

Disjunctivism, Particularity and the Content of Perceptual Experience

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Abstract

One of the standard arguments in favor of Disjunctivism claims that experiences exhibit particularity and that only Disjunctivist views can accommodate this fact. In this paper I intend to undermine this motivation by arguing that Disjunctivism cannot account for particularity. Crucially, and in contrast to standard criticisms of Disjunctivism, my argument focuses on perceptual cases rather than cases of hallucination.

One of the most controversial topics in current debates in the philosophy of perception is whether experience has representational content and, if so, what kind of content do perceptual experiences have. Nowadays, there are two main contenders in this debate. Representationalism¹ and Disjunctivism.²

Now, a very common objection of Disjunctivists to Representationalists, is that the former can account for the particularity of perception while the latter cannot. In this paper I would like to present two sorts of examples that show that Disjunctivists cannot account for the particularity of perception. So, if I am right, concerning the capacity to accommodate the particularity intuition, Representationalism and Disjunctivism are on a par.

The paper is structured in the following way. First, I present Representationalism and Disjunctivism about perception. Secondly, I will put forward the particularity intuition and then I will provide counterexamples that show that Disjunctivism cannot account for that intuition. At the end, the goal of this paper is to show that the particularity intuition is a poor guide towards the content and nature of perception.

¹ 'Representationalism' has been used to describe many different positions in the debate. Some people define it as the view that experiences have content (Chalmers, 2004), others that phenomenal character supervenes on representational content or even the view that phenomenal character is identical with representational content (Tye, 2000). To avoid possible misunderstandings, I provide a definition of what should we understand by 'Representationalism' in this paper.

² Since in this paper I focus on an argument from Disjunctivism directed at Representationalism (see below) I leave aside Sense-Datum Theories (Jackson, 1977) and Adverbialism (Tye, 1984). Let me add that none of the arguments presented here tell against Sense-Datum Theories or Adverbialism.

1 Representationalism

Representationism (as used here) holds the following two theses :

REPRESENTATIONALISM

1. Experiences have representational content.
2. The content of any perceptual state could also be had by a hallucinatory state.

The first thesis claims that experiences (hallucinations, illusions and perceptions) represent the world as being in a certain way. In other words, experiences have accuracy conditions, i.e. experiences are accurate or inaccurate depending on how the world turns out to be.³ While the thesis 1 of REPRESENTATIONALISM is widely accepted (even among some disjunctivists, see below), condition 2 is much more controversial. In contrast to 1, which only asserts that experiences have some kind of representational content, 2 specifies one of the properties of representational content, namely being able to be had by hallucinations as well as perceptual experiences.

Condition 2 is important because, in conjunction with 1, it entails a particular view on the nature of content that is rejected by disjunctivists. If experiences have content and the content of hallucinations and experiences can be the same, then the content of experience should not reflect whether a subject is in a hallucinatory or a perceptual state. So, the content of the experience should be silent as to whether a subject is actually confronted with an object or not. Similarly, it seems content has to remain the same across different perceptual states, where a subject is confronted with qualitatively identical but numerically distinct objects. If the content of two qualitatively identical experiences varied depending on the object I am confronted with, then the content would be object-involving, and no hallucination could share representational content with any perceptual state, and hence 2 would be false.

As a result, REPRESENTATIONALISM entails that the content of my experience is not object-involving. In other words, according to Representationism, a subject's experience can have the same content when she is perceiving an object A, when she is perceiving a numerically different but qualitatively identical object B or when she is hallucinating. Content is not dependent on the object of experience. Consequently, the content of experiences can be adequately cashed out in terms of an existential quantification of the form *there is an object with such and such properties*. Of course, this existentially quantified content can be made true by different objects at different occasions, but whether it is in fact satisfied or not, or whether it is satisfied by one or another particular object is

³ A very controversial issue is what does 'content' mean. In philosophy of perception there are two main options: on the one hand, the *appear-looks* notion of content claims that an experience E has content C iff when a subject entertains E it looks to the subject as if C. In contrast, on the *accuracy-conditions* notion, an experience E has content C iff the experience E is accurate only if C (Pautz, 2008). For reasons that will be clear later, (Jackson, 1977) I will rely on the accuracy-conditions understanding of content.

not reflected in the experience's representational content. On this approach, experiences represent the existence of *an* object with certain properties (McGinn, 1982; Davies, 1992).

Hence, if one endorses Representationalism one is thereby committed to the claim that the contents of experiences have the form of an existential quantification. Following Soteriou (2000), I am going to call the view that perceptual experiences have this sort of existential quantified content the 'Generality View'. More formally, this view claims the content of both veridical perceptions and hallucinations has the following form:

Generality View $\text{VIS}(\exists xPx)$

where 'VIS' stands for the visual mode of representation (what corresponds to a propositional attitude) and the expression in brackets for the content of the representation. On this view, both hallucinations and perceptions can have exactly the same content, the difference consisting on whether the existential quantification is satisfied. Notice that, since the content of perceptual states and hallucinations is the same, this view is able to deal with the traditional argument from illusion and hallucination: the common content is what explains that illusions, perceptions as well as veridical hallucinations all can have the same phenomenology.

However, there is a second group of theories that oppose REPRESENTATIONALISM and has gained prominence in recent years. Such views are usually classified under the label 'Disjunctivism'.

2 Disjunctivism

There are many different versions of Disjunctivism.⁴ What is common to all of them is the view that cases of veridical perception and cases of hallucinations differ in at least one significant respect (Haddock and McPherson, 2009). Notice that this is different from saying they do not have anything in common., as many suggest. Disjunctivism does not require that the two states do not share any property (Crane, 2006). For one thing, that would be too strong, because most disjunctivist accept that there is at least one feature that is shared by hallucinations and veridical perception, namely the property of being indistinguishable (Byrne and Logue, 2008).

Of course, the idea that hallucinations and veridical perceptions differ in at least one significant respect is still too vague for being evaluable. Different varieties of disjunctivism focus on one aspect that supposedly distinguishes the two states: a view that holds that they differ in phenomenological features is called 'phenomenal disjunctivism'. If the claim is that they differ in accuracy conditions the view is called 'content disjunctivism'⁵. On the other hand,

⁴For the difficulties of defining Disjunctivism, see Byrne and Logue (2008); Soteriou (2009).

⁵There are some Disjunctivists which claim that perceptual experiences have content but deny that that hallucinations have it. Since in this paper I will not focus on hallucinations, but in perceptual cases, this intermediate view has the same advantages and problems as

compatible with these forms of disjunctivism is the view that there is a fundamental difference between cases of veridical perception and hallucination, and hence they are states of a fundamental different kind; this view is usually called 'metaphysical disjunctivism'. (Haddock and McPherson, 2008; Soteriou, 2009)

2.1 Disjunctivism and Representationalism

Some people are pushed into some sort of Disjunctivism because they think that REPRESENTATIONALISM is inadequate. There are many reasons for departing from REPRESENTATIONALISM, but I think we can emphasize three arguments that are very popular in the literature. First, Disjunctivists argue REPRESENTATIONALISM fails to account for the particularity of experience (Martin, 2002; Schellenberg, 2009; Brewer, 2006). According to line of criticism, experiences exhibit particularity, in the sense that when we have an experience of an object A, the accuracy conditions of our experience depend on whether *that particular* object has the properties attributed by the experience and not on any qualitatively identical object (see below). Secondly, they argue that if perceptual experiences had existentially quantified contents, it would be unable to play certain cognitive roles that undoubtedly experiences play. For instance, it would not be in position to ground demonstrative or singular thoughts (Campbell 2002; Siegel, 2011). Third, according to REPRESENTATIONALISM, the relation between experiences and the world is always mediated by an intentional content (condition 1). And since this intentional content can be the same in the case of hallucination and accurate perception (condition 2), some people argue that knowledge of the external world would be impossible (McDowell's (1996) 'Screening-off Problem').

Now, if one is convinced by these arguments, there are two different ways of denying REPRESENTATIONALISM. The first one is to reject the claim that experiences have content (condition 1), and so condition 2 automatically falls out. This is the strategy pursued by people endorsing some version of 'Naïve Realism' (Martin, 2002; Campbell, 2002; Travis, 2004; Brewer, 2006). The second strategy is to deny condition 2 and claim that hallucination and perceptual states differ in content. That leads to some kind of Content Disjunctivism. Let me present both accounts in some detail.

2.2 Naïve Realism

To a first approximation, Naïve Realism could be defined as the view that denies that experiences are endowed with representational content. According to Naïve Realists, perception is not mediated by the existence of representational content; rather, we are *directly* confronted with the objects of experience. Perception should be conceived as a relation that is constituted by the subject and the

Content Disjunctivists. In particular, for my arguments to work, it suffices if they hold that the content of perceptual experiences is object-involving (the denial of condition 2 of REPRESENTATION) as they probably are if are motivated by the particularity objection and the argument for cognitive role (See below).

objects. So, on this view, the object of experience is a *constitutive* part of the perceptual relation. And since the object of experience is a constitutive part of the perceptual experience and in hallucinations there is no object the subject is related to, then it follows that cases of perception and cases of hallucination are essentially distinct. This is why Naïve Realism is usually classified as a sort of Metaphysical Disjunctivism.

Some Naïve Realists go so far so as to argue that the phenomenal character of the experience is constituted by the properties of the object (Martin, 2002). In other words, they claim the fact that there is something it is like to be in a perceptual state is explained by appealing to the properties of the object perceived. In this way, Naïve Realism can account for the phenomenal properties of experience without postulating intentional contents or sense data, but of course, faces the problem of how to account for the phenomenology exhibited by hallucinations (Martin, 2004; Fish, 2009).

Naïve Realism seems to have some advantages over Representationalism, specially in relation to epistemological arguments and the grounding of demonstrative thoughts. However, later on I will argue that it provides no advantage over Representationalism concerning the particularity objection. Before that, let me present what is probably the most popular view on perception: Content Disjunctivism.

2.3 Content Disjunctivism

The second way of accounting for the particularity intuition and the possibility of demonstrative thoughts is to oppose REPRESENTATIONALISM by accepting that experiences have content (condition 1), but denying that the content of hallucinations and perceptual state can be the same (condition 2). If one takes this option, one would have to accept that the contents of hallucinations and the contents of perceptual states (as well as the contents of numerically distinct but qualitatively identical objects) differ. This is why accepting 1 and denying 2 of REPRESENTATIONALISM leads to some sort of 'Content Disjunctivism' (Byrne and Logue, 2008). Under 'Content Disjunctivism' I classify several views which are variously called in the literature: 'Demonstrative View of Perception' (Bach, 2007), the 'Singluar (When Filled) Thesis' (Tye, 2007), or the 'Gappy Contents View' (Schellenberg, 2010). According to Content Disjunctivism, the content of perceptual experiences is object-involving, that is, the object itself figures in the experience's content. According to this proposal (or family of proposals), the contents of experience are object-involving, what means that the object itself is part of the experience's content. Originally, this view derived from a certain account on the nature of demonstratives and indexical expressions in natural language (see Bach 2007), and for this reason it might be useful to shortly review the standard approach to demonstratives and indexicals.

2.3.1 Linguistic indexicals

Indexicals are linguistic expressions that change their referent depending on the context of utterance. Examples of indexical expressions are 'I', 'you', 'now', 'here' or 'today'. According to the standard view on indexicals developed by Kaplan (1989), the content of an indexical expression is determined by the *character* of the indexical, which is a function from contexts to contents. In other words, the character of an indexical expression tells us what is the content of an expression in a given context of utterance. Since content depends on context, this view can easily explain why in every context of utterance the referent of the indexical expression may change. For instance, consider these two utterances:

1. (uttered by John): 'I am happy'
2. (uttered by Jack): 'I am happy'

On the one hand, the character of the expressions in 1 and 2 is the same, because both utterances determine the same function from context to contents. In both cases what is uttered (in one sense of this expression), is that the utterer is happy. That captures the sense in which both utterances *mean* the same. Nevertheless, the content of the two expressions is different, because the context of utterance of 1 and 3 differ. In context 1, 'I' refer to John and in context 2, 'I' refer to Jack, so the content of 1 is *John is happy* and the content of 2 is *Jack is happy*. In this sense, 1 and 2 say different things.

What are contents? On the kaplanian view, contents are functions from possible worlds (or circumstances of evaluation) to truth values. The content of 1 is *John is happy*, what means that if we evaluate this sentence in a world where John is happy, we get the truth, and if evaluate it in a world where John is not happy, we get the false. Therefore, since the contents of 1 and 2 are different, the truth values of both expressions will also differ.

With this view in mind, some people have tried to solve the problems raised by the contents of perception using indexical expressions as a model. In the debate on perception, the function from contexts to contents (the 'character') is sometimes called 'schema' (Schellenberg, 2010). The idea is that in perception we apply a schema such that, if we are supplied with the appropriate context, the content of the perceptual states involves an object; otherwise, the content does not involve any object. As in the case of indexicals, different contextual features yield differences in content. The idea is that in cases of successful perception, the experience represents *that object* as being in a certain way; in cases of hallucination, the content of experience has a place-holder without any object playing this role.

Hence, Content Disjunctivism (CD) claims the content of an *accurate* perceptual experience is of the following sort:

Content Disjunctivism_{acc.} VIS (o, P)

where VIS stands for the representational mode (vision), 'o' stands for the particular object the subject is related to by means of the schema and 'P'

for the properties attributed to it. On Content Disjunctivism D the content of an experience is determined by the schema plus the context. If the relevant relation between experience and object holds, the experience represents the fact that object has certain properties.

On the other hand, when there is no object (as in hallucinatory cases), the content of the experience has the following structure:

Content Disjunctivism_{hall}. VIS (_, P)

where ' _ ' stands for a gap in the content, and hence yields what people call a 'gappy content'.

On this approach, the content of perceptual experiences and hallucinations differ. While the contents of perceptual states is object-involving, the contents of hallucinations are gappy. How should we understand gappy content is something that need not concern us here (see Tye, *forthcoming*)

The idea motivating Content Disjunctivism is that once we accept that the object of experience is part of the experience's representational content, its particularity can be adequately captured. Moreover, perceptions of qualitatively identical but numerically different objects have different contents, so it can explain how we can have demonstrative thoughts that are directed at different object that nevertheless are qualitatively identical. They argue the fact that contents are object-involving can explain how our thoughts latch onto them. Hence, according to content disjunctivism, the content of perceptual states could be formulated in the following way: *that object has such and such properties*.⁶ Nowadays, content disjunctivism is probably the standard approach to perceptual content (Bach, 1991; McDowell, 1996; Tye, 2009; Schellenberg, 2010, 2011; Siegel, 2011).

In this paper, I will focus on the particularity objection (McGinn, 1982; Davies, 1992; Martin 2002; Schellenberg, 2009). The argument for the possibility of demonstrative thought and epistemological arguments lay beyond the scope of this short essay. Instead, what I would like to argue is that Disjunctivism is unable to account for the particularity of experiences. So I will grant that experiences exhibit particularity and I will present two arguments that show that the Disjunctivist accounts fail to explain it.

Furthermore, the arguments I will present are supposed to be original in the sense that they focus on cases of perception rather than cases of hallucination. It is widely known that most arguments against Disjunctivism focus on hallucinatory cases. However, in contrast to usual criticisms, in this paper I would like to present two arguments that focus on the *good cases*; that is, I will argue why, even if we focus on cases of perception, Disjunctivism fails to account for the particularity of experience.

⁶On some versions, not only the object but also the represented properties are different depending on the set of properties we are confronted with (Brewer, 2000). Of course, that makes cases of misperception very difficult (or impossible). In what follows, I will only consider content disjunctivism concerning the representation of objects for two reasons. First, since both kinds of Disjunctivism accept that the content of experiences should be disjunctively analysed concerning the objects, the arguments presented here apply to both versions. Secondly, the version of Content Disjunctivism I discuss is the most common position.

2.4 Particularity

The main worry I want to focus here, which has recently been pointed out by many philosophers, concerns the *particularity* of perception (e.g. see Brewer, 2006; Campbell, 2002; Martin, 2002, Schellenberg, 2010). Basically, the idea is that perceptual states seem to involve a relation to particular objects. My perceptual state of object A seems to be of *that* particular object; hence, it seems that perceptual experiences are directed at particular objects. The intuition is that if my perceptual experience were of a different object (even if it were qualitatively identical) my experience would be different in some crucial respect.

Now, the particularity objection has been formulated in many ways, and I think some of them fail to make the point.⁷ I think the particularity intuition is a claim about how things look to us⁸. The particularity intuition points at a certain property experiences seem to have: experiences seem to be of particular objects. My experience of a red apple seems to be of that particular apple, not of any qualitatively identical but numerically distinct apple. Experiences seem to be of particular objects.

The important point here is that many people think the Generality View can not accommodate the particularity intuition (Martin, 2002; Brewer, 2006, Schellenberg, 2010). These philosophers argue that if the content of experience has the form of an existential quantification, the particularity of perception is left out. The reason is that, according to the Generality View, cases of hallucinations and cases of veridical perception as well as different perceptual experiences that are related to distinct but qualitatively identical objects, all have exactly the same representational content. In other words, on the Generality View different perceptual experiences of type-identical objects have can have identical content (and the same phenomenal character), so it seems that the Generality View does not capture the intuition that our perceptual state is about this particular object. If

⁷ For instance, Schellenberg (2010) points at the existence of a *relational* particularity, according to which the object of experience should play a role in the individuation of the experience and claims REPRESENTATIONALISM accommodates this fact. However, experiences can be individuated in many ways; it seems REPRESENTATIONALISM can account for that role by appealing to causation or satisfaction. REPRESENTATIONALISM can perfectly assume that the object I am causally related to or object that satisfies the experience's existentially quantified content plays an important role in individuating the experience.

Similarly, Soteriou wrote the following:

If an experience is a perception, then the experience has particularity. There is some fact that determines which particular object is *represented* by the subject's experience. (Soteriou, 2000, p.178. Italics from the original)

If all we mean by 'particularity' is that in every successful occasion of perception there is a particular object that makes my perception true, REPRESENTATIONALISM does not fail to fulfill this desideratum, since in every occasion in which $\exists xPx$ is true there will be a particular object that satisfies this description. This is why I think the particularity claim should be better expressed in phenomenological terms.

⁸ Of course, if one adopts an *appear-looks* notion of content (see footnote 3), this claim about phenomenology entails a claim about content. However, since I will present some cases where the seeming to the subject that he is perceiving a particular object and its actual perception of an object come apart, the arguments presented here can also be interpreted as an objection to *appear-looks* notion of representational content.

we changed the particular object we are perceiving by a qualitatively identical item, the experience would still be true and, according to the Generality View, it would be endowed with the same representational content. Disjunctivists claim that something important about the experience should be different when its object is numerically distinct. That is the reason Disjunctivism is needed. Let us now assess whether such a requirement is actually justified.

3 Discussion

As I said earlier, most objections to Disjunctivism focus on the bad case, that is, in cases of hallucination. For instance, it seems Naïve Realism is committed to the counterintuitive conclusion that hallucinations lack phenomenology (see Fish, 2009) or, if they have it, it differs from the phenomenal character of perceptual states (Martin, 2002). Similarly, Content Disjunctivism is committed to attributing gappy contents to hallucinations, but is not clear whether gappy contents should qualify as contents at all. If contents are thought of as functions from circumstances of evaluation to truth values (that is, in the Kaplanian way), it seems that gappy contents fail to determine one of these functions and hence, they can not be considered contents (but see Tye, forthcoming). Indeed, whether the idea of gappy content is or not coherent is a hotly disputed issue (for instance, in the context of fictional discourse). In this paper, I want to focus on a different line of criticism.

In what follows, I would like to argue that Disjunctivism is unsatisfactory even in the good case. In particular, I would like to present two related sorts of considerations against the claim that Disjunctivism can account for particularity. I will present two counterexamples to the idea that either form of Disjunctivism can explain the intuition of particularity. The first example is a case where there is more than object perceived and nevertheless the experience has particularity (of a single object). In the second example I present a case where a subject is in a perceptual state of a single object but the experience has not particularity.

3.1 The Arguments

Disjunctivism seeks to account for particularity. That is, on this view, it is the fact that I am perceiving a particular object what accounts for the fact that it seems to me as if I were perceiving a particular object. In other words, the actual perception of a single object grounds the intuition that my experience exhibits particularity. That is why the particularity claim is an objection to the Generality View and an argument in favor of Disjunctivism. Nonetheless, notice that how there being in a perceptual state is supposed to account for the intuition of particularity differs in Naïve Realism and Content Disjunctivism. In the former, particularity is captured by the fact that a particular object is a *constitutive part* of my perceptual states. Naïve Realism claims that in perception subjects stand in an unmediated relation to their objects of experience,

in such a way that these objects are a constitutive part of perceptual act; the constitutive role of objects is supposed to explain particularity. On Content Disjunctivism, particularity is explained by the fact that the *content* of my experience involves a particular object. The fact that the content of experience is object-involving is supposed to account for the particularity of experience. In both cases, the perceptual relation to a particular object is supposed to ground the particularity intuition.

3.1.1 Multiple Objects and Particularity

In this section I will try to depict a (non-hallucinatory) case where we have good reasons to think that the experience involves particularity and, nevertheless, there is not a unique object that figures in the content of the representation or no unique object that is a constitutive part of the experience. The example has three steps:

DISTORTING GLASSES

1. At t_1 John wears transparent glasses G. There is an apple at location L. John has a phenomenal experience E as of an apple at L and the apple has caused experience E.
2. At t_2 John wears distorting glasses G'. There is an apple at L'. However, now John has a phenomenal experience E' as of an apple at L (L is at a very short distance from L'). The apple has caused the experience E'.
3. At t_3 John wears distorting glasses G'' (where each glass produces a different distortion). There are two apples, one at L' and another at L''. However, this time the distorting glasses produce an experience E'' as of a single apple at L (which is exactly between L' and L''). The two apples have caused the experience E''.

Let me go through all the cases in some detail. At t_1 John is perceiving an apple in front of him, because he has an accurate experience (there is an apple exactly where it seems to him there is one) and the apple has caused the experience (in a non-deviant way). Naïve Realists would describe this case differently, perhaps by appealing to some awareness relation that is instantiated, but they would surely count it as a case of successfull perception. Furthermore, it is also common ground that, if there is anything like the particularity of experiences, at t_1 John's experience exhibits it.

Here is important to note that the fact that John is wearing glasses does not affect the intuition that John is perceiving the world (rather than his glasses) or that the causation is non-deviant. Wearing glasses does not seem to be the kind of thing that prevents someone from perceiving the external world. It would clearly be revisionary to hold that people wearing glasses fail to perceive external objects.

Now, at t_2 John's glasses produce a slight distortion of the apple's location in his experience. At t_2 John has an experience that is indistinguishable from

the experience at t_1 , but the apple now is at a different position, L' . However, we can stipulate that the rest of properties are truly attributed to the apple. That is: at t_2 John has an experience as of a red and shiny apple at L and in fact there is a red and shiny apple at L' . Furthermore, the apple has caused this experience. Now, most people would describe this example as a case of Illusion. (e.g. Soteriou (2000); Schellenberg (2010); Siegel (2011)) The subject perceives the apple standing at L' , but misattributes a property to it, namely location. Again, notice that in this case the fact that there is a slight distortion produced by the glasses does not alter the intuition that this is a case of perception (even if it is illusory).⁹ Finally, it seems that the experience E at t_1 and E' at t_2 are exhibiting the same particularity. If at t_1 John seems to be perceiving a *particular* object, the same seems to hold at t_2 .

Finally, at t_3 John is wearing a third kind of glasses. In this case, the glasses have a different distortion from t_2 . That explains why there can be two apples (at location L' and L'') and nevertheless John has an experience that is indistinguishable from t_2 and t_1 . It seems to John as if there was a *single* apple at L , but in fact there are two apples at L' and L'' and none at L .

A key issue in the argument is how should we describe John's experience at t_3 . On the one hand, we can exclude that it is a case of full accurate perception, since he is misattributing certain properties (location). In this sense, the case is analogous to t_2 . On the other hand, it does not seem a case of hallucination; the two apples are causing John's experience and, except location, the apples have exactly the properties that John's experience attributes to them. Furthermore, if at t_2 the slight distortion of the glasses did not prevent us from classifying it as a case of illusion, it is hard to see why it should count now as a case of hallucination. So I think t_3 should be classified as case of illusion; John is *misperceiving*.

Now, at that point is where the problems for the Disjunctivist appear. Let us first consider Content Disjunctivism. What would a Content Disjunctivist say is the content of the experience? Since it is an illusion, there must be an object in the content of the experience. But which of the two apples is involved

⁹Naïve Realists face several problems when trying to analyze illusions. On the one hand, it seems that illusions are naturally classified as cases of perception where the subject misattribution certain properties; but if, as Naïve Realism holds, being in a perceptual state is being in direct contact with the object itself (and if the phenomenal character of the experience is constituted by the properties of the object), it is hard to see how one can be in perceptual contact with an object and misattribute certain properties. On the other hand, classifying such cases as hallucinations is even more problematic. For one thing, one would be committed to the claim that when someone is misattributing the color orange to an apple, her state should count as hallucination (i.e. as a case where one is not seeing anything), but when the color slowly turns into red, the subject suddenly accurately perceives the apple with all its properties. Moreover, there are other problems related to the fact that we sometimes seem to be computing true properties from misperceptions (For a discussion, see Fish, (2008) and Brewer (2008)). Content Disjunctivists, on the contrary, have a more elegant way of explaining such cases (Schellenberg, 2011), by appealing to the contents (or schemas) of experiences.

As I said at the beginning, in this paper I do now want to take issue with the bad cases where it is widely held that Disjunctivists have problems. I will assume that Disjunctivists have a way of explaining how hallucinations and illusions are possible. And, following the standard position, I will assume that Illusions can be better analysed as cases of *misperception*.

in its content? The two apples are at the same distance from the represented location L , and both have caused the experience in the same way, so it seems that choosing one apple over the other as the one that is truly represented would be arbitrary. Nonetheless, there must be an object in the content of the experience; otherwise, we would classify John's state as a hallucination. The only option that remains for the Content Disjunctivist is to claim that the two objects figure in the content of the representation. That is, at t_3 John's experience has the content *that object₁ and that object₂ have such and such properties*.

However, notice that *ex hypothesis* the experience at t_3 is indistinguishable from the experience t_2 . And t_2 exhibits particularity, so t_3 exhibits particularity as well. But at t_3 two objects figure in the content of the representation. And it is hard to see how the fact that two objects figure in the content of an experience can account for the fact that we have the intuition that we seem to be perceiving a single object (*that* object). More generally, if the fact that the content is object-involving fails to explain the particularity intuition in that case, it is hard to see why it would accommodate it in the case of successful perception of a single object. Object-involving contents are not what we require in order to account for particularity, because a content involving many objects can exhibit particularity. So assuming that the content is object-involving cannot explain why we our experience seems to latch onto a particular object.

Indeed, one could even make the problem more extreme by multiplying the objects that cause the experience as of a single object at L (and, of course, modifying the distorting glasses accordingly, so that this effect is produced). It is hard to see how the fact that ten objects figure in the content can account for the particularity intuition. But if it does not account for particularity in that case, it is hard to see how can account for it in the case of accurate perception.

The same problem can be posed *mutatis mutandis* to Naïve Realism. Granting that at t_2 the subject is misperceiving the apple, one could argue that whatever constitutive relation holds between the apple and the experience E' at t_2 also holds between the two apples and the experience E'' at t_3 . So the Naïve Realist is committed to the view that the two objects are a constitutive part of the experience and thus, the same problem applies: it is hard to see how the fact that the two apples (or ten apples, as in the modified example) are a constitutive part of the experience can explain the intuition of particularity. The fact that the apple is a constitutive part of the perceptual act does not seem to be what is required in order to account for the particularity intuition.

In short, the argument consists in the fact that in some cases the experience exhibits particularity and, nevertheless, Disjunctivism is committed to accept that different objects figure in the content (or, alternatively, are a constitutive part of the experience). But in that case, it seems that latter cannot explain the former. So, the fact that the content is object-involving (or the fact that the object is a constitutive part of the experience) fails to explain the particularity intuition.

3.1.2 Single Object without Particularity

In this section I would like to present a second related objection. The idea is to present a case where a single object is perceived and, nevertheless, the experience has no particularity. Let me first phrase the argument in terms of Content Disjunctivism, and later on I will show how it applies to Naïve Realism.

Content Disjunctivism claims the content of experience is object-involving and this fact is supposed to account for the particularity intuition. Now, I think there are some cases where (following Content Disjunctivism) a particular object figures in the content of the representation, and nevertheless we do not seem to be perceiving any particular object (Siegel, 2010; Batty, 2010). For instance, suppose you are staring at the sky, so that it fills your visual field. Further, imagine there is a very spread out cloud that occupies the whole sky. You have an experience as of a monotonous grey area that occupies your whole visual field. I think this is a case where you do not seem to be confronted with any particular object. Similarly, suppose you are looking at a large red wall from a very short distance, so that you only see a fragment of it. Your experience is as of a red *ganzfeld*. There is but a red extension in front of you. In this situation, it is not a case that it looks to you as if you were perceiving any particular object. These experiences, I think, exhibit no particularity.

However, these are surely *perceptual* states. We would not intuitively describe it as cases of illusion or hallucination. And since they are perceptual states, on Content Disjunctivism there must be an object that fills the blank of the content. So the content has exactly the same structure as standard cases of perception, but this time the experience exhibits no particularity. Thus, it seems the fact that an object figures in the content of the representation is not sufficient for an experience to exhibit particularity. Again, Content Disjunctivism fails to account for the particularity of experience.

The argument can be better expressed in the form of the following dilemma: either Content Disjunctivism accepts that in the wall-experience there is an object that figures in the content of the perceptual state, or she denies it. Suppose she takes the first horn; in that case, when I'm looking at a fragment of a very large red wall, the content of my experience contains the wall itself. The problem with this proposal is that the wall-experience has no particularity (It does not look to me as if I were related to any particular object), even if the content is the same as standard cases of perception where there is particularity. So, if content does not seem to make any difference in that case, it is not clear how the fact that the content is object-involving can account for the particularity in general. In other words, if the experience of the wall and the experience of a clearly differentiated apple in front of me, both have object-involving contents but they differ in whether the experience has particularity or not, then the fact that the content is object-involving cannot account for the particularity intuition.¹⁰

Now, suppose the Content Disjunctivist embraces the second horn of the

¹⁰Notice that the claim that only a fragment of the wall is the object of experience (rather than the wall itself) does not solve the worry. The problem is that a red *ganzfeld* does not seem to exhibit particularity at all.

dilemma and denies that the content of the wall-experience is object involving. That means that the content is gappy and hence it should qualify as a case of hallucination. But I take it as uncontroversial that the wall-experience should not count as a case of hallucination. So the Content Disjunctivist is in trouble.

Again, the same argument can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to the Naïve Realist. Whatever constitutive relation holds between subjects and objects in the case of perceiving an apple, also holds in the wall-experience. So the wall is a constitutive part of the perceptual experience. However, since the experience exhibits no particularity, it is hard to see how the existence of this constitutive relation can account for the intuition of particularity in the good case.¹¹

Hence, I conclude that Disjunctivism fails to account for the particularity objection,

4 Conclusion

As I claimed at the beginning, the question about the contents of perception is a hot topic in the philosophy of perception. The aim of this paper was to block one of the standard arguments in favor of Disjunctivism, based on the intuition that perceptual states exhibit particularity. I have provided two examples that intend to show that Disjunctivism (either Naïve Realism or Content Disjunctivism) fails to account for the particularity intuition. So, even granting that we have such an intuition, I have tried to point out that it does not tell in favor or against Representationalism (nor in favor or against Disjunctivism).

Now, if one is convinced by the arguments of this paper, there are two ways to go. One is to try to modify extant accounts (either Disjunctivism or Representationalism) in order to account for the particularity of experience. Unfortunately, I think it is likely that similar counter-examples to the ones depicted can be found against these modified versions. The worry these examples bring forward seem to be quite general: experiences can exhibit particularity without being experiences of any particular object and experiences of particular objects can fail to exhibit particularity. There seems to be a mismatch between particularity and the nature of experience.

The second option, hence, which I think is the more reasonable one, is to assume that the particularity intuition is a poor guide towards the content and nature of experience. Fortunately, there are plenty of arguments in favor and against any of the views presented here, so I am convinced the philosophy of perception can perfectly do without the particularity intuition.

¹¹ A possible reply from the Disjunctivist would be to insist that the experience of a red ganfeld *does* exhibit particularity. But, first, this reply seems clearly *ad hoc*. Secondly, even if it succeeded, this claim weakens the Disjunctivist main argument against REPRESENTATIONALISM: if an experience of a red surface that occupies the whole visual field is said to exhibit particularity, I loose grasp as to what particularity means. And it is not clear any more whether it is a problem for REPRESENTATIONALISM.

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