

Attenuated Representationalism*

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Abstract: In *The Metaphysics of Sensory Experience*, David Papineau offers some metaphysical reasons for rejecting representationalism. This paper overviews these reasons, arguing that while some of his arguments against some versions of representationalism succeed, there are versions of phenomenal intentionalism that escape his criticisms. Still, once we consider some of the contents of perceptual experiences, such as their perspectival contents, it is clear that perceptual experience does not present us with the world as we take it to be. This leads to a rather attenuated form of representationalism, perhaps one that even Papineau could come close to agreeing with.

Keywords: David Papineau, intentionalism, representationalism, intentionality, mental representation, content, phenomenal consciousness, experience, Edenic contents, phenomenal intentionality, truth conditions

1. Introduction

In *The Metaphysics of Sensory Experience* (2021), David Papineau tackles deep metaphysical questions about consciousness, intentionality, and our epistemic connection to the world beyond the mind. One of Papineau's central theses is that sensory experiences are not essentially representational. He argues that they do not by their very nature relate us to worldly facts, properties, or any other worldly entities and that they do not by their very nature have truth

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conditions. In this way, Papineau rejects many contemporary ways of thinking of the relationship between consciousness and intentionality, which aim to either identify the conscious and the representational or to in some way ground one in the other.

Although Papineau denies that sensory experiences are essentially representational, he accepts that they present us with "quasi-objects" and "quasi-properties". Quasi-objects are not real, externally-existing objects, and quasi-properties are not real, externally-existing (whether abstract or concrete) properties; rather, these quasi-items are internally-constituted, a mere product of the structure of our intrinsic, conscious states. Importantly, a sensory experience's having quasi-properties and quasi-objects does not automatically endow it with truth conditions. In sum, on Papineau's view, as far as consciousness is concerned, we enjoy a richly structured internally-generated reality consisting at least in part of quasi-objects having quasi-properties and there is no fact of the matter as to whether these quasi-items conform to the world.

I agree with Papineau that sensory experience is not a relation to external-world objects, properties, or propositions and that it is not essentially truth-conditional. I also agree that sensory experience is not an unstructured mishmash of qualia but rather involves object-like and property-like "quasi" components, that this "quasi" reality does not constitutively involve relations to external-world objects and properties, and that there is no fact of the matter as to whether the external world "correctly" corresponds to the quasi-items in our minds.

However, I disagree with Papineau over (1) whether there is any interesting sense in which sensory experiences are representational in virtue of presenting a quasi-reality, a claim he denies, and (2) whether this quasi-reality is entirely disconnected from truth and reference, a claim he affirms. My "Truth and Content in Sensory Experience" (forthcoming-c) discusses these two disagreements, arguing that there is a central notion of intentionality on which the

quasi-items of experience count as represented contents and, further, that truth-conditions are a matter of whether the world beyond the mind conforms to these contents in the way we imagine.

The aim of this paper is to argue for a somewhat attenuated form of representationalism. §2 overviews Papineau's main views and arguments, focusing on his reasons for rejecting representationalism and disagreements (1) and (2) listed above. We will see that there are phenomenal intentionalist versions of representationalism that escape Papineau's worries. Indeed, since Papineau's quasi-items satisfy the notion of content at play for at least some of his phenomenal intentionalist opponents, his view is at risk of collapsing into such a form of representationalism, though one that takes truth conditions to be strangely independent of content.

§3 argues that once we consider some of the contents of perceptual experiences, such as their perspectival contents, it is clear that perceptual experience does not really present us with the world as we take it to be. This leads to a version of representationalism on which experiences' representational features are much less central than the representationalist might ordinarily suppose. The end result is a rather attenuated form of representationalism, perhaps one that Papineau himself could come close to accepting (§4).

2. Non-relational views of conscious properties

The aim of *The Metaphysics of Sensory Experience* (Papineau, 2021) is to offer an account of "the metaphysical nature of the conscious properties we enjoy when we have sensory experiences" (p. 1). For Papineau, *conscious properties* are what are commonly called "phenomenal properties": they are properties of there being some particular way that it is like for a subject to be in a particular state. *Sensory experiences* are phenomenally conscious experiences

of the sort involved in perception, hallucination, and illusion, but not cognition (though Papineau claims that if thoughts and other non-sensory states have conscious properties, then everything he says about the conscious properties of sensory states applies to them, too; pp. 128–129). So, for example, we might say that a hallucination of redness is a sensory experience with a reddish conscious property. The aim of Papineau's book is to offer a metaphysical account of conscious properties.

On Papineau's view, "conscious sensory properties are intrinsic qualitative properties of people" (p. 1). What it is to have a reddish conscious property is to have an intrinsic qualitative property. This non-relational view of conscious properties contrasts with relational views like naive realist, sense-data, and (some) representationalist views. In order to get clearer on Papineau's view, let us briefly consider these alternatives and Papineau's reasons for rejecting them.

According to *naive realism*, roughly, conscious properties are relations between subjects (or mental states) and actual properties of external objects, at least in the "good" case of veridical perception. For example, a reddish experience might be a relation to the redness of some particular object. Papineau rejects naive realism for several reasons, one of which is its inability to offer a satisfactory account of non-veridical perceptual experiences: Naive realist views end up being committed to *disjunctivism*, the view that veridical and non-veridical experiences have different natures. But the problem with disjunctivism, for Papineau, is that it is committed to introspectively indiscernible conscious differences, which "threatens to loosen our hold on the very concept of consciousness itself." (p. 17)

Another alternative to Papineau's view is the *sense-data* theory, according to which conscious properties are relations between subjects (or mental states) and sense-data, which are

distinctly existing mental particulars. Papineau's main reason for rejecting this view is that it is committed to a questionable ontology of non-physical sense-data (p. 29).

A third alternative to Papineau's view is representationalism. Papineau takes this view to be the most popular and important alternative to his own, and so he focuses much of his discussion on explaining why he rejects it. For Papineau, *representationalism* is the view "that conscious sensory properties are identical to representational properties (p. 30).¹ For example, according to representationalism, what it is to have a reddish sensory experience is to represent redness (perhaps in a certain way or with a certain kind of representational state, like a visual representational state). Papineau takes representation to be a matter of having conditions of accuracy, veridicality, or satisfaction—in short, to be a matter of having *truth conditions*:

Throughout this book I shall understand representational contents in terms of the possession of *truth conditions*. The essential feature of any representational state is that it lays down a condition for the world to satisfy. It portrays the world as being a certain way, by drawing a line in logical space between the possibilities that verify it and those that do not. (p. 36, italics in original, footnote suppressed)

Importantly, in rejecting representationalism, Papineau does not deny that our sensory experiences have representational features. He claims that our sensory experiences *happen to be* representational, thanks to our being embedded in the right way in our environments. What he denies is that their conscious sensory properties, like the phenomenal redness of our experiences of redness, are identical to representational properties. For Papineau, conscious properties and representational properties are distinct.

¹ As Papineau acknowledges, this definition leaves out some versions of representationalism that he intends to cover, such as views on which only some conscious properties are identical to representational properties and views on which the relation between sensory and representational properties is not that of identity but rather that of realisation, constitution, grounding, or metaphysical determination. Since this does not affect our discussion, let us go along with Papineau's definition, noting that this simplified definition may ultimately need to be finessed.

Papineau distinguishes two versions of representationalism: *Naturalistic representationalism* combines representationalism (the view that conscious properties are representational properties) with a *tracking theory* of mental representation, according to which representational properties are relations to environmental features, conditions, or other items that our internal states are causally sensitive to, have the function of being causally sensitive to, require in order to perform their proper function, or in some other way *track*. In short, consciousness is a kind of tracking.² Naturalistic representationalism purports to "naturalize" consciousness (that is, to offer a metaphysical account of consciousness in terms of scientifically respectable ingredients) in two steps, each of which may seem independently palatable: First, it offers an account of consciousness in terms of mental representation (this is the representationalist bit). Second, it offers an account of mental representation in terms of a naturalistic tracking relation (this is the tracking theory bit). The end result is an account of consciousness in terms of a naturalistic tracking relation.

While Papineau accepts a tracking theory of mental representation (see, e.g., Papineau 1984), he denies the naturalistic representationalist's combination of representationalism with the tracking theory. Naturalistic representationalism, Papineau claims, is "inconsistent with the here-and-now nature of conscious experience." (p. 65) For instance, according to naturalistic representationalism, having a reddish experience might be a matter of being in a state that tracks the property of redness. But redness need not be instantiated in our immediate environment in order for us to be in such a state, since we can sometimes misrepresent things as being red when they are not. (Indeed, much of the appeal of representationalism is that it can account for hallucination in a non-disjunctive way! See Dretske 2003.) But then our having a reddish

² Dretske (1995) and Tye (2000) have developed such views. See Bourget and Mendelovici (2014) and Mendelovici and Bourget (2014).

experience is not explained by any "here-and-now" redness but rather by a general correlation of our internal state to some abstract property of redness, a property that may or may not be instantiated in our immediate environment. This strikes Papineau as exceedingly implausible: "It sounds little better than magic. How do these properties to which I am so distantly related tunnel their way into my immediate consciousness?" (p. 63) The overall metaphysical picture is absurd.

Papineau puts these intuitions in the form of an argument:

1. Instantiations of conscious sensory properties constitute concrete facts with causes and effects.
2. Instantiations of representational properties constitute abstract facts that cannot feature as causes or effects.
3. Conscious sensory properties are not representational properties. (p. 72)

In brief, the instantiations of conscious sensory properties are concrete (as opposed to being abstract) and can have various causes and effects. But the instantiations of representational properties are abstract and cannot have causes and effects. So, the two sets of properties cannot be identical.

One weakness of this argument is that it does not straightforwardly apply to non-identity versions of representationalism, versions that take consciousness to be grounded in, realized by, or metaphysically necessitated by mental representation. A proponent of such a view might agree with Papineau's conclusion that conscious sensory properties are not *identical* to representational properties while maintaining that they are grounded in, realized by, or metaphysically necessitated by them.

Still, the intuitive worries are effective against all versions of representationalism that take representation to be a relation to abstracta. On any such view, which abstract entity we are

appropriately related to will make a difference to the phenomenal character of our experience. But it is utterly mysterious how the relevant kinds of relations to abstracta can make a difference to our here-and-now, concrete experience.³

Papineau suggests that the bizarre metaphysical implications of representationalism are often neglected by representationalists (p. 54). Indeed, much of the appeal of naturalistic representationalism derives from our considering the two steps of the project independently: If we don't think of mental representation in terms of tracking, it is quite plausible that the conscious features of an experience of redness are completely exhausted by our representing redness. And if we don't consider mental representation in relation to consciousness, it is quite plausible to think of mental representation as a matter of keeping track of environmental features, much like a thermometer does in "representing" temperature. However, when you put both parts of the picture together, the view appears magical, taking consciousness to be a matter of general correlations relating us to abstract entities. The fact that both parts of naturalistic representationalism seem independently plausible but the combination seems absurd suggests that we might be equivocating on "mental representation": the notion of mental representation on which representationalism is plausible is distinct from the notion of mental representation on which the tracking theory is plausible.

The second version of representationalism that Papineau considers is phenomenal intentionalism, a view to which I am partial. *Phenomenal intentionalism* is, roughly, the view that mental representation (of at least the most fundamental kind) is ultimately a matter of phenomenal consciousness.⁴ Whereas naturalistic representationalism aims to account for

³ I make similar arguments against tracking theories of mental representation in Mendelovici (2018, section 4.4). See also BonJour (1998, section 6.4), Johnston (2007), Putnam (1982), Kriegel (2011) for similar arguments against similar targets.

⁴ See my (2018). See also Kriegel (2011), Pitt (2004), Siewert (1998), Farkas (2008), and Bourget (2010) for defences of the view. Kriegel (2013), Bourget and Mendelovici (2016), and Mendelovici and Bourget (2020) offer overviews.

phenomenal consciousness in terms of mental representation, phenomenal intentionalism reverses the order of explanation, aiming to account for mental representation (of at least the most fundamental kind) in terms of phenomenal consciousness.⁵ For example, a phenomenal intentionalist might say that what it is to visually represent a red square is to have an experience with a reddish-squarish phenomenal character. Though phenomenal intentionalists generally accept that experiences track worldly items, they either deny that consciousness is a matter of tracking relations or remain neutral on the question.

Papineau's worry with phenomenal intentionalism can be put in the form of a dilemma: Either the view takes consciousness to be (or ground) a relation to abstract entities (like abstract properties or propositions) that can be (or at least form parts of) truth conditions or it does not. If it does, then the view faces the same problems as naturalistic representationalism: it is mysterious just how consciousness could reach out of the mind and make contact with abstracta. Consciousness does not seem capable of such a feat, and standard arguments for phenomenal intentionalism do not successfully support the claim that it does. If, on the other hand, the phenomenal intentionalist denies that consciousness puts us in contact with abstracta, presumably maintaining instead that consciousness is a purely intrinsic matter, then there is no sense in which consciousness suffices for mental representation. So, Papineau claims, the view collapses into his own view, with consciousness being distinct from mental representation (assuming there is such a thing).

Many phenomenal intentionalists will take the first horn of the dilemma. Bourget (2010), for instance, argues specifically for the claim that consciousness is a relation to abstract propositions, which we thereby represent, and Pautz (2009) argues that consciousness is a

⁵ Many phenomenal intentionalists accept non-fundamental kinds of mental representation that ultimately derive from the most fundamental kind. For my favoured picture of this kind of derived representation, see Mendelovici 2018, chs. 7–8, 2020, and forthcoming-a.

primitive representational relation to clusters of properties. In response to charges of mysteriousness, Bourget (2019) says that consciousness is in fact mysterious but maintains that it is nonetheless relational in the ways described. Consciousness, by its very nature, puts us in contact with the relevant contents.

I don't think this response succeeds. I agree with Papineau that the here-and-now of consciousness cannot be a relation to nowhere-and-nowhen abstracta (or even to somewhere-else concreta).⁶ Conscious states play a psychological role in the mind in virtue of the conscious states that they are. This psychological role might consist in having certain causal effects on cognition and behaviour, making a phenomenological contribution, or being introspectable, perhaps by being available for inward demonstration. A mere relation to an abstractum—or to *any* entity existing distinctly from a conscious state—cannot play these kinds of psychological roles. So, taking the first horn of the dilemma is not a good option for the phenomenal intentionalist.

Other phenomenal intentionalists will take the second horn of the dilemma. Kriegel (2011), Pitt (2004), and I (2018, ch. 9) argue that consciousness—and mental representation—is not a relation to abstract (or concrete) items that serve as our represented contents but rather an internal feature of subjects. Papineau calls this view *pure phenomenal intentionalism*, presumably because it does not invoke anything other than intrinsic conscious properties in its explanation of mental representation (of at least the most fundamental kind); it is free of abstracta and other "impurities".⁷

⁶ See my 2018, ch. 9. Kriegel (2011) similarly argues that mental representation cannot be a relation to abstract entities because it is a concrete phenomenon and concrete phenomena cannot be explained by abstract phenomena.

⁷ Kriegel calls this view "adverbialism" about mental representation, since it is similar to adverbialist pictures of perception (Ducasse 1952, Chisholm 1957): it takes contents to be something like "ways of representing" rather than independently existing items we are related to. Pitt calls it "intentional psychologism", since it takes contents to be psychological entities, residing in the mind rather than in some abstract realm. I call this view the

Recall that Papineau's worry with this view is that it collapses into his own view, on which conscious properties are intrinsic properties of subjects and mental representation is a tracking relation that is independent of consciousness. He writes,

If [the pure phenomenal intentionalist's] position is to qualify as a species of representationalism, they need to hold that correctness conditions are essentially attached to conscious sensory experiences. But what now can forge the link between conscious feelings and worldly conditions? If worldly properties were somehow part of the conscious experiences, then that would offer some explanation of the connection. But any such story is blocked once the presence of the worldly properties within experience is denied. (p. 74)

In other words, the pure phenomenal intentionalist rejects a relational view of consciousness (and mental representation) on which the relata we are related to are truth conditions (or components of truth conditions, which compositionally form truth conditions thanks to the way the states representing them are combined in the mind). If our conscious states don't get to have truth conditions by being related by their very nature to them (or their constituents), it's unclear just how they get truth conditions and it's unclear how they can be essentially representational in the way required by representationalism. On the pure phenomenal intentionalist's picture, consciousness is shut in on itself, screened off from the world of propositions, properties, and other items that can be or be used to construct truth conditions. So, on the pure phenomenal intentionalist's picture, it's unclear just how there can be a fact of the matter as to whether a conscious state is true or false. Since, for Papineau, "representation" is defined in terms of the

"aspect view", since contents are aspects (properties or dependent components) of intentional states rather than items that exist distinctly from intentional states.

having of truth conditions, the pure phenomenal intentionalist's conscious states are not essentially representational.

Papineau suggests that some phenomenal intentionalists might agree that conscious states do not have truth conditions simply in virtue of their conscious features; such phenomenal intentionalists might instead invoke relations to the environment to play the role of determining truth conditions. But then, he claims, this view amounts to his own view:

This is a viable position, but the obvious question is what distinguishes it from the kind of purely qualitative view that I am defending. As I said at the end of the last chapter, once it is granted that conscious character fails to fix truth conditions on its own, the claim that it is essentially representational is called into question. After all, my own view also takes conscious sensory character to determine truth conditions once it is given an environmental setting, yet on my view conscious sensory character in itself is representationally dumb. (p. 75)

Papineau is right to say that the view he describes is one that is similar to his own, though it is not quite the view of the phenomenal intentionalists he cites (Loar 2003, Kriegel 2008, and Mendelovici 2018) and, in any case, it is not the only view available to the pure phenomenal intentionalist. In my "Truth and content in sensory experience" (forthcoming-c), I argue that there are two important disagreements between the pure phenomenal intentionalist and Papineau, and so that pure phenomenal intentionalism does not collapse into Papineau's view. I will briefly overview these two disagreements here in order to build upon these claims in the next section.

The first point of disagreement between Papineau's view and the pure phenomenal intentionalist concerns the relevant notion of representation. While we can all agree that there is an interesting and important notion of representation that is definitionally tied to truth conditions,

many pure (and impure, I think!) phenomenal intentionalists insist that there is a less theoretically committal, everyday notion of representation that is independent of truth conditions. We can notice in our own case that we have thoughts and experiences that "say" or "represent" that grass is green, that there is a blue cup before us, that $2+2=4$, or that a cup of coffee would be nice right now. This phenomenon we notice in ourselves, which might also be present in other cases, including cases in ourselves that we cannot introspectively notice, is a kind of representation. In order to distinguish this phenomenon from other phenomena we might describe as "representational", such as that of having truth conditions, let us call it *intentionality*. Let us say that *intentional contents* are what we think in, experience, or *entertain*. Truth conditions, arguably, are then the conditions in which what we entertain is in fact true. While many philosophers identify intentional contents with truth conditions, this is not mandatory. It is an open theoretical possibility that we do not "think in," perceptually experience, or otherwise entertain truth conditions themselves. For example, it could turn out that intentional states are relations to sense data, which are true or false depending on whether the world contains relevantly similar entities. On such a picture, intentional contents might be identified with sense data while truth conditions might be identified with abstractly-specified conditions that the world might or might not meet. Since it is a theoretical possibility that intentional contents come apart from truth conditions, it's useful to keep the two notions distinct.

According to many pure phenomenal intentionalists, phenomenal consciousness accounts for intentionality, though it may not (at least not in the absence of further ingredients) account for the having of truth conditions.⁸ Thus, the pure phenomenal intentionalist offers a story of intentionality that may end up being distinct from a story of truth conditions.

⁸ See Kriegel 2011, ch. 1 and Mendelovici 2018, ch. 1 for an elaboration on this way of fixing reference on the phenomenon of intentionality.

Papineau might himself want to accept that sensory experiences have intentional contents that are distinct from truth conditions. He recognizes that sensory experiences are structured in a way that includes object-like components and property-like components, which he respectively calls "quasi-objects" and "quasi-properties" and which, drawing on Farkas (2013), he takes to form when conscious experiences are structured and organised in a particular way. These components are not themselves external-world objects and properties but rather aspects of the intrinsic features of experience. It seems to me that Papineau should say that it is these "quasi-items" that answer to the notion of what we think, what we experience, and, more generally, what we entertain. And so he should say that they are our intentional contents. If so, then there is no disagreement here between the pure phenomenal intentionalist and Papineau after all, though it is now Papineau's view that is at risk of collapsing into pure phenomenal intentionalism, since it ends up accepting that sensory experiences are essentially representational in the sense of "representation" used by the phenomenal intentionalist, i.e., that of having intentional content.

The second point of disagreement with Papineau concerns where truth conditions enter the picture. For Papineau, an experience is true (or accurate or veridical) when it occurs in the presence of what it tracks on the relevant causal, teleological, or other kind of tracking relation. But someone who thinks that intentional contents are not identical to truth conditions need not hold such a view. Instead, they might take truth conditions to in some way or under some conditions arise from or be at least partly determined by our experiences' intentional contents. After all, a mental state's intentional contents are what we entertain when we're in that state, and a mental state is true when the world in some way conforms to what we entertain. Indeed, what we care about when we care about truth is whether the world conforms to our intentional

contents, not whether our mental states, irrespective of their intentional contents, are caused by whatever it is that they track. Indeed, this is why it makes sense to wonder whether some experiences reliably misrepresent the world, that is, whether they get things systematically wrong, perhaps because an error theory about colour experience is true or you are a brain in a vat.⁹ This kind of systematic error makes sense to us because what we care about when we care about truth is not the mere presence of what we happen to track but rather that the world conforms to the intentional contents we entertain.

How exactly the world must conform to what we entertain and what makes it the case that truth requires that the world conform in that precise way and not in some other way are important further questions.¹⁰ The point I want to make now is that even if an individual mental state's conscious features do not by themselves suffice to determine its truth conditions, our intentional contents, perhaps considered as a whole, arguably constrain or even fully determine truth conditions—or at least they *must* do so if our experiences are to have truth conditions at all. In short, intentional content matters for truth.

So, the second disagreement between the pure phenomenal intentionalist and Papineau is over the source of truth conditions. Papineau maintains that if the pure phenomenal intentionalist denies that individual conscious states determine their own truth conditions, they are forced to accept that something entirely independent of consciousness determines their truth conditions—something like tracking relations to the environment, as on Papineau's view. But Papineau neglects alternative (and, arguably, plausible) views on which our intentional contents as a whole either constrain or fully determine the truth conditions of individual states.

⁹ See Mendelovici (2013, 2016).

¹⁰ See Mendelovici (2018, ch. 9, Ott (2016) for proposals.

In the remainder of this paper, I want to return to the first disagreement between Papineau and the pure phenomenal intentionalist, the disagreement concerning whether the non-relational features of having "quasi-items" in mind is in any sense a representational phenomenon, whether it deserves the label "intentionality". I want to suggest that on the representationalist picture, the world as it is presented in perceptual experience is more bizarre than usually appreciated. This might appear to put pressure on the idea that perceptual experience is even in the business of representing, even when we understand "representation" as intentionality. I will argue that this bizarreness does not militate against the letter of representationalism, but it does suggest a more attenuated version of representationalism than most representationalists are likely to accept.

3. What's so Edenic about Eden?

In "Perception and the fall from Eden" (2006), David Chalmers introduces a notion of edenic content using the allegory of Eden:

In the Garden of Eden, we had unmediated contact with the world. We were directly acquainted with objects in the world and with their properties. Objects were simply presented to us without causal mediation, and properties were revealed to us in their true intrinsic glory.

When an apple in Eden looked red to us, the apple was gloriously, perfectly, and primitively red. There was no need for a long causal chain from the microphysics of the surface through air and brain to a contingently connected visual experience. Rather, the perfect redness of the apple was simply revealed to us. The qualitative redness in our experience derived entirely from the presentation of perfect redness in the world.

Eden was a world of perfect colour. (381)

In Eden, everything is just as it appears to be, and its being this way is directly revealed to us, free from illusion and other sources of error and unmediated by any causal processes.

Chalmers claims, "At some level, perception represents our world as an Edenic world, populated by perfect colours and shapes, with objects and properties that are revealed to us directly." (382) For Chalmers, roughly, when a world is exactly as our perceptual experience represents it to be, we can say that it is *perfectly veridical* and that its *Edenic content* is verified. Unfortunately, Chalmers claims, we do not live in Eden: we are prone to illusions and other sources of error and our contact with the world is mediated by internal and external causal processes, and perfect colours and shapes do not really exist. And so, our perceptual experience is not perfectly veridical: the world is not exactly as perception represents. Chalmers introduces fallback notions of veridicality and content: *imperfect veridicality*, which is a matter of the world being just as our *Fregean contents* say it is. Even though we do not live in Eden, our perceptual experiences have Fregean contents and achieve imperfect veridicality. For our purposes, we will set these fallback notions aside. My interest here is in what our perceptual experience strictly speaking says about the world.

I want to suggest that Eden is not all it's cracked up to be. Eden, the allegorical world that is just as our experience represents, is a bizarre, inconsistent, messed up world. We would be incredibly surprised to find out that we lived in Eden. Once we recognize see this, we can see why the standard representationalist line goes a bit too far in spirit (though perhaps not in letter). Perceptual experience, I want to suggest, is indeed representational, but this feature is not as central or important as representationalists often take it to be. In particular, much of the content of experience is not reflected in our best understanding of the world—and we don't care. At all.

Here are some ways in which Eden is bizarre: In most visual experiences, most objects that are not focused on appear to be both present and absent at two locations at the same time. If you hold your finger a foot in front of your eyes and fixate on a distant object, your finger appears to both be and not be in two separate locations.¹¹ In Eden, presumably, your finger both is and isn't in both places at the same time.

Prescription eyeglasses for myopia distort the spatial layout of apparent objects by slightly shrinking them into a smaller apparent space. If you look through the periphery of your glasses, you can experience an object as entirely located in direct line-of-sight beyond your glasses and also as partially continuing (though blurred) below the bottom edge of your glasses. In Eden, if you wear glasses for myopia, objects fully in view have repeated parts that appear blurry and in different locations. These parts come in and out of existence as you move your head around.

We usually visually perceive the space between everyday objects as entirely empty, but we at least sometimes tactually experience this space as containing air. For example, I am visually experiencing the space between my nose and my computer screen as entirely empty and not as containing air. Yet, when I open the window and a breeze blows by, I tactually experience air moving past my face. In Eden, when I open the window, there is both air moving past my face and no air moving past my face.

Perhaps the most pervasive class of bizarre experiences consists in those arising from perspectival effects, effects on experience that arise from our occupying a particular spatial

¹¹ For early discussions of the pervasiveness of this sort of double vision, see Reid (1813, ch. VI, S. 13), Titchner (1910), Taylor and Duggan (1958), and Blumenfeld (1959). Titchner writes, "So long . . . as the eyes are at rest, only certain objects in the field are seen single; the rest are seen double." (1910, p. 309) See also van Cleve (2008) for historical discussion and Schwitzgebel (2006) for discussion in relation to contemporary accounts of perspectival effects in vision. The phenomenon of double vision, whether pervasive or not, is often taken to be a counterexample to representationalism. See Boghossian and Velleman (1989) for such an objection. Sarihan (2020) offers a clear response, which is very much in line with the main claims of the present paper; see also Tye (2003) for a response.

location or "perspective". A partially shaded white wall might appear to be "gloriously, perfectly, and primitively" (Chalmers, p. 381) white all over, but it also appears to be different shades of glorious, perfect, and primitive grey in its shaded regions. In Eden, the white wall is, in some sense, white all over, but in another sense, white and different shades of grey in different parts.

There are similar perspectival effects in the case of size perception. A tree that is represented as closer to you is represented as larger than a tree that is represented as farther away, even though there is a sense in which they are both represented as being the same size.¹² Similarly, a noise whose source is represented as closer to you is represented as louder while a noise whose source is farther is represented as quieter, even if there is a sense in which the noises are represented as being of the same loudness. Likewise, a coin that appears round also in some sense appears elliptical when viewed from an angle.¹³

Representationalists generally account for perspectival experiences by saying that they represent mind-independent perspectival properties, which external objects at least sometimes have and which usually have something to do with aspects of a subject's relation to stable features of the world and other contextual factors. For example, Harman (1990, p. 38) suggests that a perspectival size experience represents a tree or other item as having a "size 'from here'", which he unpacks as its "subtending a certain angle" from the subject's location. Tye (2000) offers a similar account.¹⁴

¹² Cf. Peacocke's (1983) example of two trees that are in some sense experienced as the same size but in another sense experienced as one being twice as tall as the other. Although it is not Peacocke's intention to use this example to argue against representationalism, many commentators have used it to that effect.

¹³ But see Smith (2002), who argues that a coin viewed from an angle does not appear elliptical but rather "round and *tilted away from you*" (p. 172, italics in original). Similarly, Smith argues that objects that are closer to us do not look larger than objectively similarly-sized objects that are farther away but rather merely "*look nearer*" (p. 172, italics in original). More generally, Smith claims: "The same goes for all the phenomenological constancies: the changing sensations always manifest to us a changing relation in which an intrinsically unchanging object comes to stand to us." (p. 172) But while it is often true that tilted coins look tilted, that nearer objects look nearer, and so on, this arguably does not fully capture the phenomenology of these experiences. There is a sense in which distant objects look *smaller* and not just far away.

¹⁴ Perspectival effects are perceived as a central challenge to representationalism (see Bourget 2015 for discussion). The problem is that there appear to be conscious differences in experience that are not (or are not

Chalmers (2006, sec. 10) suggests that colour experiences represent both stable colour properties and properties of being variously shaded. A white wall might be represented as being stable white all over but as being differently shaded in different parts. Chalmers acknowledges that such a view must explain the sense in which a shaded white wall can look to be the same colour as an unshaded grey wall despite differing both in represented stable colour properties and represented degrees of shadedness. He suggests that the representationalist might say that the two walls are alike with respect to their "superficial colour", which is in some way entailed by stable colours and shadow properties. Such a superficial color "might either be seen as a composite property or simply as corresponding to another way of carving up the underlying multidimensional space." (p. 422) On this picture, then, perspectival colours are superficial colours, which might be composites of stable colours and degrees of shadedness or, presumably, complex or perhaps even basic features that correspond to ways of carving up multidimensional colour-and-shade space.

With the possible exception of some ways of filling in Chalmers' picture of perspectival colours, the above-mentioned representationalist accounts take perspectival contents to be in some way or other derivative of stable contents. Perspectival experiences represent something about how stable properties relate to a lighting condition, a physical location, or some other contextual or perspectival feature. Unfortunately, this approach of taking the perspectival to be

grounded in or otherwise accounted for by) representational differences. Two experiences of a tree might represent the tree as being the same size but be phenomenally different due to perspectival effects.

Representationalists often treat perspectival effects as an afterthought. Arguments for representationalism are most compelling when construed in terms of non-perspectival, or stable, aspects of experience. For example, the argument from transparency typically begins with the (alleged) introspective observation that the qualities we are aware of in experience are properties that external objects have (if anything does), not properties experiences themselves have. For instance, the constant greenness present in an experience of a tree (as in Harman's (1990) much-discussed example of Eloise viewing a tree) is experienced as a property of the tree's leaves and not as a property of the experience itself. Similarly, the blueness of the ocean (as in Tye's (1992) example of taking delight in the blueness of the Pacific Ocean) is experienced as a property of the ocean and not a property of one's experience. Transparency intuitions are much more compelling in the case of stable aspects of experience than they are in the case of perspectival aspects. It is not entirely implausible to say that the greyness of the wall we believe to be white is a non-representational aspect of experience, a mere quale, or a blob of mental paint.

derivative of the stable does not do justice to the phenomenology of perspectival experiences, which do not seem to have the relevant built-in complexity. Instead, perspectival contents seem to be basic with respect to stable properties, neither composed of nor otherwise constitutively dependent on stable properties and their relations to contextual factors. These phenomenological observations are corroborated by our best story of the neural processing underlying perspectival and stable contents: perspectival contents are usually represented at an earlier stage of processing than stable contents, which are worked out on the basis of perspectival contents and further information. It seems, then, that the representation of perspectival contents is not metaphysically dependent on the representation of stable contents.¹⁵

Lycan (1996) is a representationalist with a notably different kind of picture of perspectival contents on which perspectival contents are independent of stable contents. On Lycan's view, we represent both three-dimensional objects with stable features and two-dimensional colored shapes, which are our perspectival contents. For example, when viewing the round opening of a cup from an angle, we represent both a three-dimensional cup with a round opening and a complex two-dimensional shape including an oval as a part.

I want to suggest a nearby alternative picture on which stable contents are derivative of perspectival contents: Perspectival experiences represent perspectival contents, which are basic with respect to stable contents, and stable contents, which are composites of perspectival contents and other contents. Stable contents are perspectival contents that are represented as being "objective" or really out there, that we take to characterise how we really take the world to be. For example, in the case of the variably illuminated white wall, we represent the wall as gloriously, primitively white in some parts and various shades of glorious, primitive grey in

¹⁵ Of course, this is not to deny that our perspectival contents are causally triggered by complex combinations of stable properties of objects and a subject's location, the object's illumination, or other contextual features.

others; these are our perspectival colour contents. We also represent the wall as being *really* white-and-shaded in some spots and really white-and-brightly-illuminated in others; these are our stable colour contents. These stable contents involve the representation of both "real" colour and degree and type of illumination. On this picture, the stable emerges out of the perspectival, not the other way around. The content <white> that figures in the content <white-and-illuminated-in-way-W> is the same <white> that is the perspectival content of white experiences.

Stable contents, unlike perspective contents, might be "higher-level" representational contents, contents the representation of which involves some kind of "seeing as" or "perceiving as", like <pine tree> or <computer>. ¹⁶ In the case of representing a pine tree as a pine tree, the full nature of pine-tree-ness is not visually presented to us. Instead, a more abstract or conceptual understanding of a pine tree is employed. In the same way, our representation of an object as having a particular "real" colour does not visually present that real colour to us in the same way that perspectival colours are presented to us. Instead, we have a more abstract or conceptual, yet still immediate and automatic, grasp of this "real" colour.

This picture has many virtues: it accounts for the phenomenological similarity between representing a shaded white wall and an illuminated grey wall (the same basic perspectival colours are represented); it accounts for the representational similarity between perspectival white and stable white (stable white contains perspectival white as a constituent); it captures the priority and basicness of perspectival colours (perspectival colours are not merely stable colours "from here" or otherwise derivative of stable colours); and it arguably captures the phenomenological non-centrality of stable colours (stable colours are "higher-level"

¹⁶ See Siegel (2005) for discussion of the admissible contents of experience. See Mendelovici (2018, Appendix D) for a view of the representation of higher-level contents in perception.

representations, and so have an attenuated phenomenology compared to representation of "lower-level" representations).

This is not the place to offer a complete argument for or defence of this picture of perspectival and stable colours or to show how it might generalise to other perspectival and stable contents.¹⁷ But if something along these lines is correct, then in Eden objects have both stable properties and more basic perspectival properties. Perspectival properties are not merely stable properties from a certain "perspective" but rather basic, primitive, glorious properties in their own right. The point I want to make for our purposes is that while stable properties are quite tame (even if we agree with Chalmers that perfect stable colours are not ever instantiated!), perspectival properties are downright bizarre: they are constantly changing as our locations and other contextual factors change, and they diverge from the stable colour properties. In Eden, a "really" white wall is perspectivally white when brightly and evenly illuminated, but it is perspectivally grey when shaded. When red light is shone on it, it becomes perspectivally red. Similarly, a rotating coin changes its perspectival shape properties while remaining the same stable shape. Perspectival properties are basic and constantly in flux.

Perspectival contents are not mere fringe cases of perception but rather take up much of our perceptual experience. There are arguably no experiences occurring in normal circumstances that do not have a perspectival element. We never, for instance, visually experience that there is something stable red and stable square before us without also visually experiencing it as having perspectival colours and shapes, which may align with or differ from the stable ones. In Eden, bizarre perspectival properties are instantiated at every turn.

In short, the representationalist's Eden, the world as it is represented by perceptual experience, is a strange, strange place. Of course, there is much room for disagreement about my

¹⁷ But see my "Three perspectives on perspective" (forthcoming-b).

descriptions of the above-mentioned cases, but it is not my purpose here to provide a thorough defence of my description of each case. Instead, in the next section, I will suggest that if *something* along these lines is correct, there are interesting implications for the representationalist picture.

4. Attenuated representationalism

There are several observations about Eden that, taken together, lead us to a somewhat attenuated version of representationalism:

First, as we've seen, Eden is a strange place. We have contradictory and metaphysically bizarre experiences, experiences of objects existing in two places at once, partial objects existing distinctly from their corresponding wholes, space being filled and empty at the same time, and a constant flux of changing basic properties. Eden, then, is a bizarre world, rife with inconsistencies, metaphysical impossibilities, and strange occurrences.

Second, we don't really believe that we live in Eden. We don't in any sense take most of the contents of our perceptual experiences at face value. In Chalmers' allegory, we fell from Eden by eating from the Tree of Illusion and the Tree of Science, both of which led us to realise that the world is not really Edenic after all. But perhaps it would be more realistic to say that we were fallen all along. We never believed we were in Eden in the first place. Eden is the world of perception, not of belief.

Third, we don't care about the discrepancy between what we perceive and what we believe. The bizarreness of Eden does not bother us in the least, and the fact that it is far removed from how we believe the world to be does not bother us either. We are capable of navigating what we believe to be a stable and coherent world through our bizarre, inconsistent, constantly

changing, and thoroughly perspectival experiences, and we are able to adjust to changes (e.g., getting new glasses¹⁸) relatively quickly and easily. Indeed, it would be unsettling and disorienting to suddenly experience the world just as it is, with far-away objects appearing as large as nearby ones, colours that didn't change with lighting conditions, and sharp, non-blurry objects outside our focus. We are at home in a bizarre Edenic perceptual world.

I want to suggest that all this leads to an attenuated form of representationalism. But first, let us briefly consider why it should not lead us to follow Papineau in rejecting representationalism altogether. After all, many opponents of representationalism have used the case of perspectival effects, blurry vision, and other similar cases to argue against representationalism (see, e.g., Kind 2003). The anti-representationalist suggestion is that the best way to understand the relevant cases involves taking them to have mere qualia, mere felt aspects of experience that are not the representation of contents. In this way, we can entirely avoid the bizarreness of Eden—we don't perceptually represent Eden after all. Indeed, the anti-representationalist might say, we don't *believe* that the world contains objects that are both present and not present in multiple locations at the same time, that have discontinuous bits, or that have basic and constantly changing basic features. So maybe we shouldn't say that we perceptually represent it that way, either.

In order to see why we should still be representationalists despite the bizarreness of Eden, it is helpful to note that not every aspect of Eden as envisioned by the representationalist is bizarre. In Eden, there are stable colours and shapes and intact objects with sharp boundaries. Eden contains determinately-sized trees, stationary houses, and intact tables, each with their own unchanging stable colours. These "tame" features of Eden roughly correspond to the aspects of

¹⁸ Or inverted goggles (Kohler 1962).

perceptual experience that we are tempted to accept in belief.¹⁹ Of course, there might be inconsistencies between the bizarre and tame features of Eden, but this does not matter for our purposes.

The tame aspects of perceptual experience are representational. For example, it is natural to say that we perceptually represent the world as containing objects being qualified by different properties, like trees that are specific heights and walls that are stable white-and-in-shadow. These tame aspects of perceptual experience qualify as representational (at least on the notion of representation precisified as that of intentionality; see §2).

But the bizarre aspects of experience are relevantly similar to the tame ones: we also experience objects as being certain bizarre ways, like walls being basic, perspectival grey. The bizarre aspects of experience are not free-floating raw feels but rather qualified items and the items that qualify them in just the same way as the tame aspects of experience break down into objects and what qualifies them. So, the bizarre aspects of experience are just like the tame aspects in the ways relevant to the tame aspects' qualifying as representational. Tame aspects are representational, and so are bizarre aspects. If this is right, the bizarreness of Eden should not dissuade us from representationalism. It's just that the world as represented by perception is quite different from the world as represented by belief.²⁰

Still, while the bizarreness of Eden is compatible with the letter of representationalism, I want to suggest that it is in tension with the spirit of the view. Representationalism might seem to paint a picture of experience as generating a largely coherent, stable, and sensible internal model

¹⁹ An interesting hypothesis is that all or most of the tame features of Eden are represented by "higher-level" representations, like the representations involved in representing natural kinds. If so, then they might end up being represented in a different way than the bizarre features. In Mendelovici 2018, appendix D and forthcoming-a, I argue that higher-level representation is a kind of derived representation. If this is right, then the only underived, or original, representation in perception might be bizarre!

²⁰ See my 2019 for a version of this argument in the case of moods. See also Sarihan (2020), who defends representationalism from alleged counterexamples from perspectival experiences by arguing that such experiences represent contents that we don't endorse in belief.

of the world, a model that informs and justifies belief and that rationally guides behaviour.²¹ But if the previous discussion is correct, this picture is not quite right. While experience does guide belief and behaviour, it does not do so in a straightforwardly content-driven and rational way. It does not simply tell us what the world is like, putting us in a position to decide how to further our goals given this information. Instead, we learn, perhaps through trial and error, how to perform rewarding actions in response to our thoroughly perspectival and bizarre experiences. We learn to find our way around Eden. And if Eden changes, we learn to navigate our new Eden, and we do so without fuss or metaphysical reflection.

One might object that it is only the tame aspects of Eden that we use to navigate our world. But this is a mistake. The bizarre aspects of Eden are not simply stepping stones in a chain of processing that leads to a tame and stable internal representation of the world. Instead, perspectival and other bizarre contents are themselves often used to directly guide behaviour. One well-studied example of this is that of skilled baseball outfielders catching baseballs. Rather than calculating the ball's landing point based on (potentially tame) representations of its location, speed, trajectory, the wind, and other factors, they use their perspectival representations of the ball's motion and changing perspectival location to adjust their own trajectory. When all goes well, they end up at a location where they can catch the ball.²²

The upshot is that even if sensory experience is, as Papineau would put it, essentially representational, this is a far less interesting feature of experience than we might have initially supposed. The resulting view is an attenuated representationalism: representationalism is true but of less importance than we might have thought.²³

²¹ See, e.g., Tye's (2000) PANIC theory, on which the intentional states that account for phenomenal character are those that are "poised" to affect conceptual systems.

²² There are various hypotheses about how exactly this is done. See McBeath et. al. (1995), McLeod, et. al. (2002), Fink, et. al. (2009).

²³ Incidentally, this is in line with what you would expect if experience evolved to guide behaviour in the way that predictive processing models of perception suggest. According to the predictive processing picture,

This view, I want to suggest, is a view that perhaps even Papineau could accept. If Papineau takes on board the (friendly, I think) suggestion that his quasi-items count as intentional contents, this attenuated version of representationalism—which emphasises the relative unimportance of representation (in the relevant sense) to belief and rationally-guided behaviour—is a natural extension. This, of course, still leaves us with a significant disagreement: a disagreement over the source of experiential truth.²⁴

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roughly, we adjust our reactions such that we minimise predictive error (the discrepancy between expected and actual inputs), thereby improving our ability to achieve rewarding outcomes. In short (and taking immense poetic licence), we learn to get by in a messy Edenic world, unencumbered by worries about its metaphysical reality.

²⁴ Thanks to Luca Barlassina for comments on an earlier draft of this paper and to David Bourget for comments on earlier drafts and countless discussions on these and related topics.

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