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This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced PDF of an article accepted for publication in *Analysis* following peer review. The version of record (Campbell, D. (2014) *Radicalizing Enactivism: Basic Minds without Content*. By Daniel F. Hutto, and Erik Myin. *Analysis* 74 (1): 174-176.) is available online at: <http://analysis.oxfordjournals.org/content/74/1/174>.

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***Radicalizing Enactivism: Basic Minds Without Content***

**By Daniel D. Hutto AND Erik Myin**

**The MIT Press, 2013. xxiv+206 pp. £24.95**

In *Radicalizing Enactivism*, D. D. Hutto and E. Myin develop a theory of mind they call 'Radical Enactive (or Embodied) Cognition' (REC). They argue that extant enactivist and embodied theories of mind are, although pretty radical, not radical enough, because such theories buy into the representationalist doctrine that perceptual experience (along with other forms of 'basic' mentality) possesses representational content. REC denies this doctrine. It implies that perceptual experience lacks reference, truth conditions, accuracy conditions, or conditions of satisfaction.

Chapters 1–3 situate REC in relation to rival theories, Chapters 4–6 defend the book's core, anti-representationalist thesis, Chapter 7 argues that REC is superior to more orthodox enactivist and embodied theories, and Chapter 8 argues that REC sheds new light on phenomenal consciousness.

I here focus on the anti-representationalist argument of Chapters 4–6. It is, I think, unpersuasive. The argument is developed piecemeal and nowhere neatly summarized, but I believe the following is a fair reconstruction:

- (1) Our best attempts to naturalize representational content without appealing to facts about human natural language use (and attendant social practices) have failed (57–82).
- (2) Therefore it is probable that the correct naturalistic account of representational content will be provided by a theory that appeals to facts about human natural language use (xv, 13, 36, 82 & 151–2; Hutto 2008: 87–100). (From 1)
- (3) A theory of representational content that appeals to facts about human natural language use will imply that animals like cats and dogs, which do not have natural language, do not represent the world (86–87).
- (4) Animals, like cats and dogs, which don't have natural language, nevertheless have perceptual experiences (36 & 86).
- (5) Therefore it is probable that perceptual experiences are not representational. (From 2, 3 and 4)

There are at least three major weaknesses in this argument. First, Hutto and Myin fail to make a compelling case for 1. They note that 'teleosemantics proposals are the clear front-runners among existing naturalistic proposals that seek to supply something more than covariance in order to explain representing' (75–76), and then go on to admit that such proposals 'are proceeding along the right lines' (82) at least to the extent that they provide a serviceable 'content-free naturalistic account of the determinate intentional directedness that organisms exhibit toward aspects of their environments' (81). However, they nonetheless deny that teleosemantics can provide an adequate naturalistic explanation of representational content. They base this denial—and so their case

for 1—on arguments, due to Fodor (1990, 2008), to the effect that teleosemantics is incapable of explaining the intensionality (with an ‘s’) of content (79–80). Unfortunately they devote just a few sentences to this crucial point, and turn a blind eye to there being well-rehearsed ways for a teleosemanticist to deal with Fodor’s argument (Millikan 1984: 147–58; 2004: 87–100; 2005: 53–76). There is ample room to deny that this problem is the deal-breaker Hutto and Myin make it out to be.

Second, the move from 1 to 2 is problematic, for even if existing covariance-based and teleosemantics-based naturalistic theories of content face considerable obstacles (as they admittedly do), it hardly follows that a natural-language-based theory will fare any better. Although Hutto and Myin lambast their opposition for failing to provide properly detailed and adequate explanations of content (142–144 & 160), they say virtually nothing about how their own natural-language-based explanation would work. We are surely entitled to be sceptical whether an appeal to natural language (and its attendant conventions and social practices) will prove to be the silver bullet Hutto and Myin think it will, until these details are provided.

Last, but not least, the argument’s conclusion is so manifestly implausible that the argument begs to be construed as a *reductio* of its premisses. When I gaze at the Muller Lyer illusion (123), I see one line as being longer than another, when actually the two lines share the same length. My experiences thereby present things as being a way they are not: i.e., they (surely) misrepresent reality. So contrary to 5, perceptual experience *is* representational. Hutto and Myin’s response to this problem is bewildering. They concede that when we see objects ‘they look some way to us’ and that ‘an object can look a certain way only

if it is experienced as being the way' (121). But they then deny that this requires that 'the object be represented as being that way' (121; see also 126). They write:

That things look and feel a certain way does not entail that perceptual states possess or attribute content. Perceiving is, in and of itself, contentless—it lacks inherent conditions of satisfaction. There is simply no question of perceptual experiences, in and of themselves, being true or false, accurate or inaccurate, veridical or non-veridical. (134)

In short, their position is that, although I do indeed experience the two lines of the illusion as having different lengths, there is 'simply no question' of these experiences being inaccurate or non-veridical. This is—to put it mildly—a difficult position to sustain. If my experiences are such that 'things look and feel a certain way' to me, but things are not the way they look and feel, then in what senses of the words 'inaccurate' and 'non-veridical' are my experiences otherwise than inaccurate and non-veridical? If an adequate naturalistic theory of perceptual experience, which explains the 'look and feel' of experienced objects, must yield the result that things will look and feel a 'certain way' to me—a way that either jibes, or doesn't jibe, with the way things really are—then how could it not thereby imply that I represent, or misrepresent, reality? What more is wanted? Unfortunately Hutto and Myin glide quickly on to other matters without confronting these pressing questions.

If it is granted that perceptual experiences *do* have representational content, and thus that 5 is false, then Hutto and Myin's argument can be run backwards, modus tollens-style, to show that 2 is false, and that the correct naturalistic

theory of representational content cannot be a natural-language-based theory. This is obviously not the lesson Hutto and Myin would have us take from their book, but it is, I think, the correct lesson.

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