

## Arguments for the rich content view of perceptual content

What kinds of properties enter into the contents of perception? We can formulate this debate about perceptual contents in terms of a choice between the following two approaches: i) *Poor content* approach: only low-level properties (such as being blue, square, etc.) are represented in perception; ii) *Rich content* approach: high level properties (such as being an agent, a banana, sad, etc.) also enter the contents of perception.

In my presentation I focus on the arguments for the rich content view. After briefly examining a first difficulty in drawing a boundary between low level and high level properties, I underline the limitations of two methods recently proposed to argue for the rich content view: the *process first* method and the *phenomenology first* method.

Defenders of the *process first* method use the phenomenon of *cognitive penetrability* to make their point about the possibility of representing high level properties in the contents of perception. However, in order to use this phenomenon to state the rich content view, they need to rule out alternative explanations of the perceptual effect. I distinguish more carefully than is usually done between two kinds of cognitive penetrability of perception: by concepts, on the one hand, and by beliefs, desires and other non perceptual mental states, on the other. In the second case, two possibilities are again open: either the contents of cognitive states are inherited by perceptual states (e.g. if I believe that this is a banana, so I represent the high-level property of being a banana in the contents of perception), or they have an impact on low level properties represented in perception, without also entering representational content. I suggest once such distinctions are drawn, it becomes clear further arguments in favor of the process first method would be required. I focus my discussion on two cases which support my argument: Delk and Fillenbaum's experiments on objects' color perception (Delk and Fillenbaum, 1965) and data concerning the perception of emotional states. What such cases show, I argue, is that, as far as the debate on high-level properties is concerned, what is really needed is at least one case of a *cognitively penetrated* perceptual state in which the content of the perceptual state clearly *inherits* the high-level *content* of the higher-level process, e.g. belief. I argue it is not yet clear that there are such cases.

Another way one might attempt to establish that there are genuine cognitive influences on perception is to examine whether subjects have phenomenal experiences of high level properties. This leads me to consider a second kind of argument for the rich content view, called the

*phenomenal method* argument (Siegel, 2010). The method is to compare a target experience that has the target high level property (e.g. being a banana) with a contrast experience that lacks that property. If the two experiences are perfectly alike in their low-level properties but trigger two different phenomenal visual experiences, then the target property is part of the phenomenology of the target experience, but not of the contrast experience.

This phenomenology first method crucially relies on two assumptions: i) all phenomenology is perceptual and ii) a difference in phenomenology mirrors a difference in representational content. I outline some of its limitations. In order to prove her point, its proponent needs to i) definitely rule out non perceptual and non cognitive phenomenologies; ii) show that there is a direct link between a difference in phenomenology and a difference in representational content. I argue both are sufficiently controversial to be problematic.

I suggest one way to improve the phenomenology first method, by checking its predictions against experimental data provided by psychological research on perceptual adaptation and visual agnosia. My aim in so doing is not simply to imply that the methods used by psychology are the right ones: taken on their own they do not cut finely enough between competing possible interpretations of certain data. Instead, I outline how a combination of approaches might positively impact future research on such issues. More precisely, my suggestion is to look at experimental data that seem to offer a way to test for a truly perceptual effect: perceptual adaptation and visual agnosia.

I propose that perceptual adaptation could bear on the first issue I raised against the phenomenal contrast method, the problem of ruling out alternative phenomenologies. Perceptual adaptation is a sign that certain features of the object or image seen are being perceptually processed (for example it seems that there is perceptual adaption for faces). In this case, if a certain property is accompanied by a change in phenomenology and triggers a perceptual adaptation effect, it could be enough to rule out alternative phenomenological explanations. I also suggest a way to address the second issue. One could examine some cases of visual agnosia where there seems to be a disruption in representational content that propagates to phenomenal experience. Some properties disrupted in visual agnosia cases seem like good candidates for being perceptually represented properties. Indeed, visual agnosia applies to different levels of perception: I suggest a close examination of sensory agnosia, apperceptive agnosia, associative agnosia and integrative agnosia in the light of a phenomenal contrast in the subject's experience is a way to explore the issue more deeply.

## References

Delk J. L., & Fillenbaum S.(1965). *Differences in perceived color as a function of characteristic color*: American Journal of Psychology, 78, 290–293

Siegel S. (2010). *The Contents of Visual Experience*. Oxford.