

SENSATIONS, CONCEPTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS. REMARKS ON ASSESSABILITY FOR ACCURACY.

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Abstract.

I shall specify about what we are thinking when we are talking about regulating something by specifying accuracy conditions. The main thesis is that we couldn't describe representational relations as perceptual relationships if we lack a normative conception of relationships between representing and represented. Hence, searching for what it is assessable for accuracy depends on specifying the kind of intentional content which is normatively individuated and attributed.

How *should* we conceive perceptions to grasp their intentional contents as assessable for accuracy? Which are the broad relationships between such a conception and intentional contents of sensations? I shall offer a background on this issue to answer these questions.

1.

Usually, someone who thinks that intentional content don't outrun representational content¹ claims that an accurate sensation is a first-order mental state meeting accuracy conditions to have representational content (Tye, 2000). Therefore, intentional contents of sensations must be about subject-independent entities coming in to be represented. We obtain *The Background Representationalist Constraint* [BRC]:

BRC: Accurate representational contents cannot be about subject-dependent entities – what is represented by anyone meeting accuracy conditions is external to her.

From this view, representational contents of *perceptual experiences* is what is to be conceived as assessable for accuracy and accuracy conditions serve to warrant that perceptual experiences will shape true perceptual beliefs. The Background Representationalist Constraint has led many philosophers to uphold the following constrain: representational content x is accurate (i.e. perceptual experience x in which it occurs has accurate contents) iff there exists (externally to the subject undergoing x) an external entity E which is represented by representational content x –this stance has been called *Content Externalism*. So, representational content is a «subject independent entities»-involving-content.

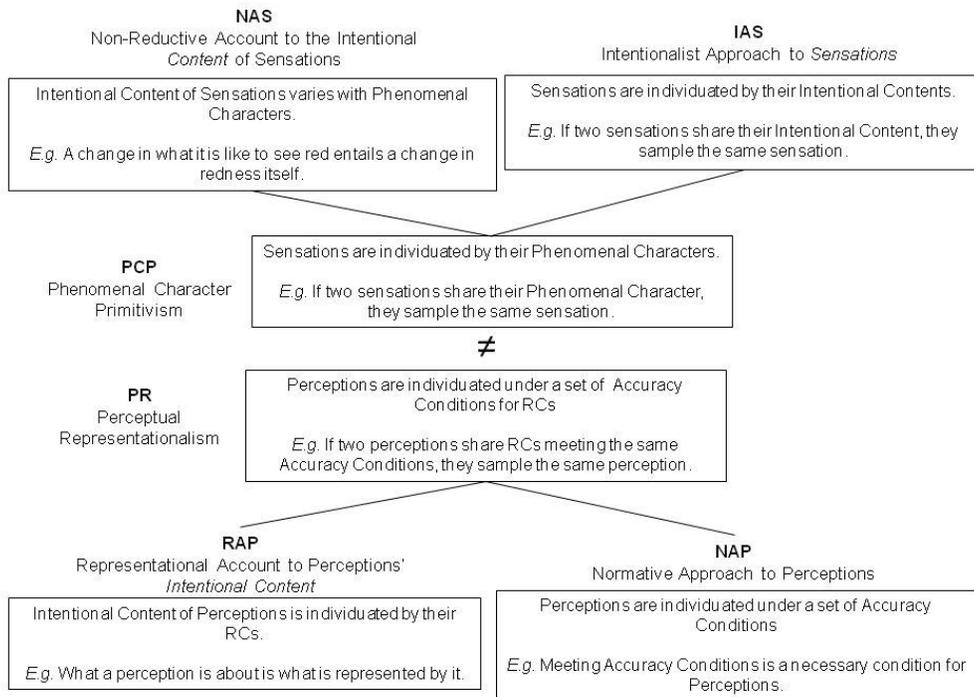
Regardless if *external* entities are x or Fx entities, *intentional objects*', e.g., x or Fx , are entities which intentional contents are about. I will adopt the Fx view leaving aside the problem concerning how Fx -entities might metaphysically be subject-independent entities; instead, I mean by 'external entities' those entities *presented as external* ones. We can join the debate specifying relationships that occur between intentional contents of sensations and intentional objects to give rise to intentional contents of perceptions and intentional contents of sensations. I will argue that if we conceive the contents of perceptions as representational contents (i.e. under Background

Representationalist Constraint) then, *per se*, we accept a normative conception of ‘perception’, a conception that we cannot adopt with respect to intentional contents of sensations. As a consequence, either we discard the Background Representationalist Constraint or we try to clarify relationships between intentional contents of perceptions and intentional contents of sensations. I’ll take the second path.

As it will be accepted, intentional contents of sensations aren’t assessable for accuracy; on the contrary, they are *primitive phenomenal contents* (Chalmers, 2005). Instead, intentional contents of perceptions are assessable for accuracy. In this way, it seems reasonable to accept that if *contents of phenomenally conscious states* aren’t assessable for accuracy, then, they won’t be assessable for accuracy *themselves*—this description derives from a wide intentionalist approach: (a) particular states are assessable for accuracy if their contents are assessable in this way and (b) sensations are individuated by their intentional contents (*intentionalist approach* to sensations [IAS]). Furthermore, if sensations are first-order phenomenally conscious states, this description depends on adopting a *non-reductive account of sensations’ intentional contents* ([NAS]: intentional contents of sensations *covary* with their phenomenal characters).

From a *non-reductive account of sensations’ intentional contents*, a change in phenomenal character samples a change in intentional content and, more narrowly, phenomenal character varies with every fine-grained change in intentional content. NAS (i.e. that intentional contents of sensations *covary* with their phenomenal characters), taken as a principle, allow us to distinguish sensations from other *mental* states. From an intentionalist approach, one has a sensation *o* if it has a particular intentional content *o*ⁱⁱ. The non-reductive account of sensations’ intentional contents plus an intentionalist approach to sensations implies that sensations are individuated by their phenomenal characters (*Phenomenalism*); thus, phenomenal character is a *sui generis property* necessarily instantiated in every first-order phenomenally conscious state (*First-Order Phenomenal Character Primitivism* [PCP]ⁱⁱⁱ). If it weren’t so and phenomenal character was to be reduced to physical or functional entities, then, what individuates sensations won’t be phenomenal character itself. If we accept First-Order Phenomenal Character Primitivism, intentional contents of sensations will not be assessable for accuracy, even though perceptions’ do.

Otherwise, intentional contents of perceptions aren’t individuated by phenomenal characters of sensations, but by representational contents or contents of perceptual representations (*representational account of content of perceptions* [RAP]). Thus, perceptions are individuated from a given set of accuracy conditions (*normative approach to perceptions* [NAP]). The representational account of content of perception, as a principle, allows us to distinguish perceptions from other *epistemic* states. Such account *plus* normative approach to perceptions implies that perceptions are individuated by representational contents meeting accuracy conditions (*Perceptual Representationalism* [PR]). Diagrammatically:



If we accept Phenomenal Character Primitivism and Perceptual Representationalism, intentional contents of sensations differ from intentional contents of perceptions, for *what is primitive cannot be normatively regulated* to appear, even though if primitive properties nomologically supervene on physical or functional ones (Chalmers, 1996, Ch.: 7, § 1). In this case, the occurrence of phenomenal characters in intentional contents of sensations isn't what is to be regulated, but the relations of empirical dependency between intentional contents of perceptions (representational contents) and *non-phenomenal entities*. By definition, phenomenal entities are those properties and objects that are presented in intentional contents of sensations and non-phenomenal entities are individuated under a particular *conception*, so represented (perceived) entities are non-phenomenal entities in a particular respect. Relationships between intentional contents of perceptions to that what is represented (i.e. *representational relations*) are what it is thought to be regulated. Representational relations cannot be the relation to what we are sensory aware of (i.e. *sensory awareness relation*), for this is also a primitive one (Pautz, 2006).

2.

Reasons to accept Perceptual Representationalism and Phenomenal Character Primitivism should be presented elsewhere; however, here I'm thinking about Perceptual Representationalism as the *theoretical* conception that best mirrors our epistemic common-sense expectations and, on the other hand, I conceive Phenomenal Character Primitivism as a metaphysical theory of phenomenal mind. In short, Perceptual Representationalism is an epistemological theory while Phenomenal

Character Primitivism isn't, even though its antecedents (e.g. IAS) are epistemological, perhaps.

Conveniently, I'll adopt a *dual-aspect approach* to intentional states (Searle, 1983): an intentional state (any state which is necessarily about something) has two essential features (I) its intentional content, and (II) a particular relation by which a creature or epistemic subject entertains intentional content. In other words, one aspect is the *aboutness relation* and the other one is the *subject-matter of the state*. This choice doesn't conflict with the intentional approach to sensations, for what individuates sensations (i.e. their intentional contents) is not all that determines them as intentional states. Intentional states depend on two *intrinsic features* to be about something, and once they have them, they differ in virtue of their intentional contents, even though they have the same kind of *aboutness relation*. *Aboutness relations* determine which intentional contents should we attribute to states (representational or primitive ones).

IC of the perception a in t_1 is what I perceive in t_1 ; the intentional content of the visual sensation v in t_1 is what I'm *sensory aware* in t_1 . The *aboutness relation* of perceptions is representational, while that of sensations is *phenomenally primitive* (a matter of being sensory aware of). From this view, somebody has a by having a *perceptual relation* to something and somebody has v by having a *sensory awareness relation* to something. So, by intentional approach to sensations and representationalist approach to perceptions, v differs from a since its intentional content differs from that of v . Therefore, *sine qua non* conditions to have a differ from those to have v and then *individuation conditions* differ.

Once one adopts a normative conception of perceptions, I think, *representationalism* (the view that intentional contents of perceptions are representational contents) derives. As a result, 'perception' is taken as an epistemic notion. 'Perception' (as a *theoretical* notion) is normative (contingent and stipulative) in nature, whereas 'sensation' isn't. Perceptions, in this normative sense, depend on how we conceive their contents from a regulative view (i.e. NAP), while sensations don't depend on this regulative conception, but on a *descriptive* approach (i.e. IAS).

I'm not outlining a theory of what perceptions are with respect to cognitive mind; instead, I'm defending an epistemological approach to the concept of perception since, I think, this serves to specify about what we are thinking when we are talking about regulating something by specifying accuracy conditions. Every regulative view on perceptions must sketch a way in which intentional contents of illusions or hallucinations are related to representational contents of perceptions: sensations enter the game. Intentional contents of sensations aren't the content of abnormal perceptions (e.g. hallucinations) (Siegel, 2006, p. 355- 356); otherwise they are present in every phenomenal state, since they have sensory awareness relation as a necessary condition. This relation is involved in hallucination, illusion and perception cases.

Once we adopt an epistemological approach to perceptions and representations it is difficult to define whether if perception entails representation or if representation entails perception^{iv}. However, the normative nature of our theoretical concept of 'perception' seems to derive from the fact that perceptions *should* provide us non-linguistic knowledge of surrounding entities. Perceptions differ from hallucinations since we have a *normative conception* of them that, in common sense, appears to be *representational*: even though I think about my perceptions as transparently informing me about the world, I believe that what I perceive is to be accurately represented by others. On the contrary, they fail to transparently represent it. I think that the next conditional must be attained:

A state s is assessable for accuracy if we have a *normative set of conditions* under which s arises, i.e. under which s has representational content.

So, *perceptual relationships*^v are representational ones occurring between S and Fx . An abnormal perceptual relation will give rise to inaccurate perceptions (perception with a representational content they *shouldn't* have). A possible world w_1 in which S has a by meeting C accuracy conditions and another world w_{34} in which she has a by meeting W accuracy conditions are conceivable. In this case, C and W could be contradictory^{vi}. In w_1 a state s is a iff it is meeting C and, in w_{34} , s is a iff it is meeting W . On the contrary, in *every* possible world S (a creature) has v only if S is sensory aware of v 's intentional content. Having *sensory awareness states* is a necessary condition to have sensations; on the contrary, perceptions need to meet accuracy conditions to have representational content. In short, sensory awareness is intrinsic to sensations, while it isn't to perceptions (*vid.*: blindsight cases (Siewert, 1998, p. 82 and meta-contrast cases, Tye, 2009, p. 19)).

I can't describe representational relations as perceptual relationships if I lack a normative conception of relationships between representing and represented.

If RC of a is what I perceive, then, 'what I perceive' differs *metaphysically* from 'what I'm sensory aware of', since intentional content of perceptions wouldn't *exist* if there are no beliefs and normative concepts or, they wouldn't be representational. Further on, 'what I'm sensory aware of' (intentional contents of sensations) is primitive with respect to another kind of mental states, say concepts. It is an error to conceive representational contents as primitive as intentional contents of sensations, as has been claimed (Dretske, 1995 and Tye, 1995).

So, accuracy conditions are *extrinsic* to sensations. In this way, if intentional content of sensations is a primitive content, sensations v has intentional content independently of what anyone could stipulate. Hence, the following constraint emerges:

x is assessable for accuracy iff, x has the content it has under accuracy conditions.

3.

What is essential to perceptions is a normative conception about their content, so what is assessable for accuracy is their representational content. If we accept that representational content is non-conceptual in nature (i.e., a kind of non-linguistic content) just as intentional content of sensations is, then what is assessable for accuracy doesn't need to be conceptual or propositional in nature. However, representational content cannot be conceived without background beliefs on what are those entities that are to be represented and without normative concepts involved in a particular conception of how things should (representationally) look like.

Searching for what is assessable for accuracy differs from searching for conceptual or propositional contents of perceptions (Siegel, 2005): representational content depends on, e.g., normative concepts, say 'should look like', but representational contents themselves are supposed to be not specified in linguistic terms as happens in the case of normative concepts.

Searching for what it is assessable for accuracy depends on specifying the kind of first-order content (i.e. non-conceptual content) which is normatively individuated and attributed. In short, what is supposed to be assessable for accuracy is a kind of content which is conceived as arising only from meeting normative conditions. These conditions are specifiable in propositional formats, while such information available to comprehend them need not to be of linguistic nature. On the contrary, it is sensory and non-conceptual. Briefly, what is regulated (i.e. representational contents or contents of

perceptual representations) differs from what is regulating it (accuracy conditions). Hence, the content assessable for accuracy must be regulated to be individuated and attributed.

Perceptual Representationalism [PR] allows us to conceive intentional contents of perceptions as assessable for accuracy. Relationships between perception and sensations are mirrored by the relationships between primitive intentional content specified from *Phenomenal Character Primitivism* [PCP] and representational intentional content individuated from Perceptual Representationalism. Phenomenal Character Primitivism and Perceptual Representationalism have different *explananda*. So, we don't need to reject one of them as a consequence. Which contents are assessable for accuracy depends on how we conceive sensations, perceptions and their intentional contents. This approach challenges the *representationalist account of sensations* to identify the normative concepts that would make its *explanandum* different.^{vii}

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ⁱ I.e. that intentional content of perception is representational content.

ⁱⁱ IAS differs from an *intentionalist approach to sensory states* [IASS] –say tasting, seeing, hearing etc.,- since sensory states are also individuated by the very kind of *sensory modality* that allow us to categorize them.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Primitivism does not automatically lead to the rejection of physicalism – at least if physicalism is a mere thesis of supervenience. G. E. Moore held that goodness is primitive, yet supervenient on the natural with matter of metaphysical necessity." (Pautz, (FC)).

^{iv} This issue differs from whether if perceptions as *cognitive* states entail representations. In particular, we can have representational *epistemic* states without needing that their functional-cognitive correlates are representational. I remain neutral on this topic but I think that it depends on how we conceive the relationships between the reference of our folk-psychology terms and what is to be taken as primitive in a representational theory of cognition. A representational theory of cognition can postulate representational states that don't match with those referred in folk psychology.

^v For a critical review of the main theories, *vid.*: Crane, 2003, Chapter 5).

^{vi} This is a modal sense in which we could describe perceptual relativism.

^{vii} I thank to Rodolfo López, Jorge Morales, Santiago Arango and René Campis for their helpful comments and suggestions.