

Minds and Machines

spring 2003

Consciousness and
intentionality, contd.

preliminaries

- problem set due in class #30
- final paper topics distributed next week

P-consciousness and intentionality

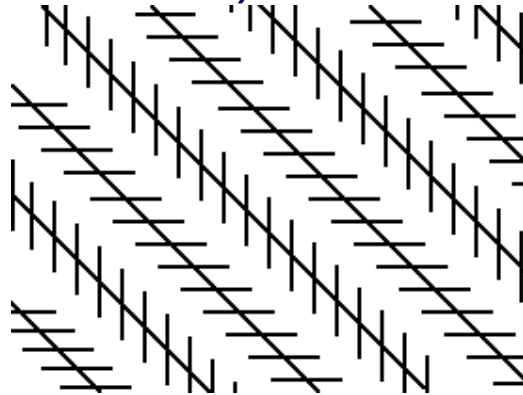
- we've seen some attempts to “naturalize” intentionality (e.g., Dretske)
- if (P-)consciousness could be explained in intentional (representational) terms, we might be able to give a naturalistic explanation of consciousness
- so, what is the relation between consciousness and intentionality?

“Sensation and the content of experience: a distinction”

- perceptual experiences have representational content (like belief, desire, etc.)
- “A visual perceptual experience...may represent various writing implements and items of furniture as having particular spatial relations to one another and to the experiencer, and as themselves having various qualities”

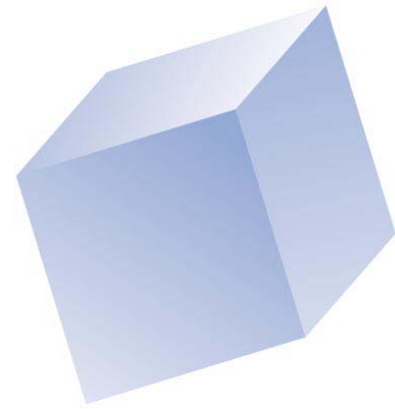
perceptual illusions

- the experience represents the world as thus-and-so, and the world is *not* thus-and-so (the experience is not “veridical”)



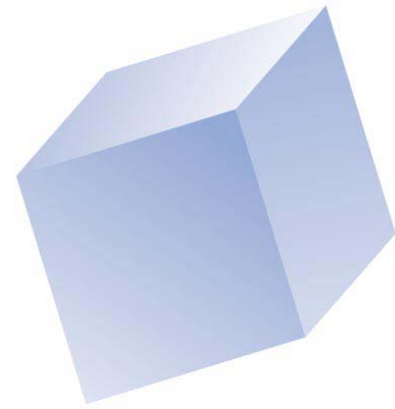
- the lines are parallel

phenomenal properties



- perceptual experiences have representational properties (e.g. the property of representing the perceiver's environment as containing a blue cube)
- there is “something it is like” to have a visual experience as of a blue cube
- so perceptual experiences also have “phenomenal properties” (a.k.a. “phenomenal character”, P-conscious properties)

phenomenal properties



- can the phenomenal property distinctive of a visual experience as of a blue cube (as opposed to a blue sphere or red cube) somehow be explained in terms of the experience's representational properties?
- Peacocke thinks not

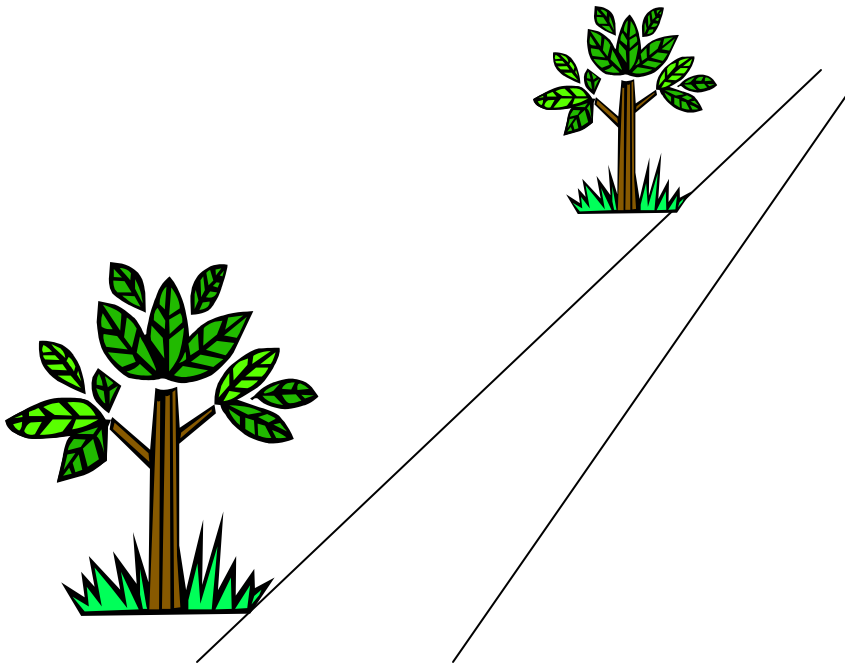
“Sensation and the content of experience: a distinction”

- according to Peacocke, perceptual experiences also have “sensational properties”
- “...properties an experience has in virtue of some aspect—other than its representational content—of what it is like to have that experience”
- “properties (...which help to specify what it is like to have the experience) explicable without reference to representational content”
- in Block’s terminology: sensational properties are phenomenal properties that are “explicable without reference to representational content”
- so, if there are sensational properties, phenomenal properties can’t be explained in representational terms

sharpening the issue

- the “extreme perceptual theorist” holds that “a complete intrinsic characterization of [a visual] experience can be given by” a sentence like ‘it visually appears to the subject that there is a blue cube before her’
- (more realistically: ‘it visually appears to the subject that there is a cube orientated in such-and-such ways, with so-and-so shade of blue,...)
- in other words, the EPT is committed to the view that it is impossible for there to be two visual experiences that have the same representational content, but which differ in their phenomenal properties (in the jargon introduced earlier, phenomenal properties *supervene* on representational properties)
- Peacocke’s examples purport to show that the EPT is wrong—but often the point is not straightforward

example 1a: the “two trees”



“Your experience represents [the trees] as being of the same physical height...Yet there is also some sense in which the nearer tree occupies more of your visual field than the more distant tree...The challenge to the extreme perceptual theorist is to account for these facts about size in the visual field” (pp. 438-9)

example 1b: the “two walls”

“The walls are covered with paper of a uniform hue, brightness, and saturation. But one wall is more brightly illuminated than the other. In these circumstances, your experience can represent both walls as being the same colour: it does not look to you as if one of the walls is painted with brighter paint than the other. Yet it is equally an aspect of your visual experience itself that the region of the visual field in which one wall is presented is brighter [in some sense] than that in which the other is presented” (p. 439)

example 2: monocular/binocular vision

the previous examples were “not cases in which the additional characterization apparently omitted by representational properties was something which could vary even though representational content is held constant. Yet there are also examples of this...Suppose you look at an array of pieces of furniture with one eye closed...Imagine now you look at the same scene with both eyes. The experience is different. [sensationally but not representationally]” (p. 439)

example 3: the Necker cube

“there seems to be some additional level of classification at which the successive experiences fall under the same type...We have here another example of apparently nonrepresentational similarities between experiences”

“The intentionality of phenomenology and the phenomenology of intentionality”

- consider:
 - A: having a headache, seeing something as red, feeling dizzy
 - B: believing that snow is white, expecting rain, wanting world peace
- in Block’s jargon, the A-examples, unlike the B-examples, are “phenomenally conscious” mental states
- as Horgan and Tienson put it, the A-examples, unlike the B-examples, are mental states “with phenomenal character”, or mental states that “have phenomenology”

“The intentionality of phenomenology and the phenomenology of intentionality”

- there are differences between the A-examples
- what it like to have a headache is not the same as what it's like to see something as red
- in the “phenomenal character” jargon, this is expressed by saying that the two states have different phenomenal characters

The “hard problem” of consciousness (p. 530)

- this is the problem of explaining why brain states are, or give rise to, states with phenomenal character
- why is it like *this* to be in such-and-such brain state?
- why is it like anything at all to be in some brain states?

the relation between phenomenology and intentionality

- as we have been discussing, some mental states/events are representational—they are “about” things, or “have intentionality”
- and some mental states/events have phenomenal character, or are phenomenally conscious
- according to Peacocke, phenomenology and intentionality are (to some extent) independent aspects of perceptual experiences

separatism

- the A-examples and B-examples suggest a related thesis, namely that phenomenology and intentionality are different, in the sense that some mental events have phenomenology but no intentionality, and some have intentionality but no phenomenology
- some of the A-examples (headaches and dizziness) seem to be cases of phenomenology without intentionality; all of the B-examples seem to be cases of intentionality without phenomenology
- *separatism* (Horgan and Tienson) is the view that phenomenology and intentionality are independent

Horgan and Tienson's view

- according to Horgan and Tienson, separatism is false
more specifically, they hold:

- **the intentionality of phenomenology**

sensations and perceptual experiences have intentionality that is “inseparable” from their phenomenology.

that is: their phenomenology (phenomenal character) is determined by (or supervenes on) their intentionality, and vice versa

- **the phenomenology of intentionality**

belief, desires, and “cognitive states” generally have phenomenology that is “inseparable” from their intentionality

that is: their phenomenology is determined by (supervenes on) their intentionality, and vice versa

“Intentional states have a phenomenal character, and this phenomenal character is precisely the what-it-is-like of experiencing a specific propositional attitude type vis-à-vis a specific intentional content. Change either the attitude-type (believing, desiring, wondering, hoping, etc.) or the particular intentional content, and the phenomenal character changes too.”

(p. 522)

states vs. events

- events (happenings, occurrences)
- states (conditions, attributes)
- distinguish *believing* that p (a state) from *judging* that p, *thinking* that p (an event)
- Horgan and Tienson think (or should think) that *events* of judging/wondering/thinking that p have phenomenology, not *states* like belief
- see Crane, 4.32

the central argument

- intentionality (at any rate intentionality “of a pervasive kind”) *supervenes* on phenomenology:
necessarily, if person *a* and person *b* are phenomenologically alike, they are intentionally alike
- phenomenology is *intrinsic*:
necessarily, if *a* and *b* are duplicates, they are phenomenologically alike

the central argument

- hence, intentionality (at any rate intentionality “of a pervasive kind”) is *intrinsic*:
necessarily, if person *a* and person *b* are duplicates, they are intentionally alike

morals

- “strong externalist theories of mental intentionality are wrong”
- the “hard problem” is even harder
“Thus, the hard problem includes this: why should a mental state that is grounded in this physical or physical/functional state be by its intrinsic phenomenal nature directed in this precise manner? And this is a very hard problem indeed.”

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- read Nagel, Jackson