

Minds and Machines

spring 2003

Consciousness and intentionality

preliminaries

- **lecture in class #27** (no recitation)
- problem set due class #30
- final paper topics distributed next week

phenomenal consciousness

“Let me acknowledge at the outset that I cannot define P-consciousness [i.e. phenomenal consciousness] in any remotely non-circular way. I don't consider this an embarrassment. The history of reductive definitions in philosophy should lead one not to expect a reductive definition of anything. But the best one can do for P-consciousness is in some respects worse than for many other things because really all one can do is point to the phenomenon...Nonetheless, it is important to point properly.” (Block, “Concepts of Consciousness”, p. 206)

phenomenal consciousness

“P-consciousness is experience. P-conscious properties are experiential properties. P-conscious states are experiential states, that is, a state is P-conscious if it has experiential properties. The totality of the experiential properties of a state are “what it is like” to have it. Moving from synonyms to examples, we have P-conscious states when we see, hear, smell, taste and have pains.”

P-consciousness and intentionality

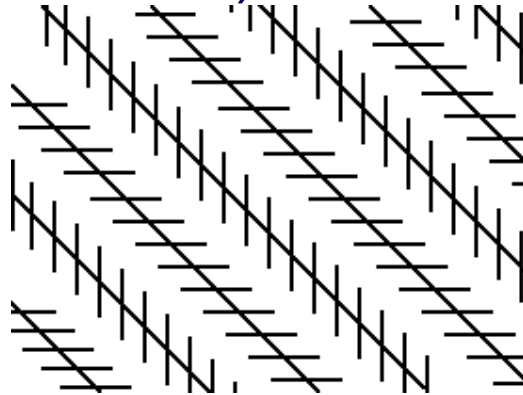
- we've seen some attempts to “naturalize” intentionality (e.g., Dretske)
- if (P-)consciousness could be explained in intentional (representational) terms, we might be able to give a naturalistic explanation of consciousness
- so, what is the relation between consciousness and intentionality?

“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

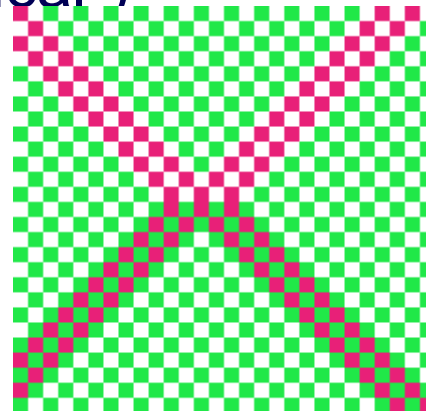
- the experience represents the world as thus-and-so, and the world is *not* thus-and-so (the experience is not “veridical”)



- the lines are parallel

perceptual illusions

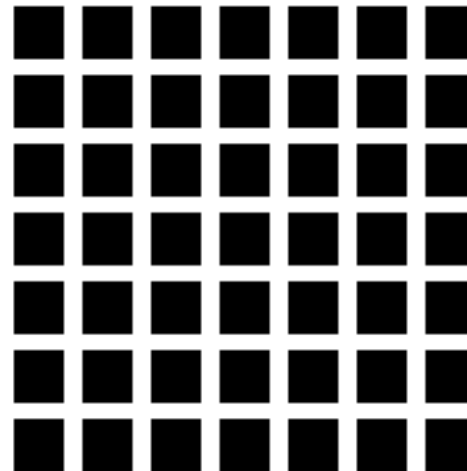
- the experience represents the world as thus-and-so, and the world is *not* thus-and-so (the experience is not “veridical”)



- the red squares are all the same shade

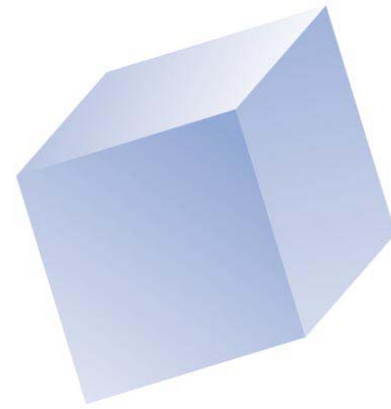
perceptual illusions

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



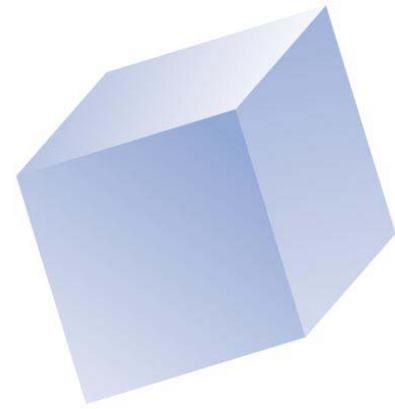
- there are no grey spots in the intersections

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

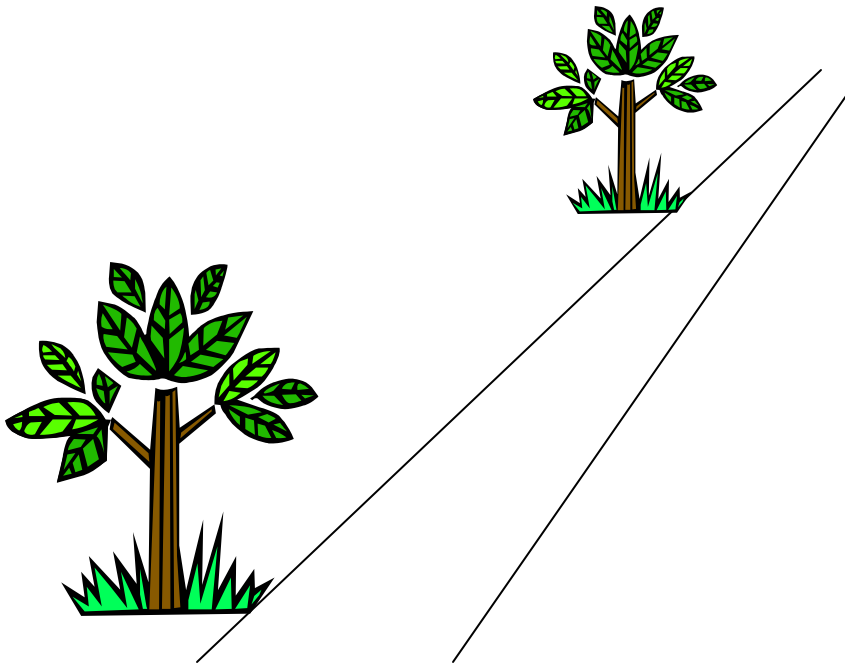
“Sensation and the content of experience: a distinction”

- 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)

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- read Horgan and Tienson
- read Crane, ch. 3