

WHAT ARE THE CONTENTS OF EXPERIENCES?

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I address three interrelated issues concerning the contents of experiences. First, I address the preliminary issue of what it means to say that experiences have contents. Then I address the issue of why we should believe that experiences have contents. Finally, I address the issue of what the contents of experiences are.

I shall address three interrelated issues concerning the contents of experiences. In §I I shall outline the preliminary issue of what it means to say that experiences have contents. In §II I shall sketch an argument for believing that experiences have contents. As a bonus, the argument for believing that experiences have contents naturally suggests a method for determining what the contents of experiences are. In §III I shall develop this method and apply it to some debates over what the contents of experiences are, including the debate over whether kind properties such as *being a pine tree* enter into the contents of our experiences.

I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY THAT EXPERIENCES HAVE CONTENTS?

Past philosophers of perception did not credit experiences themselves with intentional contents, only the beliefs which experiences are apt to cause. In contrast, contemporary philosophers of perception freely credit experiences with intentional contents. Indeed, the notion that experiences have contents figures in some central debates in the philosophy of perception. One is the debate over whether the phenomenal characters of experiences supervene on what contents they have.¹ Another is the debate over what the contents of experience are. Do they, for instance, include singular contents about particular objects? Do they include contents involving kind properties

¹ See M. Tye, *Consciousness, Color and Content* (MIT Press, 2000).

such as *being a pine tree*, as well as colour and shape properties?² More recently, there has been a debate over whether experiences have contents at all.³

These debates are framed in terms of the expression *experience x has content y*. This is a technical expression, not part of ordinary language. Therefore no one can understand these debates until this expression is explained. It may be said that we know what contents are. They are abstract objects which are true or false. But what does it mean to say that a particular experience *has* a particular content? Those involved in the debates cannot answer this question in terms of their favourite naturalistic theories of intentionality. For it is supposed that anyone can understand the expression *experience x has content y* and the debates in which it figures without accepting any particular naturalistic theory.

There are two standard conceptions of the contents of experiences. I call them the *appears-looks conception* and the *accuracy conception*. One interesting feature of these conceptions is that according to them, the claim that experiences have contents is neutral on the issue of whether the phenomenal character of experience is to be explained in terms of content. In other words, it does not entail *intentionalism* about experience. This is reflected in the fact that *qualia* theorists and other philosophers who accept diverse theories of phenomenal character agree that experiences have contents and indeed engage in debates about what they are.⁴

In my view, we should be pluralists about conceptions of ‘the contents of experiences’.⁵ The appears-looks and the accuracy conceptions provide senses in which experiences can be said to have intentional contents. But in this section I shall argue that we should not employ these theory-neutral conceptions when examining debates about the contents of experiences, since they trivialize those debates. Instead, we should employ a much more theory-laden conception of what it means to say that experiences have contents. On this alternative conception, which I call the *identity conception*, the claim that experiences *have* contents is equated with a version of intentionalism according to which they are *identical with* relations to contents, somewhat as beliefs and desires are identical with relations to contents. The claim, then, concerns the structure or real definition of experiences.

² See S. Siegel, ‘Which Properties are Represented in Perception?’, in T.S. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds), *Perceptual Experience* (Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 481–503.

³ C. Travis, ‘The Silence of the Senses’, *Mind*, 113 (2004), pp. 57–94.

⁴ T. Burge, ‘Qualia and Intentional Content: Reply to Block’, in M. Hahn and B. Ramberg (eds), *Reflections and Replies: Essays on the Philosophy of Tyler Burge* (MIT Press, 2003), pp. 405–17.

⁵ D. Chalmers, ‘Perception and the Fall from Eden’, in Gendler and Hawthorne (eds), *Perceptual Experience*, pp. 49–125, at p. 51.

First, the *appears-looks conception*. For instance, before developing an argument for the thesis that phenomenal character supervenes on content (differences in phenomenal character entail differences in content), Byrne explains what it means to say that a particular experience has a particular content by saying that ‘the content of a perceptual experience specifies the way the world appears or seems to the subject’.⁶ (Indeed, this conception is crucial to the second premise of Byrne’s argument, since this premise states that differences in phenomenal character entail differences in *how things seem*, which unproblematically entail differences in content only if this conception is adopted.) Likewise, Byrne and Hilbert say that ‘the proposition that *p* is part of the content of a subject’s visual experience if and only if it visually appears to the subject that *p*’.⁷ Occasionally, other philosophers say that an experience represents that something is *F* if and only if it *presents* something as having property *F*. Since the technical term *presents* is presumably explainable in terms of *appears* or *looks* (otherwise it is unclear what it means), these philosophers too are ultimately explaining the notion of the content of an experience in terms of *appears* or *looks*. These remarks could be taken as rough glosses or heuristics, rather than as definitions. But then one would still not understand the technical expression *experience x has content y*, and hence debates in which this expression figures would not be understandable. So I shall take these remarks as giving the meaning of this expression; ‘experience *e* has the proposition *p* as a content’ means that in having *e* it appears to the subject that *p*. (For visual experiences, one might use ‘looks as if *p*’.) I shall say that *p* is an *appears-looks content* of *e* iff *p* is a content of *e* as defined by the appears-looks conception. Those who adopt the appears-looks conception might stipulate that an experience is *accurate* with respect to a situation if and only if its appears-looks contents are true with respect to that situation. The appears-looks conception is obviously theory-neutral.

But, equally obviously, the appears-looks conception trivializes debates concerning the contents of experiences. First, it trivializes the debate over whether experiences have contents. Given its stipulative definition of what it means to claim that ‘experiences have representational contents’, this claim is equated with the triviality that experiential episodes are associated with true appears-looks reports. This must be accepted by *qualia* theorists. It must also be accepted by disjunctivists, such as Brewer, who hold that the phenomenal character of a non-hallucinatory experience is to be given simply by citing the object of experience,⁸ and that hallucination is to be given some

⁶ A. Byrne, ‘Intentionalism Defended’, *Philosophical Review*, 110 (2001), pp. 199–240, at p. 201.

⁷ A. Byrne and D. Hilbert, ‘Color Realism and Color Science’, *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 26 (2003), pp. 3–21, at p. 5.

⁸ B. Brewer, ‘Perception and Content’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14 (2006), pp. 165–81.

different explanation. When Brewer and others deny that experience is to be explained in terms of content, they must have some more theory-laden conception in mind. Secondly, if we adopt the appears-looks conception and then examine the thesis that phenomenal character supervenes on content, we can easily obtain a negative answer prior to examining arguments in its favour. When small children and animals lacking the capacity for conceptual thought have various experiences, it does not seem to them (visually or otherwise) that the world is any way at all. So, on the appears-looks conception, their experiences lack intentional contents. In cases of change blindness (in which a large but unnoticed change in the viewed scene occurs) there is arguably a change in phenomenal character but no change in the truth-values of reports of the form ‘It appears that p ’ or ‘It looks as if p ’. Thirdly, the appears-looks conception trivializes the debate over what the contents of visual experiences are because it trivially entails that experiences have both singular contents and contents involving kind properties. For instance, in a perfectly ordinary sense, there might appear to you to be a tree there with the property of being a pine tree. So, on this conception, the claim that experiences have contents involving kind properties is trivially true. If these debates are to be both intelligible and non-trivial, the technical expression ‘experience e has content p ’ must be given meaning in some other way.

A different version of the appears-looks conception might avoid triviality. It is plausible that ‘it appears to S that p ’ and ‘it looks to S as if p ’, of which I have made use so far, always mean something doxastic. One view is that they always mean that S ’s experience gives him an inclination to believe p . (This does not entail that he is inclined to believe p *simpliciter*, given his total evidence.) But some claim that looks-reports of the different form ‘ o looks F to S ’ have a special phenomenal sense.⁹ So ‘ e has as a content the proposition that o is F ’ might be stipulatively defined to mean that in experience e the object o looks F to the subject of e .

But this too trivializes debates about the contents of experiences. On this conception, it is trivially true that non-hallucinatory experiences have contents; it is trivially false that phenomenal character supervenes on content, because on this conception hallucinations lack contents (since ‘ o looks F to S ’ is true only if S sees o); and it is trivially false that *being a pine tree* enters into the content of any experience, because ‘ o looks pine tree to S ’ is ungrammatical. Indeed, on *any* version of the appears-looks conception, these debates will be uninteresting, because they will amount to debates about the truth-values of appears-looks reports in ordinary English.

⁹ F. Jackson, *Perception: a Representative Theory* (Cambridge UP, 1977).

Next, the *accuracy conception* of the contents of experiences. It would be natural to start with the claim that experiences have contents, and then define an accurate experience as one with a true content. In contrast, the accuracy conception starts with the notion that experiences are accurate or inaccurate, and then defines the contents of experience in terms of this notion. For instance, Siegel writes that ‘the content of an experience is given by the conditions under which it is accurate’, so that if an ‘experience is accurate only if there is something fish-shaped and orange at location L ... [then] the contents of the experience include *that there is something fish-shaped and orange at location L*’.¹⁰ Likewise, Byrne and Hilbert write that if ‘your experience is veridical only if something is green and square at *L*’, then ‘your experience may be said to *represent* that there is something green and square at *L*’.¹¹

There are at least two ways of elaborating the accuracy conception. First, it might be stipulated that ‘experience *e* has the proposition *p* as a content’ means that, necessarily, if *e* is accurate, then *p* is true. In other words, in every possible world in which *e* is accurate, *p* is true. But this is problematic, since *e* is a particular token-experience not present in different possible worlds. So a better formulation might be this: in every possible world in which someone has an accurate *phenomenal duplicate* of *e*, *p* is true.

The second way of elaborating the accuracy conception assumes that as with sentences, we can evaluate particular token experiences for accuracy with respect to worlds in which neither they nor duplicates of them occur, as well as worlds in which they do occur. These will be worlds that are centred on a particular location (centred worlds), since we always experience things ‘from here’. Given this assumption, one might stipulate that ‘experience *e* has the centred proposition *p* as a content’ means that *p* is true at every centred world at which *e* is accurate. So, for instance, the centred proposition *that there is a red and round thing before me* might be a content of an experience. I shall say that *p* is an *accuracy content* of *e* iff *p* is a content of *e* as defined by the accuracy conception.

The accuracy conception entails that every necessary proposition is a content of every experience. To avoid this result, the theory might be refined as follows: ‘experience *e* has proposition *p* as a content’ means that *p* is an accuracy content of *e* and *p* reflects the phenomenal character of *e*.¹² This would require explaining what it is for a proposition to reflect the phenomenal character of an experience. Since this definition explains the content

¹⁰ S. Siegel, ‘Subject and Object in Visual Experience’, *Philosophical Review*, 115 (2006), pp. 355–88, at p. 361.

¹¹ A. Byrne and D. Hilbert, ‘Colors and Reflectances’, in A. Byrne and D. Hilbert (eds), *Readings on Color*, Vol. 1: *The Philosophy of Color* (MIT Press, 1997), pp. 263–88, at p. 263.

¹² Siegel, ‘Subject and Object in Visual Experience’, p. 362, fn. 4.

of experience in terms of phenomenal character, it would rule out reductive versions of intentionalism which attempt to explain phenomenal character in terms of content. But the problems for the accuracy conception which I shall raise below apply even if this problem can be overcome.

Before I develop these problems, I need to clarify the accuracy conception further. The accuracy conception is based on the initial claim that experiences may be classified as accurate or inaccurate. But 'is an accurate experience' and 'is an inaccurate experience' are technical expressions not employed in ordinary language. Of course, the accuracy conception cannot define these notions in terms of the content of experience, because it defines the content of experience in terms of these notions. Those who employ the accuracy conception typically explain the notions in one of two alternative ways.

First, some philosophers attempt to give meaning to 'is an accurate experience' and 'is an inaccurate experience' by giving examples.¹³ I shall call this the *way of example*. So, for instance, some say that completely successful experiences (in which the actual properties of objects are perceived) are examples of accurate experiences, while illusory and hallucinatory experiences are examples of inaccurate experiences. This would not distinguish the philosopher's concept of an *accurate experience* from the more ordinary concept of a *successful experience*, an experience in which objects and their properties are perceived. But most philosophers who speak of accuracy in relation to experiences mean something different from success. To pin down what he means by 'is accurate', the philosopher might provide examples of *accurate hallucinations*. Suppose, for instance, a wizard causes *S* to have hallucinations at random, and by chance at one point the hallucinatory scene exactly matches the actual scene before *S*. The philosopher might explain that as he uses 'accurate', this hallucination is accurate. It is difficult to deny that by means of such examples 'is an accurate experience' could acquire meaning. I shall use *accurate_e* to indicate this meaning. So on one version of the accuracy conception, the accuracy_e conception, 'experience *e* has proposition *p* as a content' means *p* is true in every case in which someone has an accurate_e phenomenal duplicate of *e*.

If the accuracy_e conception is to be theory-neutral, there is bound to be some indeterminacy concerning which experiences are accurate_e, and hence indeterminacy concerning what the contents of experiences are. For instance, there is nothing in how the concept of accuracy_e was introduced to determine whether the experience of a fake pine tree, a tilted penny or the Müller-Lyer diagram are accurate_e or inaccurate_e. If experiences have contents in the sense provided by the identity conception, to be introduced

¹³ D. Chalmers, 'Perception and the Fall from Eden', p. 50.

below, this indeterminacy can be explained. On the identity conception, experiences have 'phenomenal contents' which are privileged in the sense that they constitute phenomenal character. But content pluralism implies that they can be associated with various appears-looks contents as well. When it is introduced with examples, the predicate 'is an accurate experience' is indeterminate, because the examples do not determine whether it picks out the truth of phenomenal contents or the truth of appears-looks contents. Of course, as part of the accuracy conception of the content of an experience it might be stipulated that by an 'accurate experience' is meant an experience with a true phenomenal content. But then the accuracy conception would no longer be theory-neutral, because it would presuppose the intentionalist thesis that experience is constituted by intentional content. Further, the accuracy conception would now be otiose, because the identity conception would already provide an understanding of what it means to say that a particular experience has a particular content.

There is a second way in which the accuracy conception might explain accuracy, the *way of definition*. For instance, Siegel says (p. 363) that 'an experience is accurate if its object has the properties it looks to have and is inaccurate if not'. I shall stipulate that an experience is accurate_d if and only if its object has the property it looks to have. This yields the accuracy_d conception: 'experience *e* has proposition *p* as a content' means *p* is true in every case in which someone has an accurate_d phenomenal duplicate of *e*. It will emerge that the accuracy_e conception and the accuracy_d conception yield different verdicts in some cases.

In either version, the accuracy conception, like the appears-looks conception, is theory-neutral. But it trivializes the three central debates concerning the contents of experiences.

First, the accuracy conception trivializes the debate over whether experiences have contents. Some who adopt the accuracy conception say that the claim that experiences have contents requires substantive argument, but this is not so. On this conception, the claim that experiences have contents follows from the claim that they can be classified as accurate or inaccurate with respect to various scenarios in the thin senses provided by the way of example or the way of definition. For on the accuracy conception, the claim that they have contents or accuracy conditions is reached by definition. But who could deny that experiences can be classified as accurate or inaccurate in these thin senses?

Indeed, even disjunctivists, who often say that they are opposed to the notion that experiences have contents, must recognize that they have contents in the senses specified by the different versions of the accuracy conception. For instance, must they not recognize that experiences may be

classified as accurate_e or inaccurate_e? After all, when these concepts are introduced to us, we catch on fairly quickly. We can imagine a hypothetical language in which ordinary people use the predicates 'is an accurate experience' and 'is an inaccurate experience', mostly agreeing in how to classify cases. An error theory of such talk would be implausible. Indeed, the disjunctivist can specify a property which is a candidate for what philosophers mean when they use 'is an accurate experience': an experience *e* is counted 'accurate' iff (i) *e* is indistinguishable by reflection from seeing the instantiation of a complex profile of sensible properties *P* by some objects, and (ii) before the subject of *e* there are in fact objects which have *P*. The disjunctivist must of course admit that experiences can be accurate_d or inaccurate_d. For this is merely to say that in some cases things have the properties they look to have, but in other cases this is not so. Anyone who accepts that experiences are accurate or inaccurate, in one of these thin senses, must admit that in the weak sense specified by the accuracy conception, experiences may be associated with contents or accuracy-conditions. For instance, on one version of the accuracy conception, *p* is a content of an experience *e* iff in every world in which someone has an accurate phenomenal duplicate of *e*, *p* is true. (The use of phenomenal duplication here should be acceptable to disjunctivists as well as common factor theorists; disjunctivists and common factor theorists simply provide a different analysis of it.) Likewise, sense-datum theorists, *qualia* theorists and everyone else must accept that experiences have contents in the sense provided by the accuracy conception, because on all of these theories experiences can be assessed for accuracy_e or accuracy_d with respect to possible scenarios.

Why then do some disjunctivists deny that experience is the sort of thing that can be inaccurate and that it has contents? They must have in mind more theory-laden conceptions of what these things mean. On one interpretation, when Travis and Brewer deny that experiences can be accurate or inaccurate (as they put it, 'in error'), they have in mind a conception of accuracy and inaccuracy which requires that experiences, like beliefs, are mental states with a *mind to world* direction of fit. (At the end of §II I shall argue that the issue of whether experiences can be in error in this thick sense is orthogonal to the issue of whether experience is to be explained in terms of content.) This is not a requirement of the thinner concepts of accuracy_e and of accuracy_d. When Brewer in particular denies that experiences have contents, he may have in mind something like the theory-laden identity conception, to be developed below, rather than the theory-neutral accuracy conception or the appears-looks conception. For he agrees that experiences have contents; what he denies (p. 179) is that contents give experiences their

basic natures. What he denies is that the ‘subjective character’ of perceptual experience is to be given by its representational content.

Secondly, the accuracy conception makes it trivially false that phenomenal character supervenes on content. If one looks at a square pattern of equidistant dots, one can first have an experience e_1 in which the fact that they are arranged horizontally is perceptually salient, and then have a phenomenally different experience e_2 in which the fact that they are arranged vertically is perceptually salient. It would be natural for the proponent of the supervenience thesis to adopt a fine-grained view of propositional contents according to which the propositions *there are rows of equidistant dots arranged horizontally* and *there are rows of equidistant dots arranged vertically* are distinct, even though they are modally equivalent, and then to say that e_1 represents the first proposition but not the second, and that e_2 represents the second proposition but not the first. But on the accuracy conception, since these propositions are true with respect to exactly the same scenarios, both propositions will be counted among the contents of both e_1 and e_2 . Indeed, even though they differ phenomenally, since e_1 and e_2 are accurate with respect to the same scenarios they have exactly the same contents, on the accuracy conception. The trouble is that even if propositions are fine-grained, the accuracy conception provides a coarse-grained criterion for when a particular experience has a particular content, one which cannot distinguish between modally equivalent propositions. So if the debate over the supervenience thesis is to be intelligible and non-trivial, another conception of what it is for a particular experience to have a particular content is needed.

Thirdly, the accuracy conception trivializes the debate over what the contents of experiences are. What, for instance, does the claim that the kind property *being a pine tree* enters into the content of some experience t of a pine tree mean? On one version of the accuracy conception, it means that the proposition *there is a pine tree present* is true in every possible world in which someone has an accurate phenomenal duplicate of t . But this is false. At a twin earth with no pine trees but only pine tree look-alikes, on any reasonable way of explaining accuracy, if S has an experience of a pine tree look-alike which is a phenomenal duplicate of t , then his experience might be perfectly accurate. On yet another version of accuracy conception, it is assumed that we can evaluate t – this very token-experience – for accuracy with respect to arbitrary hypothetical (centred) worlds. The claim is that the proposition *there is a pine tree present* is true in every world with respect to which t is accurate. Whether this is true depends on whether the claim presupposes the concept of accuracy _{e} or the concept of accuracy _{d} . For the concept of accuracy _{e} this claim is indeterminate (not merely epistemically

opaque), because the examples used to introduce the concept of accuracy_e are insufficient to determine a verdict on whether, say, *t* is accurate_e with respect to a (centred) world containing an object which looks like the pine tree viewed in *t*, but is not a pine tree. (Likewise, it is indeterminate whether or not *t* is accurate_e with respect to a centred world in which there is a pine tree other than the one viewed in *t*. Therefore on this conception of the content of an experience, it is indeterminate whether or not the content of *t* is a singular content about this very pine tree.) On the other hand, assuming the concept of accuracy_d, the issue of whether the content of *S*'s experience *t* involves the property of being a pine tree becomes that of whether the viewed pine tree looks to *S* to have the property of being a pine tree. If *S* has the concept of a pine tree, then it will look to him to have the property of being a pine tree, and the claim will be true. If not, it will be false. If debates concerning the contents of experiences are to be more substantive, another conception of the contents of experience is required.

In my view, the only conception of the contents of experience which does not trivialize debates over what the contents of experiences are is theory-laden rather than theory-neutral. I call it the *identity conception*.¹⁴ It may be introduced by analogy. What does it mean to say that a particular belief has a particular propositional content? Some theories, for instance, multiple relation theories and sententialist theories, deny that the property of having a certain belief is identical with the property of standing in a relation to a true or false proposition.¹⁵ In contrast, the propositional theory upholds this identification. One reasonable conception of what it means to say that a particular belief has a particular content presupposes this theory. To claim that a particular belief has a particular proposition as its content is to claim that it is identical with standing in a relation, the *belief-relation*, to the proposition. Likewise, on the identity conception, to claim that a particular experience has a particular proposition as its content is to claim that having the experience is identical with standing in some relation (distinct from and more basic than belief) to this content, so that the claim that experiences have contents goes hand in hand with the intentionalist view that experience is explained in terms of content.

To develop this idea, I must first introduce the notion of an experiential property. Suppose *S* experiences a red and round tomato in normal

¹⁴ This conception is employed in A. Pautz, 'Intentionalism and Perceptual Presence', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 21 (2007), pp. 495–541, at p. 497. It elaborates the formulation of intentionalism in M. Johnston, 'The Obscure Object of Hallucination', *Philosophical Studies*, 120 (2004), pp. 113–83, at p. 176.

¹⁵ For a sententialist theory, see D. Davidson, 'On Saying That', in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford UP, 1984), pp. 93–108. For the multiple relation theory, see B. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Home University Library, 1912), pp. 124–30.

circumstances, so that it looks red and round to him. Next, suppose *S* experiences a green and oval tomato in abnormal circumstances, so that it looks red and round to him; and he also has a hallucination of a red and round tomato. Suppose, finally, that in all three cases his experience is phenomenally exactly the same. Despite the differences between the cases, there is a salient property which *S* possesses in the three cases and in any phenomenally identical case, and which *S* would not possess in any phenomenally different case. I shall call such properties of people *experiential properties*. Even disjunctivists should recognize experiential properties common to successful and unsuccessful cases; they will analyse them disjunctively.

Different theories of phenomenal character can be viewed as different accounts of the structure or real definition of experiential properties. (I assume that properties can be complex and hence can have structure; to give the real definition of a property is to reveal this structure.) On the *qualia* theory, the sense-datum theory and certain forms of disjunctivism, experiential properties are not analysed in terms of content. In contrast, intentionalism explains experiential properties in terms of content. Often it is formulated as the claim that what experiential properties a person has *supervene on* what the contents of his experiences are. But this formulation is problematic. As I have shown, the question then becomes ‘What does it mean to say that a particular experience has a particular content?’, and the standard answers make the supervenience claim trivially false. The solution has two parts. First, intentionalism should be formulated as a theory of the *identity* of experiential properties. Secondly, ‘*x* has an experience with content *y*’ should be treated as a theoretical term and removed from the formulation of intentionalism in favour of an existentially quantified bound variable, in accordance with the Ramsey–Lewis method for eliminating theoretical terms.¹⁶ Then, in the case of visual experience, intentionalism may be formulated as follows:

Intentionalism about visual experience. There is a relation *R* such that for every visual experiential property *E*, there is a unique general content *c* such that having *E* is identical with bearing *R* to *c* (or there is a unique *type* of content *t* such that having *E* is identical with bearing *R* to some content or other of type *t*).

The parenthetical qualification is needed to make room for the possibility of *singular intentionalism*. On this view, when you have a red-round experience on viewing different tomatoes, you bear some relation *R* to different singular contents about the different tomatoes; and having a red-round experience is

¹⁶ D.K. Lewis, ‘How to Define Theoretical Terms’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 67 (1970), pp. 427–46.

identified with standing in *R* to some proposition or other of a certain type, namely, one whose predicative constituent is the property of being red and round. This is in contrast with *general intentionalism*, which says that in every case the relevant content is the same general content, roughly *there is a red and round object present*.

I can now introduce two theoretical terms according to the Ramsey–Lewis method, which refer only if intentionalism is true. Let ‘sensorily entertaining’ denote the unique relation *R* which satisfies the account provided by intentionalism of the structure of experiential properties. This is a mere referential tag which does not presuppose any analogy between sensorily entertaining contents in experience and entertaining contents in thought. Let ‘the phenomenal content of token-experience *e*’ denote the proposition which one sensorily entertains in having *e*. (By a *token-experience*, I mean a particular instantiation of some experiential property. Since it should be uncontroversial that there are experiential properties, it should be uncontroversial that there are token-experiences in this stipulated sense.) On singular intentionalism, phenomenally identical token-experiences have different singular phenomenal contents. On general intentionalism, they have the same general phenomenal content. If general intentionalism is true, we may speak of the phenomenal content of an experiential property *E* as well as of the phenomenal content of a particular experience-token: it is the unique general content *c* such that *E* is identical with sensorily entertaining *c*.

On typical supervenience formulations of intentionalism, the claim that experiences have contents is a presupposition of intentionalism which needs to be independently clarified and supported. As I have shown, existing clarifications make the supervenience claim trivially false. In contrast, on the identity conception, intentionalism and the claim that experiences have contents come together in a package.

One might think that this is less than ideal. Intentionalism holds that all experiential properties involve the same relation *R*. Therefore, as currently formulated, it entails that when they differ, they must differ in the contents which are the relata of this relation. In other words, intentionalism entails the supervenience of phenomenal character on content. Therefore on the identity conception as currently formulated, the claim that experiences have contents is wedded to this controversial supervenience claim. For this reason, one might introduce the *weak identity conception*. On this conception, the claim that experiences have contents is equated with *weak intentionalism*, which differs from *strong intentionalism* as formulated above. On weak intentionalism, every experiential property consists *in part* in bearing a relation to a content, which I shall call ‘sensorily entertaining’. But this leaves it open that some experiential properties also involve non-intentional

properties, which might account for differences among experiential properties in which the same content is sensorily entertained.

In either version, the identity conception makes the three main debates over the contents of experiences non-trivial. First, as I have shown, the appears-looks conception and the accuracy conception trivialize the debate over whether experiences have contents. The reason is that they equate the claim that experiences have contents with the claim that experiences can be non-arbitrarily *associated with* propositions, something everyone can accept. In contrast, on the identity conception, the claim that experiences have contents is equivalent to the non-trivial claim that experiential properties are *identical with* relations to contents, so that contents enter into their real definition.

It should be noted that on the identity conception the claim that experiences have contents is stronger than the claim that having experiences *involves* standing in a propositional-attitude relation to contents.¹⁷ The problem with equating the claim that experiences have contents with this *involvement claim* is that it seems that everyone can agree that having experiences involves standing in a relation to propositions, especially if we allow 'defined up' or unnatural relations. For instance, as I pointed out in connection with the appears-looks conception, everyone should admit that having experiences involves standing in the relation *it appears to x that y is true* to various propositions. Disjunctivism entails that having experiences involves standing in a relation R to general propositions, where one bears R to the general proposition *there is an F* iff one cannot know by reflection that one is not seeing the instantiation of F by something. Other theories, such as the theory of appearing¹⁸ and the sense-datum theory, entail that in having experiences we stand in other such derivative relations to propositions, definable in terms of the properties of sense-data or the properties objects present to us. In response to the threat of triviality, the proponent of the involvement claim might say that although these are relations to true or false propositions defined in mentalist terms, they are not propositional-attitude relations. But then it is unclear what more is needed for a relation to be a propositional-attitude relation. In contrast, the identity conception which I favour avoids the threat of triviality. While the sense-datum theory, the theory of appearing and other theories entail that experiential properties determine and thus involve relations to contents, they deny that experiences are *identical with* relations to contents. Further, the identity conception avoids

¹⁷ Alex Byrne formulated the claim that experiences have contents along these lines at the Glasgow conference on the Admissible Contents of Experience.

¹⁸ W.P. Alston, 'Back to the Theory of Appearing', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13 (1999), pp. 181–204.

the unclear notion of a propositional-attitude relation because it simply quantifies over relations in general without invoking this notion.

Secondly, the identity conception, in contrast with the appears-looks conception and the accuracy conception, does not trivialize the issue of whether phenomenal character supervenes on content, because it amounts to the issue of whether strong intentionalism provides the correct account of the structure of experiential properties.

Thirdly, the identity conception, unlike the appears-looks conception and the accuracy conception, does not trivialize the debate over what the contents of experiences are. On the identity conception of the content of experience, the issue of whether experiences have singular contents or only general contents becomes the non-trivial issue of whether singular intentionalism or general intentionalism provides the correct account of the structure of experiential properties. The debate over whether experiences have contents involving kind properties becomes the issue of whether kind properties must enter into the phenomenal contents of our experiences in order to explain phenomenal differences among experiences. Defenders of other theories of the structure of experiential properties, such as the sense-datum theory and the theory of appearing, face analogous issues. What are the properties of sense-data? What properties do objects phenomenally appear to have? But they should not formulate these issues in terms of some weak theory-neutral conception of the contents of experiences, because, as I have shown, such theory-neutral conceptions inevitably trivialize the debates. It is only those who accept the intentionalist view of the structure of experiential properties who should frame the issue in terms of the contents of experiences. I now turn to the case for this view.

II. WHY BELIEVE THAT EXPERIENCES HAVE CONTENTS?

Some philosophers (Travis, Brewer) have recently argued that the intentionalist account of illusion is not obligatory. I agree: disjunctivist theories and *qualia*-based theories also account for illusion. But elsewhere I have argued for intentionalism about visual experience, as opposed to rival theories, on the ground that it provides the *best explanation* of other features of visual experience. For instance, visual experience, even when illusory or hallucinatory, grounds the capacity for external thought.¹⁹ Let R be the experiential property which *S* has on viewing a red and round tomato on a certain occasion. Necessarily, if a concept-user has R, then he will thereby

¹⁹ Pautz, 'Intentionalism and Perceptual Presence'. Cf. also Johnston, 'The Obscure Object of Hallucination', p. 130.

have the capacity to have certain general beliefs with *being red* and *being round* as predicative constituents, even if he was previously unacquainted with these properties. This is no less true in a hallucinatory case in which these properties are not instantiated by physical objects before the subject. Some neglect hallucination. For instance, according to negative disjunctivists, in unsuccessful cases, one has R simply by virtue of not being able to know by reflection that one is not seeing the redness and roundness of something.²⁰ In addition to facing counter-examples (a rock is also unable to have this knowledge but does not have R), this theory is inconsistent with the explanatory role of hallucination. How might inability to have a certain piece of knowledge ground the ability to have certain thoughts? Against negative disjunctivism, a positive theory of hallucination is needed, according to which in hallucination *S* is *en rapport* with properties which are not instantiated by physical objects before him, such as *being red* and *being round*. Some such theories, for instance the sense-datum theory and the theory of appearing, postulate non-standard objects which instantiate or present the relevant properties. But they are problematic. Intentionalism avoids non-standard objects. In the hallucinatory case, having R simply consists in sensorily entertaining a content involving *being red* and *being round*. Since sensorily entertaining is more basic than believing, this state may ground the capacity to have general beliefs having these same properties as predicative constituents. If intentionalism works in unsuccessful cases, there are reasons to generalize it to successful cases as well.

Philosophers who argue that intentionalism is not obligatory also argue that it is not satisfactory. Travis argues against intentionalism on the ground that the contents of experiences are not *look-indexed*: they cannot be determined from looks-reports. I agree (see §III below). He also rejects functional theories according to which the content of a sensory state is determined by the state's typical causes and effects. I agree: there is no fail-safe algorithm for determining what contents a person sensorily entertains (just as there may be no algorithm for determining what a person knows or what is right or wrong). But I do not see the problem. People may nevertheless be sensitive to what contents they sensorily entertain, and thereby know what experiences they have.

A second objection to intentionalism is as follows. In the Müller-Lyer diagram, lines that are in fact the same length appear different in length. Brewer argues that this is not adequately explained in terms of a false intentional content to the effect that the lines differ in length. For instance, this view falsely predicts that if the distorting angles were to shrink in size, then there would be a phenomenal change in one's experience of the

²⁰ M. Martin, 'The Limits of Self-Awareness', *Philosophical Studies*, 120 (2004), pp. 37–89.

relative lengths of the lines. According to Brewer, the best view is that experiences are mere confrontations with the world which cannot be inaccurate or in error. It is only the beliefs which the subject is disposed to form which are in error. But this is only an objection to a version of intentionalism which explains the case in terms of a false content to the effect that the lines differ in length. To avoid the objection, the intentionalist might instead say that the phenomenal content of the original experience of the diagram is the true content *the top line has length l and the bottom line has length l* , and that they look different in length to S only in the sense that he is disposed to believe falsely that they are different in length.

Another point is that intentionalists could in a sense agree that experiences cannot themselves be inaccurate or in error. As I have said, everyone must admit that experiences can be inaccurate_e and inaccurate_d. So when philosophers deny that experiences themselves can be accurate or inaccurate, they must have a thicker conception in mind. Perhaps they have in mind a conception that requires that experiences, like beliefs, are mental states with a mind to world direction of fit. I shall use accuracy_i to mark this conception. As I have formulated intentionalism, it would be a mistake to say that intentionalism entails that experiences themselves can be accurate_i or inaccurate_i, because it says nothing about ‘direction of fit’. Intentionalism says only that experiences are relations to contents. But some relations to contents, for instance *desiring* and *entertaining in thought*, do not have a mind to world direction of fit. So even when they have a false content, one cannot say that the states themselves are inaccurate_i or in error. Maybe it is the same with experiences. They tend to induce beliefs because they have a rich phenomenology. But maybe, unlike beliefs, they themselves do not have a mind to world direction of fit. Certainly, on standard explications of mind to world direction of fit in terms of sensitivity to evidence, they lack a mind to world direction of fit. In that case, even when they have false contents, experiences themselves cannot be said to be literally false or in error. Error only enters the picture when the subject takes the experience at face value and forms a false belief.

III. WHAT ARE THE CONTENTS OF EXPERIENCES?

I shall now address two issues concerning what the contents of experiences are. One issue is whether the contents of experiences include singular contents into which particular objects enter, or whether they are purely general. The second issue concerns what general properties enter into the contents of our experiences.

For the identity conception of the contents of experiences, the first issue is the issue of whether singular intentionalism or general intentionalism provides the best account of the structure of experiential properties. I favour general intentionalism on the grounds that it is simple and there is no good argument against it. A common argument against general intentionalism concerns examples in which the general phenomenal content of an experience is true, but the experience is inaccurate_e. An example would be a hallucination of a scene which is not present before *S* but which is by chance exactly duplicated at some other place or time, so that the purely general content of the hallucination is true. Or suppose *S* has an experience of an object which is in fact white and to his left. However, because of a mirror and abnormal light, it looks to him red and straight ahead.²¹ If by chance there is a red object straight ahead of *S* behind the mirror, then the purely general content of the experience is true. But such cases are a problem only if the general intentionalist is committed to the *simple analysis* of accuracy_e according to which an experience inherits its accuracy_e conditions from its content. However, the general intentionalist is not committed to the simple analysis of accuracy_e.²² Granted, the accuracy-conditions of a *belief* must match the accuracy-conditions of its content, because it is part of the definition of the content of a belief that it determines the accuracy-conditions of the belief. In contrast, the phenomenal content of an experience is not defined as what determines its accuracy-conditions (the accuracy conception), but as what constitutes its phenomenal character (the identity conception). So it is open to the general intentionalist to provide a more nuanced analysis of accuracy according to which an experience might be inaccurate_e even though its purely general content is true. For instance, he might say that an experience is *accurate_e* iff it is a non-hallucinatory experience in which the viewed objects have the properties they look to have or a hallucinatory experience whose general content has among its witnesses objects directly before the subject. Then he might analyse *o* looks *F* to *S* as *o* appropriately causes *S* to entertain sensorily the content that there is something that is *F*. Alternatively, he might deny that there is any simple analysis of looks-reports in terms of content and causation.

I now turn to the second issue, that of what general properties enter into the contents of our experiences. As a bonus, the argument sketched in §II for believing that experiential properties are relations to contents naturally

²¹ M. Soteriou, 'The Particularity of Visual Perception', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 8 (2000), pp. 173–89, at p. 187, fn. 3.

²² For a similar point regarding the more ordinary concept of success, see Pautz, 'Intentionalism and Perceptual Presence', p. 513, fn. 1. For instance, the intentionalist could agree with some anti-intentionalists that success must be analysed in terms of a primitive form of awareness of states of the world.

also suggests a method for arriving at conclusions concerning what properties enter into the contents of particular experiential properties: intuitions about the potential cognitive roles of particular experiential properties can be used in order to arrive at hypotheses about what their contents must be if they are to play this role. In fact, one can state a general principle. I shall say that a single experiential property *E* *necessarily grounds* the capacity to have a belief involving a property *P* iff it is metaphysically necessary that suitable concept-users who have *E* will have the capacity to have beliefs involving *P* *because* they have *E*, where a *suitable* concept-user is one who is not cognitively impaired in comparison with a normal human. Then the following principle is plausible:

The Grounding Principle. If experiential property *E* necessarily grounds the capacity to have beliefs involving *P* *without imaginative extrapolation*, then *P* enters into the phenomenal content of *E*.

Two comments. First, the ‘without imaginative extrapolation’ qualification is needed because of cases like the following: having an experiential property *E* whose phenomenal content only involves the shades of blue *B*₁ and *B*₂ might necessarily ground the capacity to have thoughts involving an intermediate shade of blue *B*′. But *B*′ does not enter into the phenomenal content of *E*. This is not a counter-example, because imaginative extrapolation is required to form beliefs involving *B*′. I have no definition of imaginative extrapolation. But this does not make the grounding principle useless, because we may nevertheless have justified beliefs about when it takes place.

Secondly, the grounding principle can only help to determine which properties figure in the contents of experiences. It cannot help to determine which properties are bound together in the content (appear to be possessed by the same object) and which properties are not bound together.

It may be said that the grounding principle is implausible. Let *R* be the experiential property which one possesses when one experiences a particular red and round tomato. It may be thought that having *R* in fact grounds the capacity to have beliefs involving *being a tomato*, so that by the grounding principle this kind property enters into the phenomenal content of the experience. But, it may be said, obtaining this result should not be so easy. This rests on a misunderstanding. It is not the case that having *R* *necessarily* grounds the capacity to have beliefs involving *being a tomato*, as witness the possibility of a community of perceivers on a tomato-free twin earth who have *R* but not the capacity to have beliefs involving *being a tomato* because they have no causal connection to this property. So the grounding principle does not entail that *being a tomato* enters into the phenomenal content (which

is not to say that the principle entails that it does not). In contrast, as noted in §II, R does necessarily ground the capacity to have beliefs involving *being round*, for instance, the belief that something is round. So by the grounding principle this property enters into its phenomenal content.

What is the argument for the grounding principle? For a schematic case in which the antecedent holds, suppose that in every possible scenario having E grounds the capacity to have beliefs involving P without imaginative extrapolation – in hallucinatory cases in which P is not instantiated before the perceiver, on twin earth, and so on. Then P itself must somehow be present in every case in which someone has E. Otherwise how might this be the case? But on intentionalism, P is present in every case in which someone has E only if P enters into the phenomenal content of E.

To show how the grounding principle might be used to support more interesting results than the result that shape properties such as *being square* enter into phenomenal content, I can apply it to some debates. In each case, I shall try to make plausible a certain ‘grounding intuition’ to the effect that the antecedent of the grounding principle holds of an experiential property E and an external property P. Given the grounding principle, it follows that P enters into the phenomenal content of E.

To begin with a preliminary point, I believe that this *grounding method* should be used in conjunction with other methods. Siegel’s *method of phenomenal contrast* begins by noting a difference in sensory phenomenology. For instance, in the cases of colour and shape constancy to be discussed presently, there are such differences. Given intentionalism, there is a difference in what properties enter into the phenomenal content. But the phenomenal difference alone fails to show what the different properties are. Siegel suggests that we should appeal to an argument from the best explanation to determine what the different properties are. My idea is that the best explanation will be the one which accommodates people’s grounding intuitions.

First, in the debate between standard and non-standard intentionalists, *standard intentionalists* about colour experience hold that the properties which the phenomenal contents of our colour experiences attribute to external objects are simply the colours. *Non-standard intentionalists* hold that they are not the colours.²³ In fact, they hold that the relevant properties have no names in ordinary English. So they invent a name: for instance, they might call the relevant properties ‘qualitative properties’. The dispute may be seen as a dispute about natural-language semantics, with standard intentionalists

²³ M. Thau, *Consciousness and Cognition* (Oxford UP, 2002); S. Shoemaker, ‘On the Way Things Appear’, in Gendler and Hawthorne (eds), *Perceptual Experience*, pp. 461–80; D. Chalmers, ‘Perception and the Fall from Eden’.

claiming that the properties which enter into the phenomenal contents of colour experiences are the referents of colour terms in public language, and non-standard intentionalists claiming that colour terms denote properties lying outside phenomenal content.

Let *E* be the experiential property which *S* possesses on viewing a particular red object, a particular orange object and a particular green object together. Of course, both views agree that *in the actual world* having *E* grounds the capacity to have beliefs involving colours. Non-standard intentionalists might accommodate this by saying that thanks to a contingent correlation between the properties they call ‘qualitative properties’ and those they call ‘colours’, having an experience involving a certain ‘qualitative property’ grounds the capacity to have beliefs involving a certain ‘colour’. But I believe that most people have a stronger grounding intuition, namely, that having *E* *necessarily* grounds the capacity to have beliefs involving colours. No matter what his environment is like, if *S* has *E*, then one naturally characterizes his beliefs using colour language: *S* might believe that *red* is more like *orange* than *green*, that *red* is a striking colour, and so on. Given the grounding principle, this ‘grounding intuition’ entails that the properties which enter into the phenomenal content of *E* are simply the colours, in favour of standard intentionalism and against non-standard intentionalism.

If you doubt that this ‘grounding intuition’ refutes non-standard intentionalism, suppose John, who has *E* but who does not track colours in the external environment, is a brain in a vat without an evolutionary history, or has evolved on a twin earth whose environment has never contained any coloured objects. On some versions of standard intentionalism, such a case is impossible. But on non-standard intentionalism, it is possible. In addition, on non-standard intentionalism, although John has *E*, he does not have the capacity to have any beliefs involving colours, since on this view to have beliefs involving colours one must bear certain naturalistic relations to the relevant properties instantiated in the external world. (Just as there might be someone who has a ‘tomato-like’ experience on a tomato-free twin earth, but, lacking connections to tomatoes, lacks the capacity for beliefs involving *being a tomato*.) So non-standard intentionalism conflicts with the grounding intuition. But since the grounding intuition is plausible for colour, it follows that the non-standard intentionalist’s semantics for colour terms is mistaken, and colour terms refer to the properties given in phenomenal content in accordance with standard intentionalism (where it is left open whether these are reflectance properties, dispositional properties, primitive properties, or whatever).

Now for the debate over constancy phenomena. Let *C* be the experiential property which *S* has while viewing a particular white ball illuminated from

above so that it looks white on top, white but shaded in the middle, and black at the bottom. The phenomenal contrast shows that different properties enter into the phenomenal contents of the experiences of the different regions, but it fails to show what they are. Presumably *white* at the top, *black* at the bottom, but what about the middle? There are two views. The *simple view* says that the phenomenal content of the experience of the shadowed region attributes *being grey*. The *complex view* is the negation of this. The phenomenal content only attributes *being white* and some property of the form *being subject to the occlusion of a light source to so-and-so degree*.²⁴

I favour the simple view. I have already pointed out that colours enter into phenomenal contents, so the simple view is more conservative. Another point is that if the proponent of the complex view claims that the experience represents the bottom as black *simpliciter*, then at what point does the experience switch from representing *white* and (decreasing) *level of illumination* to not representing *white* or *level of illumination* at all, but merely *black*? It is hard to see how such a fact could be indeterminate. But the strongest case for the simple view is the grounding intuition that C necessarily endows people with the capacity to have beliefs involving the colour *grey* even if it is not instantiated before them, not only beliefs about *white* and *level of illumination*. For instance, if someone previously unacquainted with achromatic colours has C, one would naturally say that he now knows what *grey* is like, that he learns that *grey* is more like white than black, and so on. By the grounding principle, *grey* enters into the phenomenal content of his experience, not merely *white* and *under low illumination*.

The simple view does not have the consequence (which many would regard as implausible) that C is illusory. Since, on the identity conception, phenomenal content is defined as what constitutes phenomenology, not as what determines whether an experience is illusory or not, there is conceptual room for a view on which the phenomenal content of C is false but there is no sense in which C is *illusory*, as this notion is employed in ordinary thought. Further, in contrast with the appears-looks conception, the identity conception does not explain the content of experience in terms of looks-reports. So there is no reason to believe that phenomenal content is looks-indexed in any simple way. Hence the simple view also does not make the mistaken prediction that the middle region *looks grey* to observers. It is compatible with a more nuanced account of looks-reports which brings

²⁴ For the simple view, see W. Lycan, *Consciousness and Experience* (MIT Press, 1996); C. McGinn, 'The Objects of Intentionality', in his *Consciousness and its Objects* (Oxford UP, 2004), pp. 220–48. For the complex view, see M. Tye, 'In Defense of Representationalism', in M. Aydede (ed.), *Pain: New Essays on its Nature and the Methodology of its Study* (MIT Press, 2006), pp. 163–76, at p. 172; D. Hilbert, 'Color Constancy and the Complexity of Color', forthcoming in *Philosophical Topics*.

in factors outside phenomenal content. So it is compatible with the fact that in ordinary contexts the only correct description is ‘the middle region looks white and under low illumination’. It follows that the intuition that C grounds beliefs about *grey* is not based on any intuition to the effect that the middle region looks grey.

A similar argument may be given in favour of a simple view of shape constancy, but I believe that there are problems here. Suppose D is the experiential property which someone has when he looks simultaneously at a tilted coin, a coin viewed straight on and a cube viewed straight on. The simple view says that the phenomenal content of D attributes *being elliptical* to the tilted coin (which, given the discussion of the last paragraph, is perfectly consistent with the report ‘it looks round and tilted’). The complex view says that it does not attribute *being elliptical* to the coin; it attributes *being round* and *being tilted* (and maybe being such that it would be occluded by an elliptical object placed in front of it).²⁵ It might be said that having D necessarily grounds the capacity to have thoughts involving *being elliptical* without imaginative extrapolation: if John has never before encountered *being elliptical* in experience, then intuitively having D might give him the capacity to know what *being elliptical* is like and to believe that it is more like *being circular* than *being square*. In further support of this, the friend of the simple view might point out that John might think ‘this [the shape-aspect of the tilted coin] is not exactly similar to that [the shape-aspect of the coin viewed straight on], but it is more like that [the shape-aspect of the coin viewed straight on] than this [the shape-aspect of the cube]’. Since this thought seems true, the referent of the first two demonstratives cannot be the *actual* shapes of the coins, for those resemble exactly. The only reasonable view is that the referent of the first demonstrative is *being elliptical* and that of the second is *being round*. The proponent of the simple view might now say that since having D necessarily grounds the capacity to have such thoughts without imaginative extrapolation, ellipticality must enter into its phenomenal content.

There are two problems with the argument. First, obtaining beliefs involving *being elliptical* from D seems to be more of a cognitive achievement than obtaining beliefs involving *being grey* from C. Hence the proponent of the complex view might say that the ‘without imaginative extrapolation’ clause of the grounding principle is not met here. Secondly, the defender of the complex view might accept the grounding intuition that D necessarily grounds the capacity to have thoughts involving *being elliptical* without

²⁵ For the simple view of shape constancy, see Lycan, *Consciousness and Experience*; McGinn, ‘The Objects of Intentionality’. For the complex view, see Tye, *Consciousness, Color and Content*, p. 79.

imaginative extrapolation, and accept that the grounding principle entails that *being elliptical* somehow enters into its phenomenal content, but insist that this is compatible with the acceptance of the complex view and the rejection of the simple view. For he might grant that it enters into the content, while rejecting the key claim of the simple view that it is *attributed* to the coin itself. In particular, he might say that the phenomenal content attributes to the coin relational property of exactly occluding an elliptical *region* behind it. Further, he might say that this is how the experience makes available thoughts involving ellipticity.

In addition, there is a problem for the simple view of shape constancy which does not arise for the simple view of colour constancy. If, as on the simple view, the phenomenal content attributes *being elliptical* to the coin, it is implausible that it also represents one side as being farther back than the other. So the simple view goes naturally with a two-dimensional view of visual phenomenal content. But if, as seems plausible, there is difference in depth phenomenology between viewing objects with two eyes and then with one eye, owing to the loss of stereoscopic depth-processing, then this view must be wrong: the only plausible view is that the difference is due to a decrease in the determinacy of the representation of object distances. In reply, the defender of the simple view might say that the experience of the coin has within the level of phenomenal content two contradictory contents: a two-dimensional content attributing *being elliptical* (accounting for the availability of thoughts about ellipticity), and a three-dimensional content attributing *being round and tilted* (accounting for the depth phenomenology). But this version of the simple view is unattractively complicated. For these reasons, while I endorse the simple view of colour constancy, I have doubts about the simple view of shape constancy.

To return finally to the debate over whether kind properties enter into the contents of our experiences, there is some reason to think that after Mabel learns how to recognize pine trees, the experiential property T she has on viewing a particular pine tree will differ from the visual experiential property which she had when she previously looked at the pine tree.²⁶ If so, then the phenomenal contrast shows that there is afterwards a different property in the phenomenal content, but fails to show what this property is. According to the *kind thesis*, it is simply the kind property *being a pine tree*. But there is reason to doubt this. Here is a plausible principle:

The Reverse Grounding Principle. If the phenomenal content of an experiential property E involves P, then having E for a sufficient period necessarily grounds (in suitable concept-users) the capacity to have beliefs involving P.

²⁶ Siegel, 'Which Properties are Represented in Experience?'.

Contrapositively: if it is not the case that having E necessarily grounds the capacity to have a belief involving P, then the phenomenal content of E does not involve P.

Suppose Mabel's twin Tabel has always been on a twin earth where real pine trees are replaced by fake pine trees, so that *being a pine tree* is nowhere instantiated. Tabel gains the capacity to recognize fake pine trees. Suppose that, on viewing a particular fake pine tree, she now has experiential property T, the very same experiential property as Mabel has on viewing an exactly similar real pine tree after acquiring her recognitional capacity. It seems plausible that Tabel lacks the capacity to have beliefs involving the natural-kind property *being a pine tree*. So by the reverse grounding principle, *being a pine tree* does not enter into the phenomenal content of T, the shared content of Tabel's and Mabel's matching experiences. As I have shown, on the appears-looks conception and the accuracy conception, the kind thesis is trivially true or trivially false. On the identity conception, there is good reason to believe it is false.

The proponent of the kind thesis might reply by denying the key assumption that Mabel's and Tabel's matching experiences must share a phenomenal content involving the same properties. The singular intentionalist allows that the phenomenal contents of phenomenally identical experiences can differ in their subject constituents. Why not allow that they can differ in their predicative constituents? On this view, Tabel sensorily entertains a phenomenal content involving *being a pine tree*. Even though Tabel has the very same experiential property T, she sensorily entertains a phenomenal content involving *being a pine tree*₁, where this is the relevant kind property (distinct from *being a pine tree*) shared by fake pine trees on twin earth. The trouble with this reply is that it implies no plausible view concerning the identity of the experiential property T. The proponent of this reply must adopt the implausible view that T is identical with the infinitely disjunctive property of sensorily entertaining a content involving *being a pine tree* or sensorily entertaining a content involving *being a pine tree*₁ or sensorily entertaining a content involving *being a pine tree*₂ or ..., where these are properties of different classes of objects which are not pine trees but which look exactly like them.

To avoid this implausible view, one must retain the original assumption that when Mabel and Tabel share experiential properties, they sensorily entertain phenomenal contents involving the same properties. By the argument given, this rules out the kind thesis. But then how is the phenomenal change which Mabel and Tabel undergo, after they learn how to recognize pine trees (in the case of Tabel, fake pine trees), to be explained? One view

is that they come to entertain sensorily a phenomenal content involving an ‘overall pine tree *Gestalt*’ which is shared by real pine trees and fake ones. Another view is that they come to entertain sensorily a phenomenal content attributing the property of being a familiar object in addition to colour and shape properties. A quite different type of view is that the phenomenal change which Mabel and Tabel undergo is not due to their sensorily entertaining a new phenomenal content at all, but rather is due to a difference at the level of thought in how they are disposed to classify pine trees (or in the case of Tabel, fake pine trees).²⁷

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