



CONSCIOUS PERCEPTION IN FAVOUR OF ESSENTIAL INDEXICALITY

Abstract: *It has been widely acknowledged that indexical thought poses a problem for traditional theories of mental content. However, recent work in philosophy has defied this received view and challenged its defenders not to rely on intuitions but rather to clearly articulate what the problem is supposed to be. For example, in “The Inessential Indexical”, Cappelen and Dever claim that there are no philosophically interesting or important roles played by essential indexical representations. This paper assesses the role of essential indexicality in understanding the content of perception and argues that, if the perceptual experiences of different subjects can have the same phenomenology, and thus share a representational content (phenomenal content)—assumptions shared by a well-established research project, including a wide variety of theories—, then phenomenal content exhibit a particular kind of essential indexicality (perspectival). I also discuss how the argument is immune to Cappelen and Dever’s objections to the idea that the content of perceptual experiences is essentially indexical.*

Keywords: *Conscious perception, perspectival content, de se representation, essential indexical, phenomenal information.*

1. Perception and the Problem of Essential Indexical

It is widely accepted that we sometimes represent the world from a point of view. For example, I believe that I live in Mexico City, desire that it doesn’t rain now, and perceive that there is a cup of coffee in front of me. The content of these representations is typically captured deploying an indexical expression. Indexical expressions are expressions that seem to have different references in different contexts in which the content is expressed. Examples of indexical expressions are ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘mine’, ‘now’, ‘tomorrow’, ‘some time ago’, ‘here’, ‘over there’, ‘this’, ‘that’, etc.¹ We can call ‘indexical thoughts’ to those mental representations whose content is expressed by deploying an indexical expression.

Perry (1979) and Lewis (1979) argued that there are indexical ways of representing the world that cannot be reduced to non-indexical ways

1 In this paper I remain neutral on possible reductive relation between indexicals; e.g. ‘here’ as equivalent to ‘my location’.

of representing. Perry and Lewis focus on beliefs and hence, assuming the canonical way to individuate thoughts² in terms of an attitude (e.g. believe) toward a content, the issue can be expressed in terms of the content.³ Indexical thoughts have been taken to be special because traditional theories of content cannot offer a proper characterization of them. They have a special content that is not adequately expressed in the absence of an indexical expression, and for this reason they are often called ‘Essential Indexical’. However, there is a recent agreement that Perry’s and Lewis’ examples are insufficient to establish that a special kind of content must be attributed to indexical thoughts and that there is such a thing as *essential indexicality*.⁴ Cappelen and Dever (2013; henceforth C&D) summarize the idea when they claim that “the considerations coming out of the Perry-Lewis tradition give us no reason to change our theory of content, and provide no evidence that there are philosophically interesting or important roles played by non-constant characters.” (p. 16) The challenge for those who think that there is essential indexicality is to provide arguments that show that there is some philosophically interesting role that indexical representations play that cannot be played by non-indexical ones, and that such representations are “special” in that classical theories fail to capture the nature of their content.

If we look for the need of indexical representations, it is natural to think of the first-person point of view in our conscious experiences. Moreover, focusing on our conscious experience, and perception in particular, is especially important because, as C&D stress, if there are essential indexical thoughts we should expect an essential indexical element in the representations that work as input of other thoughts. Otherwise, if “all of your perceptual contents were objective and non-perspectival, but [...] the beliefs you formed on the basis of those perceptions were frequently perspectival [...] how are your perceptual states going to justify beliefs which systematically turn out to be about something quite different from what is perceptually presented?” (p. 140). C&D devote chapter 8 to deal with the content of perception. They note that although the perspectival nature of conscious perception is often assumed, there are not many arguments in the literature intending to show that its content is special and to what extent.

2 See Fodor (1987, p. 11). According to such a canonical way to individuate thoughts, my belief and my desire *that it rains now* have the same content and their difference is explained in terms of a difference in attitude, whereas differences among thoughts that involve the same attitude, belief for example, are explained by a difference in content.

3 This would not be Perry’s preferred way to present the discussion because he makes a different use of the technical term ‘content’ abandoning the canonical way to individuate thoughts. Nothing hinges in the preferred use of the terms. For discussion of the relation between indexical thought content and Perry’s *belief states* see Torre (2018).

4 See e.g. Boer and Lycan (1980), Cappelen and Dever (2013), Devitt (2013), Douven (2013), García-Carpintero (2017), Ninan (2016), Magidor (2015), Shaw (2020), Spencer (2007), Torre (2018). See Morgan and Salje (2020) for a recent review.

This paper contributes to show that the content of perceptual experience is, at least some-times, essentially indexical. For this purpose, in section 2 I review C&D's discussion of the arguments in favor of essential indexicality from perception. In section 3, I discuss a refined version of those arguments in terms of the current dispute over essential indexicality and, in section 4, I critically assess some possible replies that the skeptic might offer. I conclude that C&D have misestimated the role that conscious perception plays in the vindication of essential indexicality.

2. Arguments from Perception

If our perceptual experiences convey the presence of mind-independent entities, they do so, at least typically, relative to the subject's location. The content of our perceptual experience is often specified by the use of indexical expressions like 'here', 'over there', 'in front of me', 'behind me', 'now', 'a moment ago', etc.⁵ Following Siegel (2011), C&D agree that we naturally describe perceptual content using indexicals, but they note that the question at stake is whether perceptual content *must* be specified that way. C&D claim that it can be expressed by non-indexical means.

Consider the following situation. John and Berit are in different locations but they hear a qualitatively identical sound coming from their left. Herman is in the same location as Berit but facing her. Herman hears the sound coming from his right. The challenge that C&D take to face is to express what is intuitively common between John and Berit and what is different between Berit and Herman. According to C&D, we do not need indexical expressions to characterize any of this. Accounting for the difference is simple, and there is no problem to attribute different non-indexical contents to Berit's experiences—such-and-such sound is coming from Berit's left—and to Herman's experience—such-and-such sound is coming from Herman's left. C&D think that this sort of content attribution can also explain what is common between Berit and John: "each is an x such that x hears S as coming from x 's right" (p.144). This explanation denies that Berit's and John's experience have a common content and explains what is common instead in terms of a common relation to the contents they have. But they remark that, even if one insists that we should explain what is common in terms of a common content, there is still no argument for essential indexicality.

An attempt to offer such an argument is found in Brogaard's (2009) reply to Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009). Brogaard argues that propositions do not instantiate the property of truth or falsity simpliciter but rather relative truth or falsity. The interesting point for current purposes is her defense

5 Those who think that there is a *sense of mineness* constitutive of phenomenology would be inclined to think that phenomenal content is always first-personal; for recent discussion see Guillot and García-Carpintero (forthcoming); Sebastián (2012, forthcoming).

of the claim that the content of perceptual experience does not instantiate such a property. Brogaard offers two arguments in favor of this claim, the first one resting on the empirical assumption that there is variability in color perception and the theoretical assumption that weak representationalism is true; and the second one resting solely on weak representationalism. I will focus on the later one for it has weaker premises.⁶ According to Brogaard, weak representationalism “is the view that the phenomenology of perceptual experience *determines* the content of perceptual experience” (p.221, my emphasis). A position she takes to be endorsed by author like Chalmers (2004), Siegel (2010) and Tye (2002)—something that C&D dispute (ch.8 fn.4)—and to be “exceedingly plausible” (p.222). She presents the argument in the following paragraph:

When I look at two trees at different distances from me, I can see that one tree is further away from me than the other. Moreover, it is plausible that you and I can have perceptual experiences with the same phenomenology of the two trees (perhaps at different times). By weak representationalism, our experiences have the same content. So, our perceptual experiences cannot contain you or me in the content of perception. Rather, they must contain semantic values that have extensions only relative to perceivers. Hence, the contents of our experiences do not instantiate the fundamental monadic properties of truth simpliciter and falsity simpliciter. (ibid. pp. 221–222)

If the argument is compelling, it remains to be seen what the relation between a content not instantiating the property of truth simpliciter and essential indexicality, because as C&D stress “what is important here is not whether we place the perceiving subject “in the content” or not, but whether that perceiving subject has to be represented in a distinctly *de se* or indexical way. Nothing in the arguments here even starts to motivate the latter idea” (p.148).

To illustrate their point they invite us to consider Maeve, who has a non-standard perceptual system sensitive to how things are around someone else, Brigid, rather than how things stand around her (perhaps via a camera attached to Brigid feeding a signal to Maeve’s brain). C&D argue, on the basis of this case, that there is no need for a distinctively first-person feature in the perceptual content. They affirm that Maeve’s experience represents how things are around Brigid. They take this example to show that mere indexicalized truth is not enough for essential indexicality, because indexed truth can be interpreted non-indexically —Maeve can have perceptual contents that have

6 A similar argument is attributed to Chalmers (2006) by C&D. Chalmers remarks, in relation to the *de se* phenomenon, that his argument demands that “the perceiver is picked out under an indexical mode of presentation that can be shared between two different perceivers” (p. 60). However, as the skeptic argues, this is insufficient to establish the need of a special kind of content, and Chalmers himself notes that the argument does not depend on the use of centered worlds semantics to characterize phenomenal content.

no absolute truth conditions, but whose role in Maeve's perceptual system is to be true relative to Brigid.

C&D offer a similar reply to Shroeder and Caplan (ch. 8, fn. 6). Schoder and Caplan (2007) argue that subjects can have experiences that are phenomenologically indistinguishable but with different veridicality conditions. In this case, explaining sameness in phenomenology in terms of sameness of non-indexical content is problematic. In reply, C&D propose a lambda extracted content for explaining sameness in phenomenology. In the previous example, the proposed content would be λx . *there is such-and-such sound to the left of x* , a predicate that denotes the property of *being an x such that there is such-and-such sound to its left*. They deny that such a content is a carrier of veridicality, leaving no reason to introduce indexicalized truth-relative content. Moreover, as they claim in reply to Brogaard, even if indexicalized contents were introduced, it is not clear that they amount to the introduction of anything essentially indexical:

True essential indexicality would, for example, distinguish between the claim that Maeve had indexed-truth perceptual states whose veridicality conditions were true relative to Maeve and the claim that Maeve had indexed-truth perceptual states whose veridicality conditions were truth relative to herself. Only the latter would have the *de se* element characteristic of the (putatively) essentially indexical, and nothing in the various arguments from perception imposes a requirement specifically for the latter. (p.149)

Attending these issues and making explicit the relation between indexicalized truth, the subject being placed in the content, and essential indexicality is precisely the aim of the next section. I will come back to the objections of C&D in section 4.

3. A Refined Version in Light of the Current Debate

3.1 *A characterization of the Current Debate*

As I have remarked, the challenge for those who think that there is essential indexicality is to show that there is some philosophically interesting or important roles played by indexical content that non-indexical content cannot play, and that such indexical content is special in that traditional theories of content cannot accommodate it. To begin with, we should get clear about how “traditional theories” of mental content are characterized. There is plenty of disagreement among traditional theories regarding the kind of entities that contents are supposed to be: Fregean senses, classes of possible worlds, complexes of objects and properties, sentences in the language of thought, etc. However, traditional theories agree that contents are the kind of entities that have truth value and satisfy the following two conditions (Kölbel, 2013, Ninan 2016, Perry, 1979):

Global: The truth value of the content depends only on the way the world turns out to be; i.e., given a complete description of the world, we can assign contents a truth value. In this sense, contents have a *global* or *absolute* truth value, they are assigned the same truth value for any location or point of evaluation (e.g. space, time or subject) within a world.

Portable: Mental representations with the very same content can be entertained by different subjects, at different places and different times. In this sense they are *portable* or *shareable*.

To a first approximation we can think of essentially indexical contents⁷ as those contents expressed by an indexical expression that are either NOT-GLOBAL or NOT-PORTABLE, and hence cannot be accommodated by traditional theories of mental content. Those who are skeptic about essential indexicality (e.g. C&D; Magidor, 2015) maintain that there is no reason to abandon either PORTABLE or GLOBAL. They acknowledge that there is a difference in cognitive significance between my belief that I live in Mexico City and my belief that Sebastián lives in Mexico City (where I happen to be Sebastián). However, they claim that this case is no different from other cases of change in cognitive significance involving co-referential terms, as it happens in Frege's famous example of Hesperus and Phosphorus—cf. Perry 2001b. On the other hand, those who think that there is such a thing as essential indexicality fall into one of two groups depending on whether they reject GLOBAL or PORTABLE. We can call 'globalists' to the former and 'portabilists' to the latter.

The globalist agree with the skeptic that indexical thoughts involve differences in cognitive significance of co-referential terms, but they think that PORTABLE should be abandoned because essential indexicality involves some sort of exclusive access. A classical illustration of this view is Frege's idea that in first-person thought the subject is presented to themselves in "a particular and primitive way" in which they are presented to no-one else (1956, p. 298). For analogous reasons, the globalist view is also illustrated by those who think that indexical content is a reflexive singular content—in the previous example something like the singular proposition expressed by *the thinker of this very thought lives in Mexico City*—because they deny that two different thoughts can have the same reflexive content—e.g. García-Carpintero (2017); Perry (2001a, 2001b). The defense of a globalist view depends then on there being philosophically interesting or important roles played by content that can be entertained exclusively from a particular location in logical space.

Alternatively, the *portabilist* rejects GLOBAL. For example, Lewis thinks that when you and I have the belief that we would express by uttering 'I live in Mexico City', we have beliefs with the same content. The content is then

⁷ For discussion of the relation between indexical thought and content see Torre (2018).

a property—that of living in Mexico City—that we both self-attribute. This understanding of the content of belief in terms of self-attributed properties can be translated into a canonical relation between a subject and a truth evaluable content, as Lewis remarks, simply by letting contents be classes of centered worlds—ordered pairs of worlds and centers.⁸ Now, if you do not live in Mexico City, then I have the property that I am self-attributing but you are not, and your belief is false while mine is true. Considering that we both inhabit the same world, global must be rejected because fixing the way the world turns out to be does not suffice to fix the truth value of the content. It is worth stressing that, in this case, the entity that one would take to be the reference of the indexical expression cannot be part of the portabilist content, because the entity that one would take to be the reference of 'I' in your case and mine would be different; and if it were part of the content we could not share the content. In this sense, one can think of this content as involving a perspective that different particulars can occupy, and we can call indexical content that is PORTABLE and NOT-GLOBAL '*perspectival*'. The defense of a portabilist view—the existence of perspectival content—depends then on there being philosophically interesting or important roles played by this sort of not-referentially anchored content. Lewis offers one such argument based on sameness in belief of physical duplicates but such an internalism is rejected by C&D. In the next section, I discuss an argument in favor of perspectival content based on the content of conscious perception.

3.2 *The Revised Argument from Phenomenology*

Along the lines of previous work (Sebastián 2022, MS), I am going to argue that phenomenal content is, at least sometimes, *perspectival* (PORTABLE and NOT-GLOBAL) on the basis of widely accepted premises regarding the phenomenology of experience and its relation to content, focusing on perceptual experiences whose content is expressed deploying an indexical expression. This requires certain clarification to begin with.

By the *phenomenology* or *phenomenal character* of an experience I refer to *what it is like for the subject* to have the experience (Nagel, 1974/2002). In the intended use of the term, phenomenology is constitutive of experiences in general and perceptual experiences in particular (Siegel, 2011). Two token experiences E_1 and E_2 belong to the same phenomenological type if and only if E_1 and E_2 have the same phenomenology. And two token experiences are considered to have the same phenomenology just in case they are phenomenally indistinguishable in ideal conditions—abstracting away from the discriminatory and memory limitations. Now, I take it to be part of our pre theoretical understanding of phenomenology that two numerically different experiences of two different subject can have the same phenomenology. Sure, the characterization of sameness in phenomenology in terms of

8 See for example Ninan (2012) for a more detailed articulation of centered propositions.

indistinguishability invites questions in the interpersonal case (Frege, 1956; Schlick, 1959; Stalnaker, 2000—for detailed discussion see Shoemaker, 1982, 1996). But although different theories disagree with regard to the conditions that two individuals must satisfy in order to have experiences with the same phenomenology, hardly any theory denies such a possibility—think of the experience of two physical duplicates in physically identical circumstances.

Moreover, it is widely accepted that there is an intimate relation between phenomenology and content. Our conscious experiences are a primary source of information; they convey certain information to us, something acknowledged, as we have seen, by skeptics like C&D. The view that experiences have content is widely accepted, especially in the case of perception—see e.g. Byrne (2009), Nanay (2014), Pautz (2010), Schellenberg (2018), Siegel (2010); cf. Travis 2004. This relation has been exploited to theorize on the phenomenology of experience by investigating the content of experience: what experiences convey to us. The idea behind this weak representationalist research project is that there is a representational content associated with the phenomenological type, because “given a specific phenomenology, it seems that if a mental state has this phenomenology it must also have a certain specific representational content” (Chalmers, 2004). A content that we can call ‘phenomenal content’. Consequently, if two experiences have the same phenomenology then they have the same phenomenal content. Unlike Brogaard characterization of weak representationalism, this entailment is neutral on the existence of any dependence relation between phenomenology and phenomenal character. Hence, it comes as no surprise that it has been defended and endorsed by philosophers with very different theoretical perspectives otherwise disagreeing about substantial issues. It can be accepted by those who think that the phenomenology of experience is not exhausted by phenomenal content, and those who think that experiences can have contents that go beyond phenomenal content. Defenders include those who think that a state having certain content (metaphysically) depends upon its having certain phenomenology, and hence explain phenomenal content by appeal to phenomenology; and also strong representationalist who think that conscious states are representational ones and that a state having phenomenology (metaphysically) depends upon its having certain content.⁹ Note that this kind of strong representationalist would deny that phenomenal content is grounded in—or metaphysically depends on—phenomenology.¹⁰ I take these different research projects that defend and endorse the entailment between phenomenology and phenomenal content

9 E.g. Carruthers (2000); Chalmers (2004); Dretske (1995); Kriegel (2002, 2009); Horgan and Tierson (2002); Rosenthal (2005); Sebastián (2022); Siewert (1998); Tye (1997, 2002).

10 Hence, it is expected that Tye, who has defended such strong representationalism, does not endorse weak representationalism as presented by Brogaard—as C&D claim he did in personal communication.

to be “philosophically interesting” and motivated independently of debates on essential indexicality.¹¹

The argument in favour of phenomenal content being perspectival (PORTABLE and NOT-GLOBAL) can be illustrated with the case presented by C&D that we have discussed in the previous section. In this example, Berit is hearing a sound coming from her left. We have seen that it would be natural for Berit to express the content of her perceptual experience by deploying an indexical expression, for example “there is such-and-such sound coming from my left”. But as we have seen this, *per se*, is silent on the problem of essential indexical as C&D argue. Now, let John be in a different location having a different token experience with the same phenomenology as Berit. He would also express the content of his experience as “there is such-and-such sound coming from *my* left”, which again is silent on whether the content is essentially indexical. However, if sameness in phenomenology entails sameness in phenomenal content and Berit’s and John’s token experiences have the same phenomenology, then these two token experiences must have the same phenomenal content. This rules out a globalist reading of the content because portable has to be respected to make room for the possibility of John and Berit having experiences with the same phenomenology if the entailment between phenomenology and phenomenal content is accepted. The phenomenal content of Berit’s experience cannot be adequately characterized in terms of restricted access for a particular individual, as Frege for example suggests, because both Berit and John must have representations with the same phenomenal content when they have experiences with the same phenomenology. Phenomenal content is not adequately expressed by “there is such-and-such sound coming from Berit’s left” either, because it is not plausible that this is the phenomenal content of John’s experience. But this is not enough to claim that the content is essentially indexical, for the skeptic also holds on PORTABLE. In order to decide if such a content can be read as the skeptic of essential indexicality maintains (GLOBAL and PORTABLE), or if it is *perspectival* content (PORTABLE and NOT-GLOBAL), we need to analyze whether such a phenomenal content is GLOBAL.

The content is GLOBAL only if it is assigned the same truth value for any point of evaluation within a world; that is, once we fix the way the world is we can assign the content a truth value. In this example, where the indexical expression is a first-person pronoun, the relevant point of evaluation is the subject of experience. Therefore, to evaluate whether the content is global we need to consider whether two subjects inhabiting the same world can

11 Please note that the argument in this section requires an even weaker premise, in which the entailment is restricted to cognitive systems like ours or actual humans. However, given that the skeptic is happy to accept even Brogaard’s stronger formulation of weak representationalism it is not necessary to press the idea any further—for discussion see Sebastián (MS)

have representations with the same content but different truth value. The answer to this question is undoubtedly positive for anyone accepting that veridical experiences and hallucinations or illusions can have the same phenomenology, something widely accepted.¹² Now, let Berit's experience be veridical but let John's be an illusion. Berit's and John's experiences have the same phenomenology and thereby the same phenomenal content. However, there is such-and-such sound coming from the left in the case of Berit but not so in the case of John. Since Berit and John inhabit the same world, and their experiences have the same content, fixing the world is not sufficient to assign their experiences a truth value. Phenomenal content cannot then be GLOBAL, for it assigns different truth values to different individuals within the world.

Summarizing, if different subjects can have experiences with the same phenomenology and these experiences share the phenomenal content, then phenomenal content must be PORTABLE. Moreover, this content cannot be GLOBAL to the extent that we allow for illusory experiences with the same phenomenology as veridical ones: its truth value changes within a world. Therefore, the phenomenal content of this kind of experience is perspectival: PORTABLE and NOT-GLOBAL. We can now come back to C&D's objections.

4. Back to the Skeptic Reply

As we have seen, C&D's strategy to resist the need of essentially indexical content in perceptual experience comes in two steps. First, they resist the arguments for indexicalized truth, that is, the rejection of GLOBAL. Second, they argue that even if one rejects GLOBAL this is insufficient for having essentially indexical content.

Undoubtedly, C&D can resist the rejection of global in the argument above in multiple ways. For example, they can deny that there are conscious states—states having phenomenology—, that conscious experiences have content, the entailment between phenomenology and phenomenal content or deny that veridical experiences and illusions or hallucinations have content. But this would miss the point of the discussion, and indeed C&D do not play that card in their reply. The aim of the argument above is not to show that there are essentially indexical contents but rather that there are philosophically interesting projects that require essentially indexical content and depart from classical theories of content. Sure, whether there is such a thing as essential indexical content then depends on whether any of these philosophical projects—indeed the vast majority in the study of consciousness and the mainstream view in perception—is on the right track. Years of discussion have taught us that this is not something to be decided

12 Sure, this idea is widely accepted but not universally so—for rejection see e.g. Martin (1998, 2002); c.f. Burge (2005), Dorsch (2010). Fortunately for current purposes it is not

in the length of a paper or a book. But this is fortunately something irrelevant for current purposes.

It is nonetheless worth considering something along the lines of the reply that C&D offer to Schroeder and Caplan (2007), and thinking of the possibility of phenomenal content not being a carrier of veridicality. This would result in a content that is not accommodated by traditional theories of content, which take contents to be the kind of entities that have truth value, but it is not clear that this tells us in favour of essential indexicality. Experiences with the same phenomenology would accordingly share a lambda-extracted content; in our example the property of *being an x such that there is such-and-such sound coming from the left of x* (denoted by: λx . *there is such-and-such sound coming from the left of x*), which they claim has no truth conditions. The suggestion seems to be that only particular experiences can be assigned a truth value but not so to the type they belong to in virtue of having a common phenomenology (the phenomenological type). Berit's experience predicates the property of *being someone such that there is such-and-such sound coming from the left* of Berit and it is veridical if Berit instantiates such a property, whereas John's experience predicates the property picked up by the lambda predicate of John and it is veridical if John instantiates such a property. The problem with this reply is that the lambda extracted content cannot play the role that the weak representationalist requires.

Experiences with the same phenomenology convey some common information regardless of the particular experience; they all restrict the uncertainties regarding possible alternatives, and they can be assigned a truth value depending on whether those alternatives correspond to reality. For example, if anyone has a token experience with the same phenomenology as Berit's, but there is no sound, then their experience will be inadequate. This gives us reasons to think that the content associated with the (phenomenological) kind—what I have called 'phenomenal content'—is indeed a carrier of veridicality. And of course, talk in terms of properties does not prevent this possibility, because property-content impose conditions on the entity of which the property can be adequately predicated and it is thereby informative in the required sense—see e.g. Tye (2019, 2021). Moreover, we should note that any token experience can only be adequate if the kind of property that C&D propose is instantiated by the subject of the experience. That is, Berit's experience cannot be veridical in virtue of someone else, for example John, *being an x such that there is a sound coming from x left*, because what is relevant for the veridicality of Berit's experience is whether Berit instantiates the property, not John. In general, the fact that someone S instantiates the property cannot make veridical a token experience, E^* , with same phenomenology as Berit's—regardless of the particular token experience we consider and whoever happens to be its subject—, unless S is also the subject of E^* .

A possible suggestion to solve the problem is to introduce, into the phenomenal content, explicit reference to the fact that the property must be instantiated by the subject of experience. For example, one might propose the phenomenal content of Berit's experience, E, to be the property of *being an x such that that x is the subject of E and there is such-and-such sound coming from x 's left* ($\lambda x. x$ is the subject of E and there is such-and-such sound coming from x 's left). If this were the phenomenal content of Berit's experience, then E, as we just demanded, would not be veridical in virtue of John being an x such that there is *such-and-such sound coming from x 's left*, because John is not the subject of E. But this move does not help to solve the problems. Recall that, if John has an experience (E') with the same phenomenology as Berit's experience (E), then E and E' must share the phenomenal content. And the property proposed is not a plausible content of E', because John is not the subject of E. John's experience is veridical if there is such-and-such sound coming from his left, not if there is such-and-such sound coming from the left of Berit (who is the subject of E).

Another possible suggestion is to replace the particular (E) by the phenomenological kind to which both, E and E', belong in virtue of having the same phenomenology; for example letting the content be the property of *being an x such that x is the subject of and experience with E's phenomenology and there being such-and-such sound coming from x 's left* ($\lambda x. x$ is the subject of an experience with E's phenomenology and there is such-and-such sound coming from x 's left). But this is of no help either. The reason is that both E and E' have the same phenomenology, but John's experience (E') cannot be adequate if he is hallucinating but Berit also has the experience and instantiates the corresponding property. In these circumstances, there is indeed such-and-such sound coming from the left of someone (Berit) who is the subject of an experience with E's phenomenology (E itself), but John's experience is inadequate (not veridical).

If we want to capture the informativeness of experiences with the same phenomenology, we will end up with a view that collapses into the portabilist one (Sebastián, MS). According to C&D, experiences with the same phenomenology have a common lambda-extracted content, which is a predicate that denotes a property. Experiences cannot be veridical unless it is the subject of the experience the one that instantiates the corresponding property—in the case of experiences with the same phenomenology as E, they cannot be veridical unless the subject of the experience instantiates the property of *being an x such that there is such-and-such sound coming from x 's left*. This, in turn, imposes a unique relation between the subject of the experience and such a property. The properties suggested by C&D to be phenomenal "content" are precisely the kind of properties that some portabilists such as Lewis postulate to be the content of *de se* representations. Lewis agrees that the content of a *de se* representation is a property, which

is precisely the one that results from the lambda-extraction. According to Lewis, *de se* representation involves a distinctive relation between a subject and properties. He calls such a unique relation in the case of belief ‘self-attribution.’ And as we have seen, talk in terms of properties being the content of attitudes can be directly translated into the canonical framework, holding on the classical relation that is determined by the attitude to a content that is evaluable for truth. All that is required, as Lewis points out, is to let the contents be centered propositions, where centered propositions are not classes of possible worlds but classes of centered worlds. Before moving forward, it is important to note that the appeal to centered worlds is a mere tool to translate a characterization of the content in terms of properties to the canonical framework. Hence, I am not relying, *pace* C&D, on speaking in terms of centered worlds to argue for essential indexicality. And this brings me to their second line of defense.

C&D dispute that talk in terms of centered worlds mandates an Essential Indexical content in chapter 5. More precisely, they argue that even if indexicalized truth is created, if GLOBAL is rejected, this does not amount to the creation of essential indexicality. They return to this point in the chapter devoted to perception (ch. 8), where they present the example of Maeve, whose perceptual system is fed by Brigid’s environment. Without offering any further justification, C&D (p. 145) assume that, in these circumstances, Maeve’s experience would be veridical if there is such-and-such sound coming from Brigid’s left rather than from her left, and hence, that phenomenal content does not involve self-attribution. However, this assumption seems to rely on a misunderstanding of the relation played by the actual cause of a representation in determining its content (Millikan 2000). Imagine that John wears light-filtering glasses, so that, when he is looking at a red object, he has the (phenomenological) kind of experience that we have when looking at green objects. In these circumstances, a red object is the actual cause of John’s experience, but red does not enter the phenomenal content of John’s experience, and his experience is indeed misrepresenting the color of the object he is looking at. Similarly, in the case of Maeve. Despite the fact that Brigid’s environment is the actual cause of Maeve’s perceptual experience, it seems more plausible to claim that her experience misrepresents the environment as her own—regardless of the belief state she is disposed to form on its basis. Assessing whether Maeve is indeed misrepresenting or not depends on one’s preferred theory of mental representation. But my point here is that there are *philosophically interesting projects*—for example those that combine weak representationalism with etiological theories of mental content (Millikan 1984, 1989)—according to which Maeve is misrepresenting and hence immune to C&D’s remark.

We can set this issue aside, because C&D’s objection does not fundamentally rely on whether self-attribution is required, but rather, as they

stress, on whether phenomenal content can be interpreted non-indexically: “Maeve can have perceptual contents that have no absolute truth conditions, but whose role in Maeve’s perceptual system is to be true relative to Brigid” (p.149). C&D’s point in the end is that indexicalized truth, the rejection of GLOBAL, is not sufficient for essential indexicality. The content they propose might be NOT-GLOBAL but it is not *perspectival* because it is referentially anchored (to Brigid in this case). But phenomenal content cannot be such a referentially anchored content as we have seen. In the (phenomenological) kind of experience we are considering, Brigid definitely is not part of the phenomenal content of the experience of someone who is not Brigid, or whose perceptual system is not fed by Brigid’s environment—if we grant the content attribution that C&D make to Maeve’s experience—, and hence, not part of the phenomenal content of Brigid’s either. If John can have experiences with the same phenomenology as Maeve’s and Brigid’s, then his experiences have the same phenomenal content as theirs. Therefore, such a common phenomenal content cannot be referentially anchored to Brigid. Phenomenal content is expressed by deploying an indexical expression, which must be understood in the perspectival way: as PORTABLE and NOT-GLOBAL.

The argument discussed in the previous section offers, then, independent reasons, as those rejected by C&D, to accept portable. C&D deny, in chapter 5, that different individuals sincerely expressing the content of their beliefs by means of the same indexical expression have the same content. They deny that, when Hume and Heimson sincerely express the content of their beliefs by uttering ‘I am Hume’, they have beliefs with the same content, by rejecting Lewis’ internalism. The argument in the previous section offers independent reasons for phenomenal content being shared by different individuals when they use the same indexical expression to sincerely express it—for phenomenal content being portable.

To be completely clear, C&D claim, and I am happy to concede, that essential indexicality requires distinguishing the claim that Maeve had indexed-truth perceptual states whose veridicality conditions were true relative to Maeve and the claim that Maeve had indexed-truth perceptual states whose veridicality conditions were truth relative to herself. Perspectival content makes this distinction. The phenomenal content of Maeve’s experience cannot be an indexed-truth perceptual state whose veridicality conditions were true relative to Maeve if John can have an experience with the same phenomenal character as Maeve. In such a case, John’s experience would have the same content as Maeve. However, his experience would not be veridical if it happens to be such-and-such sound to the left of Maeve, but not so to the left of John. Perspectival content has veridicality conditions relative to the subject rather than relative to any particular individual.

5. Conclusion

Cappelen and Dever (2013) claim that indexicality is not essential. They argue that classical considerations derived from the work of Perry and Lewis do not support the idea that we need to change our theories of content, and that essential indexical representations do not play any philosophically relevant role. In chapter 8, they note that if there are essential indexical thoughts, we should expect an essential indexical element in the content of perception, since those representations function as input of other thoughts. They acknowledge that perceptual content is typically expressed deploying an indexical expression but they argue that this content can perfectly be captured in non-indexical terms.

In this paper I have argued that traditional theories of mental content fail to characterize phenomenal content, because if experiences of different subjects can have the same phenomenology and thus share the phenomenal content, then such a content cannot be global and it must be portable. Phenomenal content is then perspectival content, which is not referentially-anchored with regard to the indexical expression deployed to express it. In other words, the entity that would be taken to be the reference of the indexical expression cannot be part of the phenomenal content. The argument in this paper attends Cappelen and Dever's complaints and connects the fact that perceiving subjects cannot be placed in the phenomenal content with what it takes to be represented in a distinctly indexical way, as it happens in *perspectival* (NOT-PORTABLE and GLOBAL) *de se* content.¹³

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