

Susanna Siegel, *The Contents of Visual Experience* (chapter and page #s refer to the book, usually)
Replies to Schellenberg, Glüer, and Bengson. 18 February 2012.

Two general points

1. The book's center of gravity

Rich Content View: Some visual experiences represent rich properties.

The main issue surrounding whether experience contents are rich can be stated without the apparatus of the Content View (cf p. 97).

- abverbialism: which ways we can be appeared-to?
- Naïve Realism: which properties we can perceive things as having?
- sense-datum theory: which properties sense-data can have?
- Bengson's presentation: which properties are objectually presented to us in experience?

To pursue the main issue, the framework provided by the Content View (CV) is optional. One could reject my case for the CV, reformulate the Rich Content View in another framework, and still use the phenomenal contrast method, either to defend it or to argue against it.

But some sort of framework is needed. Bengson quotes me as saying that the issue could be divorced from the CV by sacrificing clarity. Maybe the divorce could go through with clarity regained, by substituting some other framework. But ultimately, I think the framework of the Content View is pretty useful.

The Content View: All visual perceptual experiences have contents.

- CV is neutral on the underlying metaphysical structure of experiences.
- CV is phenomenologically adequate for visual perceptual experiences.
- CV falls out of a relatively clear and tractable notion of presentation.

2. Visual perceptual experiences. They are your average visual experiences, typified by the kind you have when you are seeing ordinary objects and scenes. They exclude visual experiences involving in phosphenes (when you gently press your eyeball), the brain grey that you get sometimes when your eyes are closed, as well as the pink glow that appears when you close your eyes in bright light.

All three critics take issue with my defense of the framework.

Reply to Schellenberg

Two kinds of experience (Chapter 1)

Phenomenal states: individuated by their phenomenal character.

States of seeing: individuated by their perceptual relations.

The states of seeing at issue in the Argument from Seeing:

S's seeing o being F.

S sees o being F iff S sees o, o is F, o looks F to S.

Whenever you're in a state of seeing, you're also in a phenomenal state.

Phenomenal disjunctivism: the state of seeing = the phenomenal state

Phenomenal internalism: the phenomenal state could occur without the state of seeing.

Schellenberg's two readings of premise (i*-a) of the Argument from Seeing:

(i*-a) All states of seeing objects having properties present a specific particular, e.g. this cup, as instantiating a cluster of properties. (=“natural reading”).

(i*-b): All states of seeing objects having properties present that there is some particular (but not which one) as instantiating a cluster of properties.

Schellenberg's objection to (i*-a): It “builds relational particularity into the phenomenal character of the experience,” with the result that phenomenal character will be individuated by Franco.

She says that individuation claim is implausible. I agree. Part of the chapter containing the Argument from Seeing is spent arguing for Phenomenal Internalism.

Reply: From the natural reading (i*-a), it doesn't follow that the phenomenal character of the state of seeing is individuated by Franco. The state of seeing is individuated (in part) by Franco, it has a phenomenal character, and it presents Franco as being sad. But it doesn't attribute sadness to Franco by virtue of its phenomenal character alone. It attributes sadness to Franco, in part by virtue of the subject's seeing Franco.

Q: Does the Argument from Seeing, as Schellenberg says, “go through phenomenal character to establish that experience has singular content”?

A: No. Like the Argument from Appearing, it goes through the notion of presentation. If phenomenal internalism is true, then phenomenal states and states of seeing can present different things.

Schellenberg's revisions to the Argument from Seeing:

I like her rendition of the argument, which makes the singularity explicit. She is right to ask whether the defenses of the adjusted premises can be the same as the defenses of the premises they're derived from.

Premise (ii*) remains a version of the same general thesis characterizing presentation that I used to defend the original premise (ii).

Premise (iii*) follows from the same general thesis linking presentation to accuracy conditions that I used to defend the original premise (iii).

On premises (iv*) and (iv**): Schellenberg worries that if the only-if contents are singular, there is no guarantee that the if-and-only-if contents are singular as well. I agree that this is not guaranteed by logic. But none of the premises are supposed to be true as a matter of logic alone. In premise (iv) of the Argument from Appearing, the main obstacle to the move from only-if to if-and-only-if accuracy conditions was that those conditions derived from a fact about presentation that was neutral on singularity. ('presents a cluster of properties as instantiated' doesn't specify whether the condition is singular or not). But once this is specified (with an accuracy condition derived from 'presents o as instantiating F'), this obstacle is removed.

My intentions in stating the argument without the singularity explicit was to show that the Argument from Appearing can be applied directly to states of seeing, with the result that states of seeing have contents as well, and to display how the same reasoning could be applied to get singular contents. I didn't make explicit how the same reasoning can be applied to get singular contents. I'm glad Schellenberg did that for me.

Reply to Bengson

Writ large, my case for the Content View moves from premises about presentation to the conclusion that all visual perceptual experiences have contents.

Bengson distinguishes between two kinds of presentation:

Objectual-presentation (OP): S is presented with a property.

Contentful-presentation (CP): S is presented with a property as being instantiated by something.

I think we should draw a further distinction within the CP category, yielding three notions of presentation.

Universal presentation (JB's OP): S is presented with a universal F.

Instantiated-universal presentation: S is presented with F as instantiated.

Propositional presentation: S is presented with it being the case that something instantiates F.

(The last two can sub-divide into singular and non-singular versions).

I think there's little daylight between instantiated-universal presentation and propositional presentation. So I agree with Bengson that the main distinction between OP and the two kinds of CP.

Bengson likes the ideas that:

- OP cannot be defined in terms of CP.
- visual experiences often involve both OP and CP.
- some visual experiences may involve OP without CP.

Bengson uses the possibility of OP-alone experiences to raise an objection to premise (i) of the Argument from Appearing.

AFA Premise (i): All visual perceptual experiences present clusters of properties as being instantiated.

Objection to premise (i): The OP-without-CP experiences do not present properties as instantiated by anything.

Since the rest of the argument for the CV relies on the idea that experiences present in the CP-way, the OP-alone experiences either will not have contents at all, or else some argument besides the one I give is needed to show that they do.

Reply

- Which experiences involve OP without CP? The only potential examples Bengson gives are brain gray and pink glow, and quotes my point that it's "not obvious that there is any way that anything is presented as being in such experiences." (p. 209). That's why I formulated the CV so that it quantifies over visual perceptual experiences, rather than visual experiences in general.

(p. 26: "I'll call the visual phenomenal states that the CV and RCV are about *visual perceptual experiences*. These experiences exclude marginal experiences such as pink glow and brain gray....")

If brain-gray and pink glow experiences, or more generally non-perceptual visual experiences are the only OP-without-CP experiences, then those experiences aren't counterexamples to premise (i).

What about brain gray and pink glow?

Dialectical accounts aside, are brain gray and pink glow cases of OP-without-CP?

Two kinds of OP-without-CP:

Neutral-OP: The experience in which F is O-presented is neutral on whether anything instantiates F.

Anti-instantiation-OP: The experience in which F is O-presented presents F as *uninstantiated*.

Neither of these seems to me to identify a phenomenological category for anything, even brain gray or pink glow. What kind of presentation do they involve? Here a different distinction seems useful:

External C-presentation: S is presented with a property as instantiated by something external (i.e., by something in public space).

Neutral C-presentation: S is presented with a property as instantiated by something. (Compare Hume's claim that ordinary objects do not seem to appear mind-independent, and do not fail to appear that way either).

Internal C-presentation: S is presented with a property as instantiated by mental space, or by something in mental space.

Brian Loar (2003) aptly calls brain gray and pink glow "luminous happenings in strange spaces". They seem decent candidates for denying External C-presentation. But even if there's no External C-presentation in brain gray and pink glow, these experiences seem poor candidates for denying Neutral or Internal C-presentation. In that case, they're not cases of OP without CP.

Side point about intentionalism/qualia debate: Those experiences are a focal point of debate over intentionalism – the thesis that all phenomenal features of experiences supervene on representational features. The debate's outcome depends on what kind of presentation representational features derive from. It's often assumed that the representational features would involve external-world accuracy conditions, and so what's taken to be at issue is whether these experiences involve External C-presentation. But intentionalists shouldn't worry about those examples if the representational features can derive from Neutral and Internal C-presentation.

Bengson's downstream worry: two experiences side by side

Bengson discusses the possibility that there are *no* OP-without-CP experiences, and having an experience involves "two distinct experiential states, only one of which [the CP one] presents a property as being instantiated; the other simply presents the property."

JB's objection: OP-experience might be different from the adjacent, necessarily-accompanying CP-experience.

This objection is a version of Glüer's downstream worry.

Reply

- I can't feel the motivation for positing OP-experiences that are necessarily always adjoined to CP-experiences.

- Bengson appeals to tradition. Price, C.I. Lewis, Broad, Firth and other writers about perception found it compelling that perceptual experience involves OP. I doubt they provide us with a clear notion of OP-experiences that have the theory-neutral status Bengson claims for them. E.g., I don't think there's a straight answer to whether Price thinks about presentation as OP-alone or as more like CP. [Compare Price's discussions of the Given in *Perception* Ch 1, p. 7 with the 'pre-judicial' character of perceptual acceptance in ch 6, p. 163].
- There doesn't seem to be any phenomenological distinction to be drawn between OP and CP, once we focus on the visual perceptual experiences. That makes it hard for me to see how we can distinguish them as phenomenal states, at least in the visual case. What is it like to visually experience a property, without experiencing it as instantiated by anything? Perhaps it's different with smell or taste.
- Bengson mentions that OP and CP might play different explanatory roles. Do these roles depend on their being metaphysically separate experiences?
 - I can't see why.
 - Perhaps explanatory role gives us one way to carve experience at its joints, whereas phenomenal character gives us a different way, yielding plausible pluralism about experiences.
 - Compare: there are plausibly different explanatory roles for object-seeing, property-seeing, and seeing-o-being-F. Object-seeing and property-seeing provide a way to anchor *de re* thoughts about objects and properties, respectively.

Bengson on the importance of OP: "There may be positive reason to think that this gap [between OP and CP] cannot be bridged. In general the attempt to understand objectual states in terms of contentful states has not met with success. Principles ... that attempt to collapse the objectual into the non-objectual have been repeatedly shot down, defeated by counterexamples and other considerations..."

- These remarks seem premature when applied experiential OP. He's taking as understood that there are purely OP experiences. But there don't seem to be examples of them, and so far, I can't find another route to insisting on distinct-but-necessarily-concurrent experiences.

Reply to Glüer

A key part of the framework provided by the Content View is a constraint on which accuracy conditions are contents. According to the **conveying constraint**, an experience has content C, only if C is conveyed to the subject.

- Conveying is not a sufficient condition for an accuracy condition or other potential content to be a content of experience.

Content can be conveyed in 3 ways. Glüer takes issue with this one:

C is conveyed if C would be natural to believe on the basis of the experience.

Glüer's downstream worry: The state that does the presenting of properties need not be the state that has the accuracy conditions that derive in part from those properties.

Mere-conveying theory: Experiences do not themselves have contents, but they convey contents to the subject. Which contents they convey depends on what they present.

Glüer on the Downstream Worry

"I agree that some objects I see look red to me. I agree that when seeing something red I have an experience with a phenomenal character of the kind – let's call it R – that can be identified (at least in me and around here) by the ordinary language locution 'looks red to me'. I further agree that an R experience conveys the content that something is red to me (among other things by making it very natural to form a belief with that content on the basis of it). But if that is what visually presenting the property of redness consists in, it does not determine where this property is re-presented. That the experience in question has R does not determine whether redness is represented by the experience itself or further downstream."

Q: In the downstream worry, is KG using the conveyor-notion of presentation?

Conveyor-notion of presentation: Conveyed → Presented

A state X presents such-and-such as being the case, if X conveys to a subject that such-as-such is the case.

Glüer's key point, using the conveyor-notion of presentation: Even if S conveys a set of accuracy conditions, S need not have those accuracy conditions.

Glüer's key point is true if it uses the conveyor notion.

- On the conveyor-notion, an open garage door could count as "presenting that someone forgot to close the garage" (or its property-instantiation analog) by virtue of conveying this information to KG when she comes home.
- The garage door all by itself isn't the kind of thing that is accurate or inaccurate. Nor does it even determine a set of accuracy conditions for something else to have.

- ✧ This rendition of Glüer's key point does not show that the premise (iii) of the Argument from Appearing is false, because (iii) doesn't use the conveyor-notion.
- ✧ To the extent that the downstream worry is supposed to be independent from the under-determination worry, the conveyor-notion of presentation doesn't operate in Glüer's downstream worry. Or if it does, then the under-determination worry is where the issue needs to be joined.

Glüer's key point, using my notion of presentation: Even if the properties that are presented to S (and the fact that they are presented) determine a set of accuracy conditions [or a disjunction of a-conds, depending on whether they're singular], the state that does the presenting need not have any accuracy conditions.

If Glüer is using my notion of presentation, then I think she accepts premise (ii) of the Argument from Appearing, which entails that the properties presented in experience define a set of accuracy conditions:

Premise (ii): If an experience E presents a cluster of properties as being instantiated, then:

Necessarily: things are the way E presents them only if property cluster F is instantiated.

...while rejecting premise (iii), which entails that those accuracy conditions belong to the experience itself. And in rejecting premise (iii), she would also reject the general thesis that I use to defend it (p. 51).

Premise (iii): If necessarily: things are the way E presents them only if property-cluster F is instantiated, then:

E has a set of accuracy conditions C, conveyed to the subject of E, such that:

C is satisfied in a world only if there is something that has F in that world.

General thesis about presentation that entails premise (iii):

If things are the way that a state X presents them as being only if conditions C obtain, then X has accuracy conditions that are satisfied in a world only if C obtains.

On this picture, experiences would be a counterexample to this thesis, because they would determine accuracy conditions, without having them.

How does this position stop short of giving the experience accuracy conditions?

In the garage door case, the garage door doesn't have accuracy conditions, but it doesn't determine them either. Something more is needed for that, such as someone's

seeing the garage door and being presented with various of its properties (sometimes Naïve Realists say, “seeing the garage door’s openness as such”).

But once we have that much, then we can ask whether things are as *the experience* presents them as being. And I can’t find any daylight between the fact that we can answer that question, and the fact that the experience is accurate or inaccurate, depending on whether the garage door really is open. (Compare the closeness of instantiated-universal presentation and propositional-presentation).

Glüer’s under-determination worry: The conveying constraint does not sufficiently delimit which contents would be natural to form on the basis of the experience.

E.g., are the contents of experience closed under entailment?

As Glüer points out, ‘content’ is a technical notion, and thus needs a definition. I define the notion using the three constraints that Glüer mentions.

Contrary to Glüer’s suggestion, I don’t rely on any ordinary use of the word “content” or the newspaper analogy to tell us what contents are. The point of the newspaper analogy is to justify using the English word for the technical notion that my constraints define.

Underlying worry: The conveying constraint doesn’t help us identify or rule out good candidates for being contents of experience, because it’s unclear how to apply the belief-version of the conveying constraint. If we can’t **ever** apply the belief-version of the constraint, then the constraint isn’t functioning even to pin down candidates for contents of experience.

Reply 1: The conveying constraint is not supposed to settle which contents can be contents of experience.

I describe a method that I argue can help discover which contents those are (the phenomenal contrast method), and I apply the method in several chapters to defend the Rich Content View. For these arguments to work, the conveying constraint doesn’t have to antecedently identify candidates for being contents of experience. It would be enough if it acts as a regulative constraint. Given the conclusion of one of an argument that certain contents (e.g. causal ones) can be contents of experience, the conveying constraint could defeat the conclusion if it turned out that those contents are not conveyed.

Reply 2:

The underlying worry is overstated.

There are some contents for which we might hedge, if asked whether they’re even candidates for being contents of experience, prior to specific arguments that they are or aren’t.

- Would it be natural to believe the very-long-disjunctive content: Franco or Ray or Percy...is sad, on the basis of an experience (e.g., seeing Franco being sad)?

- The answer may depend on views about whether belief is closed under entailment. If you believe that Franco or Ray or Percy is sad whenever you believe that Franco is sad, then when you form the simple belief, you form the complicated one too. And that may make it seem as if the complicated one has to be just as natural to form as the simple one.
- But the fact that there are cases in which the conveying constraint by itself is hard to apply without further factors doesn't show that it is never possible to apply it. Glüer seems to agree that it'd be natural to believe that x is red upon seeing x when it looks red.

Two further points

1. Glüer says the Argument from Appearing is a case of arguing from ordinary sense of 'looks' to the Content View, and that the ordinary sense of 'looks' is the traditional phenomenal sense from Jackson (and non-comparative sense from Chisholm). But Jackson explicitly limits the phenomenal use of 'looks' to those that denote "color, shape and/or distance" (*Perception* p. 33), and Chisholm suggests a similar restriction. If I took on that limitation, then my argument for the Content View would be at odds with my ultimate conclusion that the Rich content view is true. My use of 'looks' all along is my regimented one.

Glüer cites p. 59 where I say that my arguments for why experiences are assessable for accuracy rely on the English words 'looks' and its cognates (I need those words to describe situations in which certain experiences are intuitively inaccurate.) I meant that for all I had said so far, the use of 'looks' I was relying on could be an ordinary one, and Travis or other skeptics would be right to ask what I meant by it. My answer in the book is, I mean the regimented use. I doubt that there is an ordinary use that tracks how things look in the regimented sense. I agree with Byrne and Hellie that the way we ordinarily use of 'experience' is pretty different from the way it is used in the philosophy of perception. Unlike them, I don't think this helps show that there are no experiences in that sense.

2. On Glüer's view, experiences are beliefs that ascribe properties looking red, looking rectangular, or looking to be 'over here' to the objects. Glüer suggests these are ill-fit to be rich contents, I think because only non-K properties can figure in the ascription of looks-properties. But my definition of Rich content counts these properties as rich properties, because of the 'looking' part.