

# The Representationalism versus Relationalism Debate: Explanatory Contextualism about Perception

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*Abstract:* There are two very different ways of thinking about perception. According to representationalism, perceptual states are representations: they represent the world as being a certain way. They have content, which may or may not be different from the content of beliefs. They represent objects as having properties, sometimes veridically, sometimes not. According to relationalism, perception is a relation between the agent and the perceived object. Perceived objects are literally constituents of our perceptual states and not of the contents thereof. Perceptual states are not representations. My aim is to argue that if we frame this debate as a debate about the individuation of perceptual states, rather than the nature of perception, then we can reconcile these two seemingly conflicting ways of thinking about perception.

## 1. Two Ways of Thinking about Perception

There are two very different ways of thinking about perception. The first one is this. Perceptual states are representations: they represent the world as being a certain way. They have content, which may or may not be different from the content of beliefs. They represent objects as having properties, sometimes veridically, sometimes not.

According to the other influential view, perception is a relation between the agent and the perceived object. Perceived objects are literally constituents of our perceptual states and not of the contents thereof. Perceptual states are not representations. Following John Campbell, I will label these views the 'representational' and the 'relational' view, respectively (Campbell 2002). I use these as convenient labels, but it needs to be acknowledged that both the 'representational' and the 'relational' view come in a variety of forms (see Pautz 2010 and Siegel 2010a, esp. Section 6 for rudimentary classifications).

My aim is to argue that if we frame this debate as a debate about the individuation of perceptual states, rather than the nature of perception, then there are ways of reconciling these two seemingly conflicting ways of thinking about perception.

## 2. Representationalism

Philosophers, psychologists and cognitive scientists often talk about perceptual experiences, or perceptual states in general,<sup>1</sup> as representations. Many of our

mental states are representational. Most of our emotions, for example, are about something: we are afraid *of* a lion, fond *of* chocolate mousse, etc. The same goes for beliefs, desires and imaginings. It seems natural then to suppose that perceptual states are also representations: when I see a cat, my perceptual state is about this cat: it refers to this cat. My perceptual state represents a particular as having a number of properties and the content of my perceptual state is the sum total of these properties (see Peacocke 1989, 1992; Nanay 2010a, 2013; Siegel 2010a, 2010b; Pautz forthcoming).

Describing perceptual states as representations has some important explanatory advantages (Pautz forthcoming). I will mention two of them here. It is important that these are not supposed to be knock-down arguments in favor of the representational view, but rather (non-conclusive) reasons for preferring representationalism over relationalism.

Here is one frequently cited consideration in favor of the representational view. Our beliefs can be inaccurate and so can our perceptual states. The representational view can give a simple explanation for this: both beliefs and perceptual states can fail to represent correctly; both can misrepresent. I may hallucinate that there is a cup of coffee on my desk. In this case, I am in a perceptual state that misrepresents. It represents a cup of coffee in front of me but in fact there is no cup in front of me. If we accept the representational view, hallucinations and illusions are considered to be perceptual states that misrepresent their objects.<sup>2</sup>

Another reason for being representationalist is the following. Perceptual states, whatever they are, must be able to play a role in justifying our perceptual beliefs. If perceptual states are representational, if they have content, then it is easy to see how they can play this role: a perceptual state with such and such content justifies the perceptual belief with such and such (presumably similar) content in virtue of its (similar) content. What role the content of our perceptual state plays in justifying beliefs is widely debated, but the representationalist argument is that it needs to play *some* role. Thus, if we think of perceptual states as not having content, it is not clear how we can explain perceptual justification.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to distinguish this claim from one that has received a lot of attention recently. According to some, considerations about perceptual justification put a constraint on the way we should think about the content of our perceptual states: as the content of our perceptual beliefs is conceptual, the content of our perceptual states also needs to be conceptual: perceptual states must have conceptual content, otherwise they can play no role in justifying our perceptual beliefs (McDowell 1994). Others deny this (Crane 1992; Heck 2000). But whether or not one endorses the claim that perceptual states need to have conceptual content in order to play a role in justifying our perceptual beliefs, one can maintain that perceptual states need to have *some kind* of content in order to play a role in justifying our perceptual beliefs.

Again, these two reasons for being representationalist are not conclusive. Not everyone is persuaded by them. Relationalists, for example, are not.

### 3. Relationalism

Although considering perceptual states to be representations may be a natural way of describing our perceptual system and this assumption dominated both the philosophical and the psychological research on perception, some have recently questioned this entire framework. The proposal is that perceptual states are not representations: they are constituted by the actual perceived objects. Perception is a genuine relation between the perceiver and the perceived object—and not between the agent and some abstract entity called ‘perceptual content’.

One of the arguments in favor of this ‘relational view’ is that if we assume that perception is representational, then we lose the intuitively plausible assumption that the object of perception is always a particular token object. The charge is that the representational view is committed to saying that the content of perceptual states is something general. If the content of a perceptual state is taken to be the conditions under which it represents the world correctly (Peacocke 1992), then how can this content specify a token object? It is likely to specify only the conditions a token object needs to satisfy. And then any token object that satisfies these conditions would equally qualify as the object this perceptual state represents.

Suppose that I am looking at a pillow. Replacing this pillow with another, indistinguishable, pillow would not make a difference in the content of my perceptual state. On these two occasions the content of my perceptual state is identical and the phenomenal character of my perceptual state is also identical (the two pillows are indistinguishable, after all). Thus, it seems that according to the traditional representational view, the two perceptual states themselves are identical. But their objects are very different (see Soteriou 2000 for a good summary on the particularity of perception). But if, as the relationalists emphasize, perceptual states are about something particular, then traditional representationalism must be wrong.

It is important to emphasize that this objection works against some, but not other versions of representationalism. It does seem to work against what I called ‘traditional representationalism, according to which the content of a perceptual state is the conditions under which it represents the world correctly (McGinn 1982; Burge 1989; Peacocke 1992). But it not work against relatively recent versions of representationalism that take perceptual content to be ‘Russellian’, ‘gappy’, ‘Russellian gappy’, ‘Fregean gappy’, ‘singular’, ‘object-involving’ or ‘singular-when-filled’ (see, e.g., Soteriou 2000; Martin 2002; Loar 2003; Tye 2007; Schellenberg 2010 and see Chalmers 2004, 2006; Siegel 2006b, Bach 2007 for discussion—I will say more about these theories in Section 7). According to these newer representationalist accounts, as perceptual content is determined, partly, by the token perceived object, our perceptual state when we are looking at the two indistinguishable pillow is different—just as the relationalist claims.<sup>4</sup> In spite of the differences between the traditional and the more recent (object-involving, gappy, Russellian) versions of representationalism, they share a

commitment that perceptual states are representations. The main argument of this paper (unlike the problem of particularity of perception) applies to them equally.

It has been suggested that the real question that representationalists and relationalists disagree about is not whether these two perceptual states (of seeing two indistinguishable pillows) are different or the same, but whether these two perceptual states belong to 'the same fundamental kind' (Martin 2004: 39, p. 43). The representational view says they do; the relational view says they don't. Belonging to a 'fundamental kind' is supposed to 'tell what essentially the event or episode is' (Martin 2006: 361, see also Byrne and Logue 2008, especially section 7.1, for a thorough analysis of the 'fundamental kind' version of the relational view). I will come back to this argument in the second half of the paper.

Another reason for being relationalist is the following. Perceptual states, whatever they are, must be able to ground our demonstrative thoughts. As John Campbell put it, 'a characterization of the phenomenal content of experience of objects has to show how it is that experience, so described, can be what makes it possible for us to think about those objects demonstratively' (Campbell 2002: 114).

Campbell argues that the relational view can fulfill this explanatory task, whereas the representational view cannot. His example is the following. Suppose that I am eavesdropping on my neighbor's daily activities, while I have never been in his apartment. On the basis of the sound of his electric razor, I come to the conclusion that he has a mirror on the wall that divides his apartment from mine. I can have thoughts about this mirror and I can refer to it. After years of eavesdropping, I finally get to see my neighbor's apartment and the mirror on the wall as well. As Campbell says, 'the contrast between the knowledge you have now, on the basis of a look at the objects and the knowledge you had before of the existence of objects with particular functional roles, is that when you see the thing, you are confronted by the individual substance itself. On seeing it, you no longer have knowledge of the object merely as the postulated occupant of a particular functional role. Your experience of the object, when you see it, provides you with knowledge of the categorical grounds of the collections of dispositions you had earlier postulated' (Campbell 2002: 114–5).

If we think of perceptual states the way the representationalist does, we cannot account for this difference, since, according to the representational view, perceptual states can only specify the 'existence of objects with particular functional roles' or 'the postulated occupant of a particular functional role'. The representationalist cannot account for the fact that perception 'can confront you with the individual substance itself, the categorical basis of the dispositional relations in which the object may stand to other things' (Campbell 2002: 116). In short, the representational view cannot account for the genuine relation between the agent and a token object, which is supposed to serve as the ground for our demonstrative thoughts. Note that this argument may work against traditional versions of representationalism, but not against those versions that take

perceptual content to be 'Russellian', 'gappy', 'Russellian gappy', 'Fregean gappy', 'singular', 'object-involving' or 'singular-when-filled' (see references above). These versions of representationalism would in fact endorse the claim that perception 'can confront you with the individual substance itself' (although this substance is conceived of as (part of) the perceptual content).

Finally, an important inspiration for the relational view is direct (or naïve) realism: the view that what we are directly aware of is the external object itself (see esp. Martin forthcoming). And if, as the relational view suggests, perception is a relation between the perceiver and the external object itself, then it is difficult to see what else could be the direct object of our perception than the external object itself. The relational view delivers direct realism.

The claim is not that *only* the relational view can deliver direct realism. Some versions of the representational view are not only consistent with, but also clearly inspired by direct realist considerations (see, Pautz forthcoming for a summary). But if we accept the relational view of perception, direct realism comes for free.

#### 4. Individuating Perceptual States

The difference between the relational and the representational view of perception is usually considered to be a debate about the nature of perception: is perception essentially a representation or is it a relation? I will argue that the difference between the relational and the representational view of perception could be framed in such a way that it does not concern the nature of perception, but rather the individuation of perceptual states.

Representationalism could be rephrased as a view about a necessary condition for individuating perceptual states. If two perceptual states are the same, then the properties attributed perceptually to the perceived object perceptually must also be the same.<sup>5</sup> For some representationslists (see, e.g., Peacocke 1992), this is also a sufficient condition for the individuation of perceptual states: they claim that if two perceptual states are different, then the properties attributed to the perceived object perceptually must also be different. But this stronger claim is not endorsed by all proponents of representationalism (for example, by those more recent representationalists who think of content as 'object-involving', 'gappy', 'Russellian', etc; they do accept the necessary condition though).

The relational view individuates perceptual states very differently from the representational view. For the relationalist, two perceptual states must be different if their objects are different, even if the properties attributed to these objects are the same. Again, this is a necessary condition for the individuation of perceptual states, not a sufficient one. Some relationalists seem to add that the only thing that is relevant in individuating perceptual states is the perceived object. As John Campbell says, 'two ordinary observers standing in roughly the same place, looking at the same scene, are bound to have experiences with the same phenomenal character' (Campbell 2002: 116). But this stronger claim is not

endorsed by the entire relationalist camp (and maybe not even my Campbell elsewhere).

In short, they set different necessary conditions on the individuation of perceptual states: (REP) and (REL):

(REP) Two perceptual states are different if the properties perceptually attributed to the perceived scene are different

(REL) Two perceptual states are different if the perceived objects are different.

But this way of framing the relationalism vs. representationalism debate raises the following simple and obvious question: Do we need to always individuate perceptual states in the same way? Couldn't the individuation of perceptual states be relative to the explanatory project?

### 5. Individuation and the Explanatory Project

The proposal is that we should not look for *the* one and only way to individuate perceptual states. The individuation of perceptual states is relative to the explanatory project. In the case of some explanatory projects, we should use (REP), in some other cases we should use (REL).

Take the thorny issue of individuating biological traits as an analogy (see Nanay 2010c). What makes wings different from non-wings? The answer to this question seems to depend on the explanatory project. There are (at least) three different ways of individuating biological traits: by (a) functional criteria, (b) morphological criteria and (c) homological criteria.

- (a) *Functional criteria*: A token object belongs to trait type T if and only if it has certain functional properties: if it has the function to do F. Those entities are hearts that have the function of pumping blood. Those entities that do not have this function are not hearts. As Karen Neander puts it: 'Most biological categories are only definable in functional terms' (Neander 1991: 180, See also Beckner 1959, 112; Lewens 2004, 99, see also Burge 1989, 312).
- (b) *Morphological criteria*: A token object belongs to trait type T if and only if it has certain morphological properties. An entity is a heart if, for example, it has a certain shape, size and color, and it is not a heart otherwise.
- (c) *Homological criteria*: One could argue that what guarantees that two traits are tokens of the same type is that they are homologues: they have common descent; they are members of the same 'reproductively established family' (Millikan 1984; Roth 1984: 17; Amundson and Lauder 1994; Lauder 1994; Wagner 1994; Lewens 2004: 99–100).

The important point is that none of these three criteria for individuating biological traits apply in all possible cases (see, e.g., Neander 2002; Griffiths 2006). Further, the very same token trait is typed differently, depending on the

explanatory task at hand. A quick example: Paleontologists do not consider the forelegs of an ancient amphibian to be wings. But embryologists do consider the morphologically very similar trait of the embryos of birds to be wings. Biologists and philosophers of biology then gave up on trying to find one unified theory of trait type individuation: in different explanatory contexts, we should use different criteria for individuating biological traits (Nanay 2010c, see also Nanay 2011d, 2012a; Neander and Rosenberg 2012). My suggestion is that philosophers of perception would be well advised to make the same move.

We can extend these considerations to the individuation of perceptual states. If the individuation of biological traits depends on the explanatory task at hand, why should we suppose that the individuation of perceptual states does not?

Our perceptual system is an evolved mechanism. Just like birds' wings. Thus, if we have good reasons to doubt that there is one and only one way of individuating wings, we also have a *prima facie* reason to doubt that there is one and only one way of individuating perceptual states. If the individuation of other biological traits depends on the explanatory project, we should expect that so does the individuation of perceptual states (see Matthen 1998 for a similar point). Here is why: perceptual states are states in the perceptual system, that is, in an evolved biological mechanism. And as the individuation of the states of other evolved biological mechanisms, like the *systole* and *diastole* states of the heart, the individuation of the states of our perceptual system is also sensitive to the explanatory project at hand. If we have good reasons to doubt that there is one and only one way of individuating the *systole* state of the heart, we also have good reason to doubt that there is one and only one way of individuating perceptual states.

Thus, the proposal is that the individuation of perceptual states, like the individuation of biological traits in general, also depends on the explanatory task at hand. If a vision scientist is doing research on the shape-recognition mechanisms of the human perceptual system, she will be unlikely to individuate perceptual states according to (REL), but she will rather use (REP): what matters for this specific explanatory project is the properties that are perceptually attributed and the mechanism that attributes them. It is not particularly important (again, in this specific explanatory project) what token entities these properties are attributed to. Conversely, if a psychologist or philosopher is enquiring into the differences and similarities between vision and visual imagery, then (REL) may be a helpful way of individuating perceptual states—(REP) may be less relevant.

Just as it is pointless to debate about whether the functional or the homological criterion is the best way of individuating trait types in general, it is also pointless to debate about whether (REP) or (REL) is the best way of individuating perceptual states in general (see Section 7 for a potential objection to this claim). It is a valid question to ask whether it is better to use functional or homological criteria in a certain specific context—for example, when individuating the forelegs of ancient amphibians. And, similarly, it is also a valid question to ask whether it is better to use (REP) or (REL) in a certain specific context. But we have no reason to suppose that the answer will be the same in all explanatory projects.

In other words, we should not look for *the* one and only way to individuate perceptual states. The individuation of perceptual states is relative to the explanatory project. In the case of some explanatory projects, we should use (REP), in some other cases we should use (REL).

### 6. Anti-Essentialism about Perceptual States

This way of resolving the representationalism versus relationalism debate implies denying an implicit essentialist assumption. If we accept that the individuation of perceptual states depends on the explanatory project at hand, then we have to reject the assumption that perceptual states come regimented into 'fundamental kinds' and, as a result, we also have to reject that, as Martin suggests, this tell us 'what essentially the event or episode is' (Martin 2006: 361).<sup>6</sup>

Conversely, one way of denying the plausibility of the proposal that the individuation of perceptual states depends on the explanatory project at hand would be to insist on essentialism about perceptual states: on the claim that perceptual states form natural kinds with essential properties: properties all and only members of a certain kind have and they do so in all possible worlds.<sup>7</sup>

The essentialist response would then be the following. Chemical kinds, according to some, have essential properties (Kripke 1972; Putnam 1975). There is a property, for example, that all and only pieces of gold have and they have it in all possible world (supposedly, the property of having a specific atomic structure). It would be odd to suggest that the individuation of chemical elements depends on the explanatory task at hand. There may be explanatory tasks where we lump chemical elements together, but *any* attempt at the individuation of chemical elements would need to be based on the periodic table. And if we endorse essentialism about perceptual states, the same is true of the individuation of perceptual states. Any attempt at individuating perceptual states would need to be based on the equivalent of the 'periodic table' in the case of perception. And the problem is that this 'periodic table' of perceptual states will look very different depending on whether we accept representationism or relationalism.

How could we defend my proposal against this essentialist argument? The first thing to note is how *ad hoc* this argument is. It proposes an analogy between chemical and perceptual kinds. But why should we model our metaphysical picture of perceptual states on chemistry? Aren't there natural kinds other than chemical ones that would serve as better analogy? Indeed, there are: biological kinds. Biology has always been considered to be a problem case for essentialism or at least a potential exemption. According to the traditional 'anti-essentialist consensus' (Okasha 2002: 195; Walsh 2006, 325) among biologists and philosophers of biology, essentialism about biological kinds is false (Hull 1965; Ghiselin 1974; Dupré 1986, 2002; Hacking 2007a; Nanay 2010b; Nanay 2011a, Ereshefsky ms, but see Okasha 2002; Griffiths 1999 and Walsh 2006, Devitt ms for dissenting views). Essentialism about chemical kinds may be correct, but biological kinds

do not have (and cannot have) any essential properties (Wilkerson 1995; Ellis 2001). Why is it that biological kinds are different in as much as they do not have essential properties? Without going into the details of the biological anti-essentialism literature, the reason is that biological kinds are evolved kinds (it is not clear what aspect of evolution militates against essentialism, see Mayr 1959; Hull 1965; Ghiselin 1974; Sober 1980; Dupré 2002 and Nanay 2010b, 2011a for various versions of this claim). But so are perceptual kinds. Our perceptual system is an evolved mechanism, much like any other biological mechanisms we have. Thus, it seems that we are more justified to use biology, rather than chemistry, as a model for understanding the individuation of perceptual states.

But not everyone would agree that perceptual kinds should be analyzed on the analogy of biological kinds. And in fact, it has been suggested that we need to make a distinction between biological kinds on the one hand and human kinds, social kinds or psychological kind on the other (Dupré 1986; Elder 1989; Hacking 1995, 2007b, forthcoming; Machery 2005). And perceptual states would presumably fall in one of the latter categories. Note, however, that those who insist on the difference between biological kinds versus human, social and psychological kinds take the latter kinds to have no essential properties. They draw this distinction because they are less, and not more, essentialist about human/social/psychological kinds than biological ones (see esp. Dupré 1986; Hacking 1995; Machery 2005). Thus, if we go along with these proposals and treat perceptual states on the analogy of human/social/psychological kinds, then we have even more reason to resist essentialism about perceptual states.

In short, my proposal about the relativity of the individuation of perceptual states to the explanatory project works even if we endorse an extremely weak version of anti-essentialism. It does not require anti-essentialism across the board. Nor does it require anti-essentialism about biological kinds. And endorsing this very weak version of anti-essentialism may not be such a high price to pay for dissolving a major debate in the philosophy of perception, and one that does not seem to be approaching anything reminiscent of a consensus. In fact, this may give us some reason (regardless of whether we have essentialist or anti-essentialist leanings in general) to accept anti-essentialism about perceptual states.

## 7. An Objection

I said that endorsing essentialism would be one way of denying my main proposal. But it is not the only way. One could argue that the individuation of perceptual states is not sensitive to the explanatory project: there is one and only one metaphysically correct way of individuating perceptual states, but we do not need to endorse essentialism in order to do so.<sup>8</sup>

There are two versions of this objection that need to be distinguished. There are two options: this one and only one metaphysically correct way of individuating perceptual states either has some kind of epistemic import or it does not.

If it has no epistemic import, then this one and only one metaphysically correct way of individuating perceptual states is clearly irrelevant for the relationalism versus representationalism debate: it cannot help us to resolve this debate. Maybe it is true, metaphysically speaking, that there is one and only one way of individuating perceptual states, but this way of individuating perceptual states is not accessible to us.

If, on the other hand, the one and only one metaphysically correct way of individuating perceptual states does have an epistemic import, then the objection does get off the ground. If one of the two competing views of the individuation of perceptual states, or maybe a third one, is the metaphysically correct one, then this could help us to reconcile the two competing camps.

Here is one way of substantiating this general proposal—not the only way, but the most plausible one I could come up with.<sup>9</sup> As both (REP) and (REL) are necessary conditions, couldn't we come up with a way of individuating perceptual states that makes both (REP) and (REL) true? If this proposal for individuating perceptual states makes at least some representationalists and relationalists happy, the objection goes, we have no reason to turn to the more radical move of making the individuation of perceptual states sensitive to the explanatory project. Let us see what this new individuation condition would be:

(REP&REL) Two perceptual states are different if the perceived objects are different or if the properties perceptually attributed to these objects are different.

(REP&REL) could be thought to satisfy both representationalists and relationalists.<sup>10</sup> In fact, it may seem that the most plausible versions of both the relational and the representational view endorse something like (REP&REL). Let us take representationalism and relationalism in turns.

Those representationalists who want to deny (unlike Peacocke 1992) that the content of perceptual states is the conditions under which this state is correct need to allow for the token perceived object to play some role in individuating perceptual states. And this is exactly what those representationalist accounts do that aim to capture some of the relationalist intuitions and construe the content of perceptual states as 'Russellian', 'gappy', 'Russellian gappy', 'Fregean gappy', 'singular', 'object-involving' or 'singular-when-filled' (see, e.g., Soteriou 2000; Martin 2002; Loar 2003; Tye 2007; Schellenberg 2010 and see Chalmers 2004, 2006; Siegel 2006b; Bach 2007 for discussion). Those who take the content of perceptual states to be object-involving or gappy, already endorse something like (REP&REL) as a necessary condition for individuating perceptual states.<sup>11</sup>

But (REP&REL) seems to be a good bet for the relationalist too. Remember Campbell, who clearly would not endorse (REP&REL): 'two ordinary observers standing in roughly the same place, looking at the same scene, are bound to have experiences with the same phenomenal character' (Campbell 2002: 116). It is easy to see that this view ignores the differences in attention between these two ordinary observers.<sup>12</sup> If the two ordinary observers attend to different features of the perceived scene, their perceptual states will be different (see the rich

literature on inattentional blindness and Nanay 2010a for a philosophical summary). Thus, the view according to which perceptual states are individuated by the perceived scene alone does not seem to be the best bet for the relationalist. If they want to allow for differences in attention to play a role in individuating perceptual states, relationalists may want to endorse something like (REP&REL).

The problem with (REP&REL) is that it individuates perceptual states too finely. It is difficult to see how two different token perceptual episodes could count as being the same. What David Lewis said about property-types is also true of individuation conditions: "If it's distinctions we want, too much structure is no better than none" (Lewis 1983: 346).

(REP&REL) individuates so finely that it would make any representationalist or relationalist explanation difficult. Relationalists would want to say that staring at an apple would count as one perceptual state even if my attention flickers or if the lights across the street are suddenly switched off, bringing about a slight change in illumination. But if we accept (REP&REL), then we have a sequence of different (albeit quite similar) perceptual states because if we accept (REP&REL) as a necessary condition for individuating perceptual states, then, presumably, any change in one's attention or the illumination conditions would bring about a new perceptual state. Similar considerations apply in the case of the representationalist. (REP&REL) is too fine-grained to be of much practical use.

Further, although both some representationalists and some relationalists may accept (REP&REL) as a necessary condition for individuating perceptual states, they may still disagree about how to type perceptual states. Suppose that you are looking at a pillow, which then, unbeknownst to you, gets replaced by another, seemingly identical pillow. If we individuate perceptual states according to (REP&REL), then these two perceptual states are different. But do they belong to the same type? Do they belong to 'the same fundamental kind' (Martin 2004: 39, p. 43)?

The representational view still says they do; the relational view still says they don't. Belonging to a 'fundamental kind' is supposed to 'tell what essentially the event or episode is' (Martin 2006: 361). Thus, even if the representationalist and the relationalist can agree on how to individuate perceptual states, they will disagree about how to partition these perceptual states into 'fundamental kinds'. In other words, they will disagree about how to individuate types of perceptual states: according to their objects (relationalism) or according to the properties attributed to them (representationalism). The difference between (REP) and (REL) will reoccur on a different level:

(REP\*) Two perceptual states belong to different 'fundamental kinds' if the properties perceptually attributed to the perceived scene are different.

(REL\*) Two perceptual states belong to different 'fundamental kinds' if the perceived objects are different.

In short, although (REP&REL) may seem to be a good bet for those who want to deny explanatory contextualism about perception, the debate between the

relationalist and the representationalist could not be resolved by accepting (REP&REL) as individuation conditions for perceptual states.

## 8. Conclusion

I argued that the debate between representational and the relational view of perception cannot be settled in absolute terms. Sometimes, in certain explanatory contexts, we are better off thinking about perception the way the relationalist does and individuating perceptual states along the lines of (REL). But in some other explanatory contexts, (REP) may be a better bet. The representationalism vs. relationalism debate does not have a universal solution.<sup>13</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Some versions of both relationalism and of representationalism are about perceptual *experiences*. I will talk about perceptual *states* in general (not assuming that they need to be conscious).

<sup>2</sup> It is important that there are other, non-representational, ways of explaining how our perceptual states can be wrong (Travis 2004; Brewer 2006, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Of course, not everyone agrees that perceptual states justify beliefs. Here is Davidson's famous statement, for example: "No doubt meaning and knowledge depends on experience and experience ultimately on sensation. But this is the 'depend' of causality, not of evidence or justification" (Davidson 1983/2001, p. 146).

<sup>4</sup> For a different way of accommodating the particularity of perception in a representationalist framework, see Nanay 2012b.

<sup>5</sup> The range of these 'perceptually attributed properties' is debated even within the representationalist camp, see Siegel 2006a, Nanay 2011b, 2011c, 2012b, 2012c, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> As a result, Martin may not go along with the compromise I outlined here. Thus, my suggested compromise, not surprisingly, is unlikely to be accepted by everyone involved in this debate. But if resisting this compromise involves endorsing essentialism about perceptual states, then many will find this too high a metaphysical price to pay—as I argue in what follows.

<sup>7</sup> Kripke's Lecture 3 in his Kripke 1972 could be interpreted as making a similar claim. As he says: "if something is a pain it is essentially so, and it seems absurd to suppose that

pain could have been some phenomenon other than the one it is" (Kripke 1972: 148, see also Soames 2002: 253 for a nice analysis of the ambiguities of Kripke's argument). But it is important to note that Kripke's (much criticized) claim is about *sensations* like pain. Thus, it is unclear how his considerations could be generalized to perceptual experiences let alone (conscious or unconscious) perceptual states in general (although he seems to suggest at one point (without offering any argument for this claim) that his claim applies to all mental phenomena, see Kripke 1972, p. 152).

<sup>8</sup> A structurally similar objection was given in Johnston 2007, pp. 241–242, against an anthropocentric notion of the causal connection. The objection I consider in this section is that a parallel argument could be made about the individuation of perceptual states.

<sup>9</sup> Needless to say that by pointing out that one way of substantiating the general proposal I am criticizing here does not work does not imply that no way of substantiating this general proposal works. But I find it difficult to come up with a way of substantiating this general proposal that is more plausible than the one I am criticizing.

<sup>10</sup> Some relationalists will undoubtedly object to the representational language of 'perceptually attributed properties' in (REP&REL). As we shall see, there are deeper problems with this proposal.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that other representationalists, notably those, like Peacocke, who take (REP) to be not only a necessary, but also a sufficient condition for individuating perceptual states will not accept (REP&REL).

<sup>12</sup> It needs to be acknowledged that Campbell, of course, says a lot about the role attention plays in our perceptual experience—nonetheless, he seems to be committed (at least in the quoted text) to saying that we can individuate perceptual states without any reference to attention.

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