in perception since they are already accepted by the subject as being true. Consequently, looks$_t$ are in danger of collapsing into, on the one hand, belief or judgement (i.e. "autorepresentation") or, on the other, merely "indicating" (*ibid*. 67) what is expected under the circumstances, taking all the available evidence into account. Whilst this is presumably part of the intended role of p-representation, it cannot be what makes perceptual content recognisable for the reason given above: it is not a (wholly) perceptual phenomenon, but an epistemic one. If, *per impossibile*, looks$_t$ were what made the contents of experiences recognisable, then they would do so in virtue of a state—namely, belief—that is, by all accounts, explanatorily subsequent to experience, since looks$_t$ themselves depend upon the subject's background beliefs. Thus, the content of experience would be recognisable in virtue of some further state that is supposedly formed on the basis of experience, and not in virtue of the experience itself, thereby contravening *Availability* and potentially generating a regress.

It may seem unproblematic to some representationalists (cf. Siegel 2010: 51) for the relevant content to be recognisable in virtue of beliefs or other states 'downstream' of experience. However, this cannot form part of an argument for the existence of p-representational content since it reverses the desired order of explanation—i.e. the contents of beliefs are supposed to depend upon the content of experience, and not the other way around—as well as contravening both *Givenness* and *Face Value*. Moreover, as noted above, that beliefs are representational is common ground between representationalists and their opponents, and so neutral between the two views. Consequently, looks$_t$ cannot be what make p-representational content recognisable since the information that determines what is represented according to them is not available to the subject in virtue of how things perceptually appear. Thus, looks$_t$ are not wholly perceptual, as per P3.

3.3 Looks-indexing

If we rule out both looks$_v$ and looks$_t$ as being what makes the content of experience available, an obvious further question arises: could not some other notion of looks or appearances do the job of indexing p-representational content? After all, as yet we have no reason to think that Travis's two notions of looks are exhaustive. Travis goes on to claim in P4, however, that no such 'hybrid' notion of looks is possible.

Travis's argument for this point is that while *Availability* pushes the representationalist towards looks$_v$, which contravene *Face Value*, *Face Value* itself pushes the representationalist towards looks$_t$, which contravene *Availability*. Thus, either (a) appearances are wholly perceptual, in which case they fail to pick out any particular way that the world must be in order for things to look the way they do, and so are equivocal between contents, i.e. P2, or (b) appearances index (or are identical to) the

contents of epistemic states that are supposedly derived from experience, in which case they are univocal, but not wholly perceptual, since the information that is perceptually available to the subject is insufficient to identify the relevant content, as per P3. The dual constraints of *Face Value* and *Availability* are therefore in tension with one another in such a way that they cannot be jointly satisfied by any one notion of looks. If this is right, then there can be no intermediate or hybrid notion of looks that satisfies both constraints, as per P4, since the very idea of a univocal, objective and wholly perceptual look is itself incoherent. Nevertheless, some of Travis's critics, including Byrne (2009) and Schellenberg (2011b), argue that:

> *Response 2:* Some further, e.g. 'non-comparative' or 'phenomenal', notion of looks is capable of satisfying both *Face Value* and *Looks-indexing*.[15]

I consider this approach in §4.3 below. However, if Travis is right that these conditions are irreconcilable, then experiences cannot be looks-indexed, and so P1 must be rejected, yielding a further response to the argument:

> *Response 3:* Reject *Looks-indexing*.

This brings us to the second horn of Travis's dilemma on which the representationalist now faces the difficulty of specifying how, if not in virtue of appearances, *Availability* might be satisfied, or else of justifying dropping this apparently plausible condition on p-representation. Rejecting *Availability* outright, however, makes it difficult to claim any substantive explanatory role for representational content at the level of experience, thus calling into question the very

[15] Byrne (2009) also claims to reject *Looks-indexing*, though it is unclear that he takes this condition to play the role that is described here.

notion of p-representation. Rejecting *Face Value* or any of Travis's other conditions similarly threatens to weaken or undermine the view (see §5).

Travis's dilemma is pressing in part because it is difficult to see what else could take the place of *Looks-indexing* in making p-representational content recognisable, though alternative options are available. As I argue in §5, however, both of the above responses place a substantial explanatory burden upon the representationalist that cannot be easily discharged in a way that decisively favours their view over a competing anti-representationalist explanation of the contents of perceptual judgements or beliefs.

4. Some Common Misinterpretations

Having established the overall structure of Travis's argument, I now wish to examine some putative objections to it, each involving some misunderstanding that has become prevalent in the literature, along with how one might respond to them. These concern (i) the semantics of 'looks', (ii) the individuation of perceptual content, and (iii) 'non-comparative' or phenomenal looks, respectively.

4.1. The semantic objection

A number of commentators—notably Byrne (2009) and Siegel (2010)—take Travis's argument to concern the semantics of the term 'looks' and its cognates. Siegel, for example, discusses the following objection to the representational view: "No actual uses of *looks* (or *looks F*) and its cognates in ordinary English exclusively track what is presented in experience" (*ibid.* 59). Siegel attributes a version of this objection to Travis, who she claims "raises doubts that any actual uses of *looks* [sic] in English report contents of visual perceptual experience" (*ibid.* 60). However, as should be clear from

the above formulation, Travis's argument concerns the metaphysics and epistemology of appearances, and not the semantics of 'looks' in English or any other language. Consequently, even if there were no use of 'looks' that tracked the alleged contents, the argument would still stand. That we sometimes *describe* experiences using terms like 'looks', 'appears', and so on, is therefore beside the point.

Byrne (2009) similarly takes Travis to be making a semantic point, claiming that "Travis is wrong to conclude that our ordinary talk provides no support for (CV) [the content view]" (*ibid.* 444). Byrne rebuts the alleged conclusion by arguing that "we use 'looks' to convey information about the non-comparative looks of things", which he identifies with "the familiar 'phenomenal use'" of 'looks' (*ibid.* 441; cf. §4.3). However, this again misunderstands the role that looks play in Travis's argument. The point is not that our everyday looks-talk fails to support CV, but that perceptual appearances are unsuited to making p-representational content available. Appearances, or looks, are (according to Travis) either equivocal or non-perceptual, neither of which can explain the availability of perceptual content to the subject.

No doubt these misunderstandings are in part due to Travis's (2004) identifying thinkable looks via the English locution "looks as if" in the indicative mood, and visual looks with "looks like", which is typically (though not always) comparative. As Travis notes, the issue is complicated by the fact that each of these phrases can be used to signify either comparative or epistemic looks, effectively making them ambiguous between Travis's two notions. The argument from looks, however, does not turn on these linguistic points, and the terminology is subsequently replaced in Travis (2013a), which uses "visual" and "thinkable looks" to identify the relevant notions. However, even in the original version of his paper, Travis states that he means "to point to usage

to distinguish two notions of looks" and that "[w]hat matters is that we are conscious of the differences between these notions when it comes to asking just what notion of looks might serve a representationalist's purpose" (2004: 75–76). To reject Travis's critique on the basis of whether English usage tracks, or otherwise, the relevant notions therefore fails to engage with the substance of his argument which concerns the metaphysics and epistemology of appearances, and not the semantics of 'looks'.

4.2. The triviality objection

A second misinterpretation of Travis's argument is that it concerns what determines, or individuates, the content of perceptual experience, rather than what makes that content recognisable. According to this version of the argument, Travis aims to show that appearances, as manifested via visual phenomenology, underdetermine the content of experience, and so cannot be what fixes that content (cf. Burge 2010: 344). However, few, if any, representationalists take appearances to play this role, in part for that very reason. Indeed, representationalists generally hold the order of explanation to be the other way around, and that it is representational content that determines perceptual appearances or phenomenology (i.e. *intentionalism*), and not *vice versa*. The objection, then, is that Travis merely seeks to establish what is already common ground between him and his opponents. Hence even if his argument is valid, it is trivial or irrelevant, since representationalism does not require perceptual content to be determined by appearances.

A version of this objection may be found in Siegel (2010), who argues that Travis's question of establishing which of a range of possible contents a given experience has "seems flawed, driven as it is by the idea that demonstrable [i.e.

visual[16]] looks might fix contents of experience" (*ibid.* 62). Siegel goes on to claim that looks are "irrelevant to fixing the content of experience" (*ibid.*)—a claim with which Travis would no doubt agree. However, the argument from looks does not concern what *determines* p-representational contents, but rather how those contents may be *recognised* by the subject such that they can 'read off' the face value of experiences. Indeed, I take it to be one of Travis's major contributions to the debate that he draws attention to this distinction which has been ignored or glossed over by many other philosophers of perception.

The triviality objection is therefore flawed since it ignores the central role of *Availability* in Travis's argument. Indeed, the suggestion that the content of experience is determined by something other than appearances arguably makes the problem worse, and not better, for the representationalist (see §5.1).

4.3. The phenomenal looks objection

Perhaps the most pressing objection to Travis is, as I alluded to in response 2 above, that he neglects to consider a further 'non-comparative' notion of looks—namely, *phenomenal looks*, or *looks*$_p$. These are characterised by Jackson as

> being explicitly tied to terms for color, shape, and/or distance: 'It looks *blue* to me', 'It looks *triangular*', 'The tree looks closer *than* [sic] the house', 'The top line looks *longer than* the bottom line', 'There looks to be a *red square* in the middle of the white wall', and so on. That is, instead of terms like 'cow', 'house', 'happy', we have, in the phenomenal use, terms like 'red', 'square', and 'longer than'.
>
> (Jackson 1977: 33)

[16] By "demonstrable looks", Travis means visual appearances demonstrably possessed by objects that are not specific to a given subject's experience. However, it is clear that Siegel takes this to mean visual looks, and Travis (2013a) subsequently drops this terminology.

If looks$_p$ were capable of combining aspects of visual and thinkable looks such that they are both wholly perceptual and capable of making face-value content recognisable, then P4 of Travis's argument would be false, and the argument fails to go through. Indeed, Byrne (2009) and Brogaard (2010) argue that Travis himself is committed to the existence of a third notion of looks, based on his definition of visual looks as follows:

> [S]omething looks thus-and-so, or like such-and-such, where it looks the way such-and-such, or things which are (were) thus-and-so, does (would, might) look.
>
> (Travis 2004: 69–70)

Unpacking the somewhat convoluted grammar of this passage, it is apparent that 'looks' appears in both the *explanandum* ("looks thus-and-so, or like such-and-such") and *explanans* ("looks the way … does"). If both occurrences referred to comparative looks, i.e. looks$_v$, then Travis's definition is circular since looks$_v$ would be defined in terms of themselves, generating a regress.[17] The latter use of 'looks', argue Byrne and Brogaard, must therefore refer to some other notion of looks. Since these are presumably not epistemic looks, then Travis is committed to the existence of non-comparative looks, i.e. looks$_p$, in terms of which his other two notions may be defined.

The objection, however, is flawed. First, as discussed below, it is not clear that phenomenal looks *are* non-comparative. Second, despite Travis's use of cognitively rich examples like "looks like a Vermeer" (*ibid.* 75) or looking "as if Pia will sink the putt" (*ibid.* 78), his argument equally applies to so-called visual primitives like *looking*

[17] Strictly speaking, this is incorrect since, provided that for all *F*s, *looking*$_v$ *F* can be defined in terms of *looking*$_v$ *G*, where *F* and *G* are non-identical, and *looking*$_v$ *G* is not itself defined in terms that appeal to *looking*$_v$ *F*, then no regress is generated. This is consistent with the comparative analysis of looks$_p$ given below.

blue or *looking triangular*—precisely the terms by which Jackson defines phenomenal looks.[18] According to Travis, looks$_p$ are equally susceptible to ringers—for example, looking white-in-blue-light, or looking like a tetrahedron seen face-on, respectively—and so are similarly equivocal between contents. Moreover, it is controversial whether there is any such set of primitives in terms of which all other appearances may be defined, and if so, precisely what these are. Whilst this is presumably an empirical matter that is answerable via scientific investigation of the human visual system, in the absence of such knowledge it is unclear how naïve subjects are supposed to be capable of grasping what is represented to them in experience when they are unaware of what the relevant primitives are.[19]

Travis's definition of looks$_v$, if indeed it is such, is intended to highlight the essentially comparative nature of visual looks. However, we could equally replace it with the following Brewer-inspired definition without loss of meaning:

> *x* looks$_v$ *F* [to *S*] iff *x* has visually relevant similarities [from *S*'s point of view, under relevant circumstances *k*] to paradigm exemplars of *F*.
>
> (Cf. Brewer 2006: 169)

According to Brewer (2006, 2007, 2011) and Martin (2010), looks are grounded in a series of similarity relations between objects or their visually detectible properties. Thus, for something to *look red*, for example, is for it possess relevant similarities to paradigmatically red things, such as a ripe tomato seen in full daylight. Brewer's notion of a "visually relevant similarity" may in turn be cashed out in terms of the

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[18] Notably, Jackson, who is frequently cited as defending the existence of phenomenal looks, takes these to ground a form of sense-datum theory, and not representationalism.

[19] See §5.1 for further discussion.

dispositions of perceivers to judge that two stimuli, under contextually-determined circumstances *k*, are similar in some visually detectible respect, such as their colour or shape. Importantly for Brewer, perceivers need not be consciously aware of such similarities. Rather, in order for the relevant looks to obtain, the relevant similarities need merely exist. Thus looking$_v$ is not, according to Brewer, an intentional notion.

Brewer and Martin's comparative analyses of looks may equally be applied to looks$_p$. Thus, even supposed visual primitives like *looking blue*, *looking triangular*, and so on, can be analysed as being implicitly comparative. If this view is correct, then Byrne and Brogaard's objection to Travis collapses since the terms 'appearance' or 'look' need not appear on the right-hand side of the above biconditional, thereby avoiding the alleged regress. More importantly for present purposes, however, Travis's argument against looks$_v$ may now be applied to looks$_p$ which, when analysed in comparative terms, are similarly equivocal between contents, and so cannot satisfy *Looking-indexing*. Whether looks$_p$ are indeed comparative is therefore a substantive question that needs to be addressed by any proponent of the phenomenal looks objection.[20]

In the absence of independent grounds for preferring a non-comparative analysis of looks$_p$ over the more "parsimonious" comparative account (Martin 2010), the argument between Travis and the representationalist remains a stand-off with the mere availability of the comparative analysis effectively neutralising the phenomenal looks objection. No doubt much more remains to be said on both sides about this kind of defence of Travis's P4. However, it is clear that the phenomenal looks objection is not the knock-down response that Byrne and Brogaard appear to suggest. The representationalist's problem is that the connection between *looking*$_p$ ψ and

[20] For further discussion, see Martin (2010) and Brogaard (2010).

representing ψ cannot simply be taken for granted—for example, on semantic grounds—since this connection is precisely what is at issue in Travis's argument. Consequently, the argument cannot be dismissed simply by appealing to phenomenal looks, since (a) such looks may themselves be implicitly comparative, and so equivocal, and (b) it is unclear how looks_p are capable of making objectively assessable content available, as opposed to, for example, denoting a purely subjective state of the perceiver (cf. Glüer 2009; §3.1). So, while it remains open to the representationalist to argue that a 'non-comparative' or 'thin' notion of looks is capable of making perceptual content recognisable, as per response 2, it remains to be explained how looks_p can play this role.

5. The Challenge for Representationalism

Setting the above misinterpretations and objections to one side, Travis's challenge to the representationalist may be restated as follows:

(i) If visual experiences were p-representational, then their contents should be "recognizable", or cognitively available, to the subject solely in virtue of their having the relevant experience (i.e. *Availability*, glossed as *Availability**). Plausibly, this occurs on the basis of how, in experience, things appear, or *look*, to the subject (*Looks-indexing*).

(ii) But visual looks (looks_v) are comparative, and so equivocal between a potentially infinite series of objectively assessable contents. Looks_v are therefore incapable of making the relevant face-value content available. (To this we might add that 'thin' or phenomenal looks seem similarly unsuited to making such contents

available since (a) they too may be implicitly comparative, and (b) they arguably lack objective import; i.e. they are narrow contents.)

(iii) Thinkable or epistemic looks ($looks_t$) on the other hand, draw upon the subject's beliefs in a way that is incompatible with their being constitutive of perceptual experience, since experience is supposed to be explanatorily prior to judgement. Rather, $looks_t$ are perceptual 'takings', or "autorepresentation" in Travis's terms, formed *on the basis of* experience, that go beyond what is perceptually available to the subject, and so not wholly perceptual. Moreover, the resulting contents—of beliefs, for example—do not themselves constitute evidence for experience being p-representational, since their existence is entirely compatible with the denial of representationalism.

Assuming, *pace* responses 1 and 2 above, that no further notion of looks is available, the representationalist now faces the following choice. Either:

(a) perceptual content is consciously available to the subject, but not in virtue of how things appear, or look, and so *Looks-indexing* is false (response 3); or

(b) perceptual content is *not* consciously available to the subject, and so *Availability* is false (response 4).

The problem with (a) is that it remains to be explained how, if not in virtue of appearances, perceptual content is consciously available to the subject. The problem with (b), on the other hand, is that if perceptual content is *not* available to the subject, then it is difficult to see how it can play any substantive role in relation to the subject's conscious mental life, thus undermining much of the initial motivation for

representationalism. I examine each of these alternatives in turn below.

Alternatively, the representationalist might deny one of Travis's other conditions for p-representation, i.e.

Response 5: Reject *Objectivity*, *Face Value* and/or *Givenness*

However, this too has the effect of significantly weakening the view since each of these four conditions is closely connected, both with each other and with *Looks-indexing*.

5.1. Rejecting Looks-indexing

At this point, it might be objected on behalf of representationalism that p-representational content is not available 'in virtue of' any particular feature of experience, such as appearances, but is simply available full stop. According to the resulting view, it is constitutive of perceptual representation that its content is available to the conscious subject, and not something that needs to be 'added on' after the fact—for example, in virtue of how things look. In fact, this objection is a version of response 3, since it denies *Looks-indexing* in favour of some other way of satisfying *Availability*.

One worry about this suggestion is that it threatens to render the phenomenal character of experience superfluous in the manner of what Mark Johnston (2006: 260) calls "The Wallpaper View". On this view, phenomenal character is a "mere accompaniment" (*ibid.*) or by-product of experience rather than part of any mechanism by which content is made manifest to the subject. This results in subjects being 'saddled with' perceptual content irrespective of, and independently from, the phenomenology of experience. Moreover, this seems contrary to the way that many representationalists characterise their view as involving the 'conveying' (Siegel's term) of content to the subject by experience, rather than such content simply being self-

evident as with belief or judgement.

Assuming that the representationalist wishes to provide some positive story about how representational content is available to the subject, if not in virtue of how things look, we need to distinguish between the following two questions:

1. *Individuation question:* What determines, or individuates, p-representational content?

2. *Availability question:* what makes p-representational content recognisable, or cognitively available, to the subject?

Question 1 has attracted no shortage of philosophical responses: anti-individualism (Burge 1979; 2010), biosemantics (Millikan 1993), asymmetric dependency (Fodor's 1987), informational content (Dretske's 1994), demonstrative content (Burge 1991; McDowell 1994; Brewer 1999), conceptual and/or discriminatory capacities (McDowell 1994; 2008), to name but a few. By contrast, however, question 2 has barely shown up on the philosophical radar. This is problematic because many of the factors that representationalists have taken to determine or individuate the content of experience—distal or proximal stimuli, counterfactual dependencies, historical facts about the evolution of the visual system, and so on—are ones to which perceivers have no independent first-personal access. Assuming that p-representation is supposed to play some substantive role in our mental lives—indeed, if, as per *Face Valu*e, we are supposed to be able to tell or otherwise grasp how our experiences represent the world as being—then the representationalist must also explain how this is possible given the apparent inaccessibility of the factors determining perceptual content. That is, they must answer the availability question.

Travis' challenge to the representationalist, then, lies in requiring an answer to both of the above questions in a way that disambiguates at the conscious level between the multiple possible contents that perceptual experiences could have. Thus it is not sufficient to explain what *gives* experiences their contents (i.e. the individuation question), but one must also explain how it is possible for those contents to be cognitively *available* to the subject (the availability question). Moreover, in order to constitute an argument for representationalism, the resulting explanation must be one that favours the view over alternative explanations, such as a purely relational (Campbell 2002) or object-based (Brewer 2006) view of experience, or Naïve Realism (Martin 2002, 2006; Kalderon 2007).

While both representationalists and anti-representationalists accept a role for the existence of mental content, they differ as to whether this should be thought of as occurring within perceptual experience or judgement, respectively. A further difficulty for the representationalist, then, is that whatever explanation they give for how experiences get their contents such that those very contents are consciously available to the perceiver, can, in many cases, be co-opted by the anti-representationalist to explain how the corresponding perceptual judgements or beliefs get *their* contents. This in turn highlights an important commonality between these apparently competing views concerning the tokening of mental content that places the emphasis upon the nature and functioning of what we might call perceptual discriminatory capacities, whether these are operative at the level of experience, as the representationalist would have it, or in judgement or belief, as the anti-representationalist claims. Whether any of the standard representationalist views can satisfy these constraints—and indeed how anti-representationalists themselves solve the problem of tokening belief-contents—

therefore constitute important and under-explored questions that arise directly from Travis's argument from looks.

5.2. Rejecting Availability

The denial of *Availability*, i.e. response 4, is compatible with representational content forming part of a causal explanation of the sub-personal mechanism of perception, such as one might find in neuroscience, for example. It does not, however, support representational*ism* as it is here formulated, since the resulting contents are not constitutive of any conscious experiential state.[21] Indeed, this threatens to undermine the very basis of representationalism, since, as Travis might put it, if it is not apparent to me what my experiences represent, then in what sense can they be said to represent anything at all, and to whom? The point here is not that only conscious agents may be represented to, but that what appeared to be a familiar metaphor of experiences 'representing' various states of the world, or external objects, to the subject has now been replaced by a much weaker, quasi-technical notion of representation that is quite distinct from conscious experience. This severely limits the explanatory role of the relevant content, potentially collapsing perceptual representation into mere sub-personal effect-representation.

This highlights the nature of Travis's challenge to representationalism as not so much concerning the existence of perceptual content as its explanatory role. On the one hand, intentionalism emphasises the role of perceptual content in explaining the phenomenal character, or phenomenology, of experience. However, it is doubtful that the resulting content can extend beyond this to represent the states and properties of external objects, thus yielding a form of 'thin' or narrow content. Such a view is,

[21] For a representational view of this kind, see Burge (2010).

according to Travis, incompatible with the role of p-representation in informing us how the world is, or in justifying our beliefs and judgements about anything beyond the subjective character of experience itself. The epistemic or justificatory role of p-representation, on the other hand, requires that contents be assessable with respect to worldly objects and their properties, and so has objective purport. However, it is not clear how it is possible for such content to be cognitively available to the subject on the basis of perception alone. Thus the representationalist's explanation of perceptual phenomenology and the epistemic role of p-representation appear to be in tension with each other. Indeed, it is precisely this tension between visual and thinkable looks that is captured by the argument from looks. Whether it can be reconciled will depend upon precisely what one takes the explanatory role, or roles, of perceptual content to be.

To give a decisive argument in favour of representationalism, then, its proponents must either (a) identify some unique role that the representational content of experience is supposed to play which cannot be adequately explained, or is superior to the explanation given, by their anti-representationalist opponents, or (b) identify some distinctive mechanism by which experiential contents are tokened such that they are cognitively available to the perceiver, but which cannot in turn be co-opted by the anti-representationalist to explain the content of the resulting perceptual judgements or beliefs. I am aware of no such views in current philosophy of perception. However, that is not to say that such a view could not be devised—for example, by focusing upon the operation of perceptual discriminatory capacities that both token and make perceptual contents consciously available. Thus, while identifying a number of important constraints upon the notion and explanatory role(s) of p-representation, Travis's argument falls short of ruling out its existence entirely.

6. Conclusion

Despite its intuitive appeal, the claim that perceptual experience is in some sense representational is neither obviously nor trivially true. Whilst I have argued that Travis's argument from looks does not entirely rule out this possibility, it does provide a useful way of sharpening the nature of the disagreement between representationalists and their opponents, as well as hinting at a possible reconciliation centring upon the role of perceptual discriminatory capacities in tokening and providing access to the contents of experience and/or belief.

By highlighting the various theoretical commitments and explanatory roles that representationalists have taken perceptual content to satisfy, Travis places pressure upon the suggestion that all of these can be played by a single such content, if indeed they can be satisfied at all. This in turn highlights the need for greater clarity about the precise explanatory role, or roles, of such content; i.e. not only what it represents, but at which level (e.g. personal or sub-personal), and precisely how this is supposed to explain phenomenal character, the content of belief, epistemic justification, and so on, or some combination thereof. Moreover, in order to constitute an argument for representationalism, this must be done in a way that genuinely favours the view over a parallel anti-representationalist explanation of the contents of perceptual beliefs or judgements. To do so requires considerably more argumentation than Travis's opponents have yet provided. To that extent, Travis's argument from looks remains a serious challenge to a wide range of views that appeal to the existence of representational content in perceptual experience.

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