

PHIL 2606: Knowledge, Reason and Action  
Lecture 18: Representationalism<sup>1</sup>

Readings:

Crane, T. (2001), *Elements of Mind* (Oxford: OUP), ch. 5.

1. Crane argues for *representationalism* (he calls it ‘intentionalism’).
2. According to direct realists, what we are directly aware of when we perceive are mind-independent material objects and their properties.

We saw in Lecture 13 that the phenomena of perspectival variation, illusion, and hallucination pose a problem for direct realism.

3. According to representative realists, what we are directly aware of when we perceive are *mind-dependent* sense data.

Perspectival variation, illusion, and hallucination do not pose the same problem for representative realists, but they are committed to the existence of ‘weird’ sense data.

4. According to disjunctivists, they are distinct kinds of perception that are involved in veridical perception, illusion, and hallucination – not a single kind.

They avoid the problems of perspectival variation, illusion, and hallucination by claiming that the arguments that present the supposed problems are invalid. But they are left with the counterintuitive claim that these are distinct kinds of perception.

5. According to representationalists (intentionalists), what we are directly aware of when we perceive are representational (intentional) contents: when we perceive, our experiences *represent* the world to be a certain way – that the bottle is white, that there is a dagger over there, and so on.

According to this view, perceiving is like believing: when we believe, our beliefs represent the world to be a certain way – that the bottle is white, that there is a dagger over there, and so on. Perceiving is *not* believing, but it is *like* believing in that our experiences have representational content (as do beliefs).

6. Representationalists uphold the claim that veridical perception, illusion, and hallucination are all the same kind of perception (unlike disjunctivists).

They also (typically) reject the appeal to sense data.

So how do they avoid the problems posed by perspectival variation, illusion, and hallucination?

This way: just as I can believe that Patch is red without Patch actually *being* red, so too my visual experience can represent that Patch is red without Patch actually *being* red (illusion). And just as I can believe that there is a dagger before me without there actually *being* a dagger before me, so too my visual experience can represent that there is a dagger

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<sup>1</sup> Also see the section called ‘The Intentionalist Theory’ in the SEP article, ‘The Problem of Perception’ (also by Crane).

before me without there actually being a dagger before me. The key fact here is that there is such a thing as *misrepresentation*.

7. Crane defends 'strong intentionalism', the view that *all* features of visual experience are aspects of its content. That is: two visual experiences cannot be different unless they differ in content – unless they represent the world to be different ways. (But note: he thinks that visual experiences and, say, tactile experiences are different and yet might have the same content.)
8. There are some problems for this view (strong intentionalism). We will consider two, and how Crane responds:
  - a. Specks before the eyes. Opponents claim that when we see specks before our eyes our visual experience does *not* represent that there are specks before the eyes (one would, for instance, not try to touch them).

Crane responds: Just because we do not *judge* that there are specks there, it does not follow that our visual experience does not *represent* them to be there. What this example shows is that perception is not a kind of judgment or belief.

- b. Inverted spectrum. Suppose that Invert has inverted colour vision – things that look green to us look red to him, and vice-versa. Suppose also that Invert calls grass 'green' and fire engines 'red' – his inversion is undetectable. Opponents claim that the contents of Invert's visual experiences are the same as ours (he forms the same beliefs on their basis), but his visual experiences are different from ours.

Crane responds: just because Invert's *beliefs* are the same as ours, it does not follow that his visual experiences have the same *content* as ours. It might be that Invert has *true* beliefs about the colour of grass and fire engines, but *false* beliefs about how they look to him.