

Looks, Reasons, and Experiences

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According to the phenomenal belief account of perceptual experience I have suggested elsewhere, experience is a kind of belief. These beliefs have contents of a special form or type: While their objects are ordinary material objects, the properties they ascribe to these objects are 'phenomenal' properties, properties such as looking red or looking round. In this paper, I shall further develop this account by defending it against two objections: a) the objection that ultimately, no plausible epistemology can be built upon experiences with phenomenal contents. And b) the objection that phenomenal 'looks' is a propositional attitude operator and therefore cannot be used in specifying the content of experience. First, however, I shall argue that the intuitive inferential integration of experience into our system of beliefs provides one of the strongest motivations for construing experiences as having propositional content in the first place. The phenomenal belief account provides one good way of accommodating this inferential integration. Defending it thus is one way of defending the claim that experience indeed has propositional content.

Introduction

Whether perceptual experience has content has been a question of lively debate for the last decade or so. One way of construing the question is whether perceptual experiences are mental states much like beliefs and desires – whether they are mental states, that is, that can be understood on the model of the propositional attitudes. That is the way in which I shall construe the question in this paper. And I shall offer an argument for answering it in the affirmative, an argument that to my mind at least has not received quite the attention it deserves in the recent debates. The argument starts from the observation that perceptual experience figures in folk-psychological reasons-explanations in a certain way. And playing certain sorts of folk-psychological roles is arguably one of the strongest motivations for construing mental states as having content in the first place – modeling these roles is precisely what contents are *for*. Whether experience has content thus clearly is a question of significance not only for the metaphysics of mind, but also for epistemology, the theory of rationality and the theory of action.

1. Contents and Reasons

Asking whether experience has content immediately raises to two further questions: What *are* contents? And: What is it for a psychological state to *have* a content? These questions are closely related: Asking what it is for a psychological state to have content amounts to asking what contents are there for, what their *theoretical role* or function is. And if contents are whatever best fulfills that role, we can find out what they are by means of investigating what that role is and what best fulfills it.

In this section, I shall provide a rough-and-ready answer to these questions and apply it to the question whether experience has content. The account of perceptual experience and its content I shall suggest is highly controversial, but it will be based on a rather traditional answer to the foundational content-theoretic questions just outlined – I shall employ a content-theoretic framework inspired by Donald Davidson and David Lewis.¹ That it has a venerable tradition behind it will, moreover, be the only argument provided for using this framework.²

A simple, old-fashioned answer to the question what contents are is the following: Contents either are, or are essentially such that they determine, *truth or correctness conditions*. Truth or correctness conditions are conditions the world has to be in order for the content in question to be true. Contents thus are whatever essentially has truth values; they are *propositions*.³ Until recently, this idea commanded broad consensus amongst theorists of content. One seemingly immediate very significant advantage of identifying contents with propositions that appealed to many was that it allows us to assign uniform contents to both

¹ Cf. Davidson 1973; 1975; 1974; 2005, Lewis 1972; 1979.

² There is, I think, a discussion to be had about the theoretical role of the notion of content, a discussion of some urgency even, especially regarding its relation to the notion of semantic value. But this is not the right place for that discussion.

³ Davidson, of course, thought that we could do without any objects – be they propositions or whatever – explicitly assigned as meanings to utterances or contents to attitudes. He not only held such objects to be ultimately redundant in the theory of meaning and content, but also worried that proposition-talk might (falsely, according to him) suggest that there are unique correct assignments of meaning and content (cf. Davidson 1974, 147). Nevertheless, Davidson himself talks quite freely of propositional contents, and the minimal notion of propositional content adopted below should be entirely compatible with his strictures.

linguistic expressions (or their utterances) and certain mental states, the propositional attitudes. For reasons soon to be apparent, I shall follow this tradition. In what follows I shall thus not make any distinction between contents and propositional contents, and I shall think of contents and propositions – whatever they more precisely turn out to be – as that which essentially has truth values.⁴ This minimal understanding of a proposition is, I hope, uncontroversial.⁵

Thinking of contents in terms of propositions is thinking of contents as abstract objects of a certain sort. These objects, by their very nature, are such that they stand in certain relations to one another. Propositions are essentially such that they bear logical and inferential or evidential relations to one another. Just like truth values, at least some of these relations depend on the world. Nevertheless, it is an entirely objective matter what truth values propositions have, and in which inferential or evidential relations they stand to one another. Together, these properties are what uniquely qualifies the propositions for their role as the objects of those psychological states that we think of as content bearing: The propositional attitudes.

Their function in this respect is threefold: First, to individuate these states in an adequately fine-grained way. Attitudes with different contents are different. Second, to explain certain significant similarities between attitudes of different attitudinal kinds: Thus, a belief and a desire can have the same object. And third, to explain and predict propositional attitudes and intentional actions on the basis of other such attitudes and actions.

Contents thus play the following role: They are abstract objects we assign to psychological states to model a specific kind of structure among them, to locate individual states in such structures, and to predict and explain their formation by means of other such states present in such structures. The states are those our folk-psychology recognizes, the explanations are reasons-explanations, and the individuation of the relevant states is by means of

⁴ I shall remain neutral here on the question of whether this content is structured.

⁵ Tradition thus has it that all psychological states with contents *are propositional attitudes*, where ‘propositional attitude’ is taken to have an inclusive and hopefully uncontroversial sense, too. In this sense, entertainings are propositional attitudes, for instance. Tradition also has it that the attitudes have uniform contents in the sense that all attitudes have whole propositions as contents. This, I take it, rules out propositional functions as attitude contents. It does not rule out that the contents of propositional attitudes are best construed as centered worlds propositions, however. Whether or not they do is another question I remain neutral on here.

propositional contents and folk-psychological role. Here is a recent voice, that of Richard Heck, summing up this way of thinking about content:

Why should we attribute content to mental states at all? A common answer might be that mental states are representational: Talk of a state's content is short for talk of its representational properties. That is certainly true. But why trouble ourselves with the representational properties of mental states? What would we lose if we just ignored them? I take it that we would lose the very idea of psychological explanation. We are in the habit of explaining our own behavior, and that of other creatures, in terms of what we all believe: We explain why Joe ran across the room in terms of his believing that his stuffed dinosaur was on the other side. (...) The explanations themselves are formulated not in terms of the neurological features of mental states but in terms of their contents (...). And so we might say: The reason we should attribute content to mental states is because there are things we wish to explain in terms of mental states, as individuated by their contents (Heck 2007, 120f).

If sufficiently fine-grained individuation was our only concern, propositions might not be the objects of choice for the role of contents; other kinds of abstract objects might do as well. But psychological explanation requires more than sufficiently fine-grained individuation, it requires relations beyond sameness and difference. Propositions by their very nature stand in certain relations to one another that uniquely qualify them for their job: the logical and inferential or evidential relations. Heck again:

Why not just take the contents of beliefs to be (possibly transfinite) ordinal numbers? (...) [T]he best answer, it seems to me, is that mental states are not just distinguished from one another by their contents: They are also related to one another by their contents. For example, given any two beliefs, there are several other beliefs that are related to them in familiar ways: Their negations, their conjunction and disjunction, and so forth. These relations are not just logical but also psychological: Someone who believes two propositions will, *ceteris paribus*, also tend to believe their conjunction, at least when the question arises (Heck 2007, 121).

For beliefs, that is, reasons explanations are possible because the beliefs of actual believers at least to some (minimal) degree tend to instantiate the objective logical and inferential or evidential relations between the propositions that are their objects. Together with beliefs, the ascription of contents to desires (or pro-attitudes) then allows for reasons explanation of intentional actions.

From this perspective, content first and foremost is what allows a psychological state to play a role in reasons-explanations. Consequently, the question of whether a given kind of psychological state does, or does not, have content is (at least to a large part) to be decided by the question of whether this kind of state does, or does not, play a role in reasons-explanations. Reasons-explanations 'surf' on the logical and inferential or evidential relations 'induced' between psychological states by means of assigning contents to them.

Following this content-theoretic tradition thus suggests the following way of looking at the question whether a given kind of psychological state has content: Do the states in question show the kind of inferential integration into their subject's system of propositional attitudes that would come with assigning contents to them? Does the state in question provide its subjects with reasons? Is this an important part of our folk-psychology? If the answers to these questions are positive, we have an excellent prima facie case for assigning propositional contents to that kind of state.

There is a complication, however: Assigning propositional content to a kind of psychological state is necessary, but not sufficient for accounting for its inferential integration into a system of propositional attitudes. Different kinds of attitudes play different kinds of reason providing roles. The role of desire as a (practical) reason provider is significantly different from that of belief. Any account of the psychological role of a propositional attitude is thus a function of two variables: content and attitude.

And while there are any number of contents, traditional models of theoretical and practical reasoning, or reasons-explanation, contain only two kinds of attitudinal 'slots': motivational and doxastic slots. So, for any propositional attitude, it can play one of two reason providing roles: a desire-like motivational role, or a belief-like doxastic role. To the extent that doxastic role in theoretical reasoning amounts to a justificatory role, folk-psychology here amounts to folk-epistemology.

With these elements in place, we can now turn to our initial question: What about *perceptual experience*? Does experience provide its subjects with reasons? And if so, does it fit into one of the slots provided by traditional accounts of reason providing?

In previous writings (esp. my 2009), I have argued that it is, indeed, an integral part of our pre-theoretic conception of perceptual experience that experience provides reasons for its subject's beliefs and actions. Like other proponents of this claim – such as John McDowell (1994), Bill Brewer (1999), or Richard Heck (2000) – I have focused on reasons for belief:

(R) Experience provides its subject with reasons for first-order empirical belief. Unlike other proponents of (R), I have combined (R) with a doxastic account of perceptual experience, an account according to which experience is a (peculiar) kind of belief. One of the main advantages of such an account, I have argued, is precisely that it allows to us to understand the reason providing role of experience on the model of the reason providing role of (non-experiential) belief, thus keeping our overall account of theoretical reasoning unified and traditional.

Availing ourselves of this advantage comes at a price, however. We only get a plausible account of the reason-providing role of experience from a doxastic account, if we are willing to construe experience contents in a certain nonstandard way. Standardly, experience contents are construed as being of the 'naïve' form x is F , where x ranges over ordinary material objects, and F over sensible properties.⁶ Together with a doxastic account, this has a number of unpalatable consequences.⁷ Not the least of them is that any inference from an experience content to the most basic kind of experience based belief would be of the 'stuttering' kind: It would be an inference from p to p . If nothing else, that makes a hash of the idea that perceptual reasons are defeasible.⁸ Such consequences can be avoided, or so I have argued, if we construe the contents of experience as 'phenomenal contents'. Phenomenal contents ascribe 'phenomenal

⁶ Strictly speaking, and on the assumption that there are sensible relations, it should be said that experiences have contents of the form $F(x_1, \dots, x_n)$, where x_i ($1 \leq i \leq n$) ranges over material objects and F over sensible properties and relations. Given the richness of experience, full experiential contents moreover should probably be construed as (long) conjunctions of such predications.

⁷ For instance, it would result in outrightly contradictory beliefs in cases of known (or believed) illusion. One might say that this is a kind of compartmentalization, a kind of compartmentalization, moreover, that is to be expected given the 'modularity' of perceptual experience. Alex Byrne, who at least seems to be quite tempted to construe experiences as beliefs, has taken this line in conversation.

⁸ I discuss what I call the 'stuttering inference argument' at some length in my (2009). The argument derives from McDowell 1998, 405f.

properties' to ordinary material objects, properties such as *looking F*.⁹ In what follows, I shall also call these contents 'looks-contents' or '*Lp*-contents'.

From the Davidsonian-Lewisian perspective on content, accounting for its intuitive reason providing role and its consequent inferential integration into its subject's system of propositional attitudes is the best possible substantiation of the claim that perceptual experience has propositional content. In this paper, I shall defend the claim that experience indeed has propositional content by further developing and defending the doxastic account of experience I have suggested.¹⁰

I shall proceed as follows: In the next section, I shall briefly recapitulate the main elements of the account and explain in what sense it allows experience to provide its subject with reasons. Then, I shall take up two challenges to the account, one concerning the epistemic role of experience, and one concerning its contents. In the third section, I shall ask when experiential reasons are *good* reasons. Can the doxastic account on offer provide a plausible epistemology for perception-based belief? In the fourth and last section, I shall take up a challenge to construing the contents of experience as looks-contents: 'Looks', it has been argued, is itself a propositional attitude operator. It thus has no place in the content of any first-order propositional attitude.

2. Experiences, Beliefs, and Reasons

The doxastic account of experience I have suggested combines two elements: The claim that experience is a kind of belief, and the claim that (visual) experience has looks-contents:

⁹ As customary, I shall focus exclusively on visual experience here. It is not completely clear how to generalize the account to olfactory and auditory experiences as these, *prima facie* at least, do not seem to take ordinary material objects.

¹⁰ This defense leaves any number of questions open: In what follows I do not take a stand on, for instance, the issue of the *kind* of proposition best assigned as content to experience, nor the issue of *how* experiential contents are represented. For all I care here, experiential representation might well be "iconic" (Fodor 2007) or "analogue" (Dretske 1981, 135ff). On my use of 'propositional', that does not prevent them from having propositional content. McDowell and Crane, by contrast, recently have come to tie having propositional content to being represented by sentence-like structures of a language-like medium. Cf. McDowell 2008, Crane 2009.

(PB) Perceptual experience

- i) is a kind of belief
- ii) with phenomenal contents.

Of course, there are many important differences between those beliefs that are experiences and other, non-experiential beliefs. Most importantly, perceptual experiences have a distinctive *sensory nature*: Phenomenally, having an experience is very different from having a non-experiential belief.¹¹ Experience thus is a kind of belief, a kind that any satisfactory account of experience ultimately should be able to specify.

One immediate question for (PB) thus is whether i) and ii) are necessary and sufficient for a state's being a perceptual experience, or only necessary. That, I think, depends on how precisely looks-contents are construed. Are there non-experiential beliefs with looks-contents? I tend to think not. I think that the sense in which 'looks' figures in the content of experiences is the so-called *phenomenal sense*.¹² In this sense, an object x cannot look F simpliciter. Rather, it always looks F to a subject S at a time t . Moreover, x looks F to S precisely if S , at that very time, has an experience as of x 's being F . Working along these lines, (PB) might be able to distinguish the experiences from the rest of our beliefs by their type of content. If that ultimately does not work, (PB) would have to fall back on experience's distinctive phenomenology to single out the relevant kind of belief. Both having a distinctive type of content and having a distinctive kind of phenomenology, however, are compatible with sharing the attitude component with ordinary common and garden beliefs. Not only is this compatible, the attitude component in perceptual experience is moreover *best* construed as that of holding true or belief – or so I suggest.¹³ One of the most important and immediate advantages of thus construing the attitude component is that it allows us to subscribe to (R): If experiences are beliefs, they provide reasons for

¹¹ This holds regardless of whether we think that there is such a thing as cognitive phenomenology.

¹² For more on that, see below, section 4.

¹³ I am not here going to argue against any kind of sui generis account of experience that allows experiences to be holdings true, without thereby subsuming them under the beliefs. See my (2009), however, for an argument to the effect that the availability of doxastic accounts that preserve the special functional role of experience undermines the very motivation for sui generis accounts.

(further) belief in the relatively well understood, traditional sense in which beliefs provide reasons for (further) beliefs.¹⁴

Let me spell out in a bit more detail the sense of reason, and reason providing, in which I take (R) to be an important and integral part of folk-psychology.¹⁵ The relation of reason providing we are interested in is a relation between two propositional attitudes, more precisely between two first-order empirical beliefs. One of them, the belief that *p*, provides its subject *S* with a reason for another such belief, the belief that *q*. Strictly speaking, the reason this belief provides *S* with is a proposition: *p*. *S* ‘has’ this reason in the sense that it is the content of one of *S*’s beliefs. In this respect, the notion of a reason we are interested in is *subjective*.

Such reasons *rationalize* further beliefs. If *p* is a reason for believing that *q*, then *p* must be such that it – from the subject’s own perspective – *speaks in favor* of believing that *q*. If *S* forms the belief that *q* on the basis of believing that *p*, citing *p* as a reason must confer some degree of rationality on believing that *q*. This rationality, too, is *subjective* in the sense that the explanation provided by citing the reason is such that it shows that something spoke for believing *q* *from S’s own perspective*.

¹⁴ The account has other advantages: It accounts for the ‘modularity’ or ‘belief-independence’ of experiences by means of their contents, not by compartmentalization, thus preserving the full rationality of the subject of a known illusion. It allows for *uniformity of contents* across veridical and non-veridical experiences. Most (virtually all) of the experience-beliefs will be true, of course, but (PB) can account for non-veridicality in terms of *misleadingness*: non-veridical experiences are those that provide their subjects with prima facie reasons for false beliefs. (PB) thus is compatible with the intuition that non-veridicality somehow is ‘downstream’ of experience, a matter of (non-experiential) belief (cf. Brewer 2006, Travis 2004). It also accommodates various phenomenological observations regarding experience, for instance what is sometimes called its ‘immediacy’, its ‘presentational’ or ‘committal’ character. (PB) captures this by construing experience as belief. (PB) also captures experience’s *particularity*, i.e. the claim that the veridicality of an experience depends on the intuitive object of the experience, not on some other object that happens to make its content true. Looks-contents naturally construe experiences as about those very objects they intuitively are about: Those objects causally responsible for them (in the right way, of course). Moreover, (PB) accommodates what is reasonable about *transparency*: Phenomenal properties, whatever their ultimate analysis, are properties of ordinary material objects, not properties of experiences. Finally, and on the assumption that there is such a thing as a phenomenal notion of looks, (PB) quite easily (or rather, trivially) satisfies the desideratum – if it is one – that experience content be “looks-indexed”, i.e. that experience content is determined by the looks of things (Travis 2004).

¹⁵ All I need for my argument is that reason providing in this sense is indeed a deeply entrenched part of folk-psychology. I do not need to deny that there are other, more objective notions of reason, notions that might be useful in epistemology (or elsewhere). I do not even need to deny that such notions also are part of folk-psychology.

At the same time, however, *S*'s perspective needs to be recognizable as a perspective by others: Believing that *p* needs to be such that it would provide *any* subject with a reason to believe *q*. This objective, or at least intersubjective, aspect of reason providing can only be secured by an underlying, *objective* relation of inferential or evidential support between *p* and *q*. In order for the belief that *p* to provide its subject with a reason for believing that *q*, there needs to be a *valid inference* (of some sort) from *p* to *q*.

At this point, it is important to note that we are not concerned with *good* reasons – yet. A subject can have reasons for and against forming a certain belief. These reasons need to be weighed against one another to determine what the subject has good reasons to believe – if anything. But so far, we are concerned with the more basic notion of having, or providing, *a* reason – of having, or providing something that even qualifies for such weighing. We are, in other words, concerned with *prima facie* reasons.

Two more (negative) characteristics are crucial: Having reasons for one's first-order empirical beliefs does *not* require forming them by means of conscious inference. Having a reason for believing that *q* does not require anything regarding how that belief is formed, not even that it actually be formed at all. And analogously for reasons explanations: We can explain *S*'s believing that *q* by means of her believing that *p* without implying anything about any conscious thought processes or deliberations on *S*'s part. To be sure, for one belief to reasons-explain another, the latter must somehow be based on the former, but the relation need not be one of conscious inference.¹⁶

Connected with this is the observation that having or providing reasons does *not* require the possession of *second order states*. What we are concerned with here are relations between first order propositional attitudes and their contents. A creature has reasons in the required sense as soon as its beliefs and actions can be explained by means of its further beliefs and desires. The capacity to think *about* these beliefs and desires is not required, and even less the capacity to think about these beliefs and desires *as* providing the reasons in

¹⁶ Ever since Davidson's 1963 paper "Actions, Reasons, and Causes", there has been widespread consensus that reasons explanation is a species of causal explanation.

question.¹⁷ What is required, however, is a certain minimal, subjective rationality. There are no reasons explanations, be it for beliefs or actions, unless a creature's beliefs actually to some minimal but significant degree instantiate the basic inferential or evidential relations objectively obtaining between the propositions that are the contents of their beliefs.¹⁸

Now, if we think of perceptual experiences as beliefs, we can accommodate their reason-providing role by simply extending our account of how beliefs, in general, provide reasons for further beliefs to them. This requires some care, however, as we at the same time want to preserve certain peculiarities of the inferential or evidential relations between experiences and other beliefs.

The two maybe most important characteristics of experiential reason providing are the following: First, the evidential relation between the contents of experiences and even the most basic further beliefs based on them must be *defeasible*. Experience can, and does on occasion, mislead. And when we know (or believe) that we are in circumstances where experience is apt to be misleading, the reasons it provides us with can be, and often are, overridden or defeated. If I know that the light is iffy, or that there is something wrong with my eyes, I will at least be hesitant to form beliefs about the color of nearby objects on the basis of my experience of their color. At the same time experience is such that it can, and often does, remain completely impervious to such background

¹⁷ Contrary to an anonymous referee's objection, I do not think there is any tension between this claim and the idea that reasons rationalize belief or action in the sense of being something that 'speaks for' forming a certain belief *q* or performing a certain action *a* *from the subject's own perspective*. What we are concerned with here is first and foremost a perspective on the world, not a perspective on one's own mental life. What makes a reason *p* part of the subject *S*'s perspective on the world is simply the fact that *S* has that reason, for instance, believes *p*. Then, if *p* is a reason for *q*, and *S* believes *p*, there is something that from *S*'s perspective 'speaks for' believing *q*. A perspective on the world can, but does not have to include a perspective on one's own mental life.

That reason providing can be a purely first-order affair is not only born out by our practice of ascribing reasons to some animals and to small children. It is also supported by the vast majority of the reasons-explanations we give every day for the behavior of the grown-up people around us. If you ask me why I am opening the fridge and I tell you that I am thirsty and believe there to be beer in the fridge, my explanation is not elliptical or deficient in the sense that for it to be complete I would need to add that I also believe that that belief and desire provide me with a reason for opening the fridge. Note, too, that in the most basic cases an accompanying second-order belief simply cannot be required: If believing *p* never rationalized believing *q* without also believing *that believing p is a reason for believing q*, we would be off on a regress.

¹⁸ This much rationality I take to be implicit in the very content-theoretic framework employed here. Without such rationality, reasons explanations would have no explanatory force whatsoever: Anything could be a 'reason' for anything else.

beliefs about its reliability. That's the second characteristic feature of experiential reason providing important here. Take well-known illusions such as the Müller-Lyer. Those lines look as if they were of unequal length no matter what your background beliefs tell you about their length. And there are many very robust and stable illusions like that. Phenomena such as these have led philosophers to think of perception as *modular*, or at least as 'belief-independent' (Evans 1982, 123).

None of this can be easily accounted for by a doxastic account that construes the contents of experiences and the contents of basic experience based beliefs *as the same*. I have argued that a doxastic account of experience can both preserve defeasibility and account for the modularity phenomena if it adopts a phenomenal semantics for experience. Construing experiences as having looks-contents allows these beliefs their independence from background beliefs. By the same token, it explains why the reasons provided by such experiences can be overridden or defeated precisely by considerations concerning a situation's illusion inducing potential. Nevertheless, or so I have suggested, experiences do provide strong prima facie reasons for basic perceptual beliefs: That it looks as if there was something red in front of you is a strong, but defeasible reason for believing that there is something red in front of you.

This is where I previously left matters. In the next section, I shall consider whether a plausible *epistemology for perception-based belief* can be developed on the basis of these ideas about the reason providing role of experience.

3. Experience and Justification

Experiences with looks-contents, I have claimed, provide strong prima facie reasons for beliefs. What we want to know now is when the reasons provided by experience are *good* reasons. More precisely, what we want to know is when experience provides its subject with *doxastic justification*.¹⁹

In order to understand how experiences with looks-contents can not only provide reasons for, but *justify* beliefs, we first need to have a closer look at the

¹⁹ What we want to know, that is, is when a subject *S* has (*doxastic*) *justification for* believing that *p* on the basis of her experience – as opposed to when *S* is (personally) justified in forming the belief that *p* on the basis of her experience.

underlying inferential or evidential relation, however. To provide a reason for believing that p a belief needs to have a content such that there is a valid inference (of some kind) from that content to p . For experiences with looks-contents, we get the following schema for such inferences:

$$(S) \quad \frac{Lp}{p}$$

Inferences of this kind obviously will not be deductively valid. Rather, if they are valid, they are valid in some ‘material’ sense. We can think of inferences like these in terms of *evidential support* or *probabilification*. Such inferences are valid if the conditional probability of p , given that Lp , is sufficiently high. They are valid, that is, in the sense of being *reliably truth-preserving*.

It is at this point that the most basic worry about experiential reason providing kicks in. It can be put in terms of a dilemma. The first horn consists of making the inferential connection between experience and belief content ‘too tight’: If experiences and basic perceptual beliefs have *identical* contents, the relevant inferences ‘stutter’. Defeasibility and modularity go by the board. We avoided this by assigning different contents to experiences and basic perceptual beliefs. But even though we did this by the seemingly minimal application of the looks-operator to the content of basic perceptual beliefs, the worry now is that the gap nevertheless is ‘too wide’. The other horn of the dilemma thus consists of losing the connection between the validity of the inference and the rationalizing power of its premises: If nothing but brute probabilification is required, experiential premises might no longer ‘speak for’ forming the relevant basic beliefs from the subject’s perspective at all. Instead of stuttering, the senses now are in danger of becoming mute.²⁰ Let’s call this the *dilemma of stuttering and silence*.

²⁰ Michael Pace (2008) offers an argument like this against what he calls ‘subjectivist’ accounts of experience, i.e. sense datum and adverbial accounts. We should, he says,

capture [the] idea that experiences serve as reasons for belief. However, it is not at all clear how subjectivist [views] can do so. The properties of which the subjectivist says one is directly aware perceptually, whether properties of sense-data or of mental states or of ways of being appeared to, are not the same as the properties one believes objects to have. How then can awareness of such properties give one a reason to believe that there is something in the world instantiating the external properties one believes to be present? (Pace 2008, 656.)

According to Pace, the advantage of both disjunctivist and intentionalist accounts over subjectivist ones precisely consists in construing experience as ascribing or relating the subject to the *very same*

We probably ought to agree that *mere* probabilification never is sufficient for justification. If p and q are logically unrelated empirical propositions, believing p *just by itself* never provides a subject with a *good* reason for believing q . But even if this is right, it might be possible to save experiences with looks-contents from silence.

A first, unfortunately hopeless idea would be to ‘bridge’ the gap between Lp and p by means of further beliefs. In order to have good reason for believing the conclusion of a ‘material’ inference, the more general reasoning here might go, a subject not only needs to (have good reason to) believe its premise(s), but also needs to (have good reason to) believe some principle connecting premise(s) and conclusion. In the case of inferences following schema (S) above, the subject could for instance believe that inferences of that form are generally reliable, or that particular such inferences, for instance the inference from *it looks as if there is something red in front of me* to *there is something red in front of me* usually gets things right.²¹

This is hopeless, for at least two reasons. For one, it seems psychologically implausible to ascribe belief in bridge principles to all subjects with good experiential reasons for empirical beliefs. And having good reasons for believing bridge principles does not seem any less cognitively demanding than actually believing them.²²

More importantly, however, further belief clearly cannot bridge the gap in any case. Rather, requiring belief (or having good reason for believing) in bridge

properties the relevant beliefs ascribe to the objects in question (cf. Pace 2008, 657). His argument might thus generalize to a ‘phenomenal intentionalism’ such as mine.

²¹ Another idea would be that the subject has (to have good reason) to believe that experiences in general justify believing that things are as they appear, or that particular kinds of experiences, for instance experiences as of red things in front of one, do so. Justification derived from such bridge principles would only be available to subjects capable of second order thought, however. This violates the requirement that reasons, even good ones, be available to creatures without such capacity.

²² Ascribing looks-contents might seem cognitively too demanding, too, especially with respect to the experiences of creatures of limited conceptual repertoire. Since some animals and small children are supposed to have experiences just like ours, it is thus often argued that the contents of our experiences must be simple enough to be plausibly ascribed to animals and small children. This argument, however, might as well be turned around: If animals and small children indeed do have experiences just like ours then we are fully justified to ascribe to these experiences contents precisely as complicated as required for performing their characteristic role in us. That we thereby might ascribe some ‘powers’ to animal experience that the animal itself not makes full cognitive use of does not seem objectionable. By contrast, it would seem eminently objectionable to argue that animals and children do possess beliefs in bridge principles. After all, it is quite clear that most of us do not have such beliefs, either.

principles leads into the kind of infinite regress familiar from Lewis Carroll (1895). Here is one way of illustrating this: As already observed, there is a (logical) gap between the premise – Lp – and the conclusion – p – of the inference we are concerned with: The inference is not necessarily truth preserving. We are trying to close that gap by means of belief in a bridge principle. Now, assume that the bridge principle is an inference schema like (S). Using such a schema to guide our inferences can take two forms: either we treat the schema as admitting of exceptions, or we treat it as to be followed in every case. If we treat it as admitting of exceptions, there will be a gap in the application of the schema to any particular instance i : Why is i an instance where the schema will lead to a true conclusion? And if we treat the schema as not admitting of exceptions, there is a gap in the justification of the use of the schema itself: since it is not necessarily truth preserving why should it be followed as if it were? In either case, there is a new gap – a gap of the very same nature as the original gap – in need of closing by means of a further bridge principle. And so on, ad infinitum.

We should therefore look for some other model on which to construe the justificatory power of the ‘material’ inferences we are interested in. In what follows, I shall be solely concerned with perceptual justification. When it comes to perceptual justification, it is very plausible to think of experiences as providing reasons of a particular kind, it seems to me – “prima facie reasons” in the sense originally suggested by Pollock (1974). To secure the justificatory power of experiential premises we should not ask for *additional* reasons or beliefs – rather, what we should require is the *absence* of certain other (reasons for) beliefs.

Defeasibility is only a necessary condition for being a prima facie reason in Pollock’s sense. The basic idea is the following:

[A] prima facie reason is a reason that by itself would be a good reason for believing something, and would ensure justification, but may cease to be a good reason when taken together with some additional beliefs (Pollock 1974, 40).

More specifically, a prima facie reason is a defeasible reason that is a good reason if, and only if, there are no *defeaters*. Pollock himself thought that two kinds of justification are to be construed as involving prima facie reasons in this sense: justification provided by inductive reasoning, and justification provided

by perception. Both suggestions seem plausible to me. Applying the idea to perceptual experience – as construed by the phenomenal belief account – we get:

- (J) A perceptual experience with the content Lp provides its subject S with justification for believing p iff
- i) Lp evidentially supports p to a sufficiently high degree, and
 - ii) S does not have good reason to believe any defeaters.

In the relevant epistemological tradition, it is common to distinguish between two kinds of defeaters: *rebutting defeaters* (Pollock called them ‘type I defeaters’) and *undercutting defeaters* (‘type II’). Rebutting defeaters ‘attack’ the conclusion of the relevant inference directly: They provide independent reasons against believing p . Undercutting defeaters ‘attack’ the connection between premise and conclusion, for instance by providing S with reasons for believing that circumstances are such that inferences following schema (S) are unreliable.

When it comes to perception, examples for both kinds of defeaters are not hard to come by. Pollock himself provides this example for a rebutting defeater:

‘Jones told me that x is not red, and Jones is generally reliable’ would be a type I defeater for ‘ x looks red to me’ as a *prima facie* reason for me to believe that x is red (Pollock 1974, 42).

And in the following quote he illustrates how ‘ x looks red’ *in the absence of any undercutting defeaters* provides good reason for believing that x is red:

Ordinarily, when I can see an object clearly, and have no reason for supposing that there is something wrong with my eyes, or that there are strange lights playing on the object, or anything of that sort, I unhesitatingly judge that the object is red if it looks red to me (Pollock 1974, 41).

My suggestion, then, is to construe the reasons experience provides for basic perceptual belief as *prima facie* reasons in the Pollockian sense: They are reasons that are good unless defeated. Merely having these beliefs is not sufficient for justification, but the ‘more’ that is required is not more belief, or more reason for belief, but rather the *absence* of (good) reasons strong enough to defeat them. If experiences with Lp -contents do provide Pollockian *prima facie* reasons, we can avoid the stuttering of the senses without having to mute them.

But why should we think perception is special? Why should we think perceptual reasons are *prima facie* in the Pollockian sense – when so many other

reasons are not? In particular, why should we think that the absence of defeaters is sufficient to turn mere probabilification into justification in the perceptual case – when the same combination does not seem to do the trick in other cases? That this is indeed very plausible is, I think, best brought out by considering some examples. While many other (defeasible) reasons a subject may have for empirical belief are not at all plausible as candidates for being *prima facie* reasons in the Pollockian sense, experiential reasons *are* different.²³

Consider Larry: Larry has never met Paul, but believes that he is left-handed. The only ‘reason’ Larry has for this belief is his (justified) belief that Paul is red haired. This belief clearly is not a plausible candidate for providing him with a Pollockian *prima facie* reason: Intuitively, the absence of any defeaters does nothing to make the ‘inference’ justified. Moreover, this does not change if we assume that there in fact, but completely unbeknownst to Larry, is a strong correlation between left-handedness and red hair.

Now, let’s turn the example around: Consider Laura. Laura is just like Larry in that she does not (have any (good) reasons to) believe anything defeating the ‘hair-hand connection’, but she nevertheless never draws any conclusions about people’s handedness from their hair color. Laura does not in any way strike us as odd or irrational. Quite the contrary.

But the situation is rather different when it comes to experience and basic perceptual belief. Take John. In bright daylight, he looks at a book right in front of him. The book is red, and nothing obstructs John’s line of sight. Nor does John believe that there is anything wrong with his eyes, or that the surrounding conditions are in any way other than they seem. He does not have any reason to believe any of this, either. Nevertheless, John does not believe that the book is red. Talking to him about it reveals that the book does, indeed, look red to him. Asked about defeaters, he denies believing any of them. Nor does he have any good reason to. Yet, he assures us ardently that he does not believe the book to be red. This *is* immensely odd, and quite clearly irrational.

There is a stark contrast between John and Laura: Intuitively, Laura is perfectly justified in not drawing conclusions about people’s being left handed from their being red haired, while John’s refusal to draw conclusions about the

²³ The following discussion was prompted by conversation with Alex Byrne.

book's redness appears utterly unjustified – in fact, it appears so unjustified that we might start wondering whether John knows what 'red' even *means*.

But even though the contrast between John and Laura indicates that perceptual reasons are special, one might still worry that probabilification is not what accounts for their being good in the absence of defeaters. Rather, examples such as John's might seem to suggest that the validity of schema (S) inferences somehow is a matter of conceptual or 'linguistic' necessity. For John's example does make us wonder whether John knows what 'red' means, and this might suggest that schema (S) inferences are 'analytic', 'meaning-constitutive', or a priori in some sense. Pollock himself certainly went down this road. According to him, perceptual reasons are *defeasible and "logical"* at the same time, and it is this combination that makes them prima facie (cf. Pollock 1974, 40). He explains what he means by "logical reason" as follows:

Whenever the justified belief-that-P is a good reason for one to believe that Q, *simply by virtue of the meanings of the statements that P and that Q*, we will say that the statement-that-P is a logical reason for believing the statement-that-Q (Pollock 1974, 34, *emph. added*).²⁴

While I agree that schema (S) inferences play an important and central role in the determination of meaning and content, I think it is equally important to hold on to the idea that these inferences are 'contingent'. These are, after all, the 'first' and most basic steps in the justification of the whole of our *empirical* knowledge. We must not fudge this fundamental insight by trying to cook up some unholy empirico-conceptual bridging mix here.²⁵

This does *not* mean that there must not be more to an inference from prima facie reason than the absence of defeaters, however. It only means that there is no alternative to using probabilification as underwriting experiential evidential support and thus licensing schema (S) inferences in the absence of defeaters. We do not need more for experiential prima facie reasons than what is already built into (J):

²⁴ Jim Pryor, another contemporary fan of experience as provider of Pollockian prima facie reason, holds that it is a priori that experiences as of *p* in the absence of defeaters justify believing that *p* (cf. Pryor 2000).

²⁵ No experiential prima facie reason is such that it is a good reason for believing something *simply by virtue of the contents believed*. It is good only in the absence of defeaters. Defeaters of an eminently empirical nature, moreover.

- (J) A perceptual experience with the content Lp provides its subject S with justification for believing p iff
- i) Lp evidentially supports p to a sufficiently high degree, and
 - ii) S does not have good reason to believe any defeaters.

The presence of a relation of evidential support (of sufficiently high degree), however, depends on the way the world actually is. If the world ‘cooperates’, schema (S) inferences will be *reliable*. It is in this sense, and in this sense only, that schema (S) reasoning is justified or warranted: In the absence of defeaters, such reasoning is warranted by its reliability. This much ‘externalism’, it seems to me, is ultimately unavoidable in the theory of empirical justification or warrant. Combining the phenomenal belief account with this account of experiential justification, we can avoid the dilemma of stuttering and silence. If the senses provide us with defeasible *prima facie* reasons, they neither stutter, nor are they mute. Whether what they ‘say’ can be trusted ultimately remains hostage to the world. But that is how it should be, it seems to me – it’s the human predicament.²⁶

²⁶ It is fairly obvious that there is no (direct) anti-skeptical mileage to be gotten from the idea that experience provides reliable *prima facie* reasons for (further) belief. This becomes drastically clear once we spell things out in terms of probabilities. Plausibly, reason (or evidence) providing is governed by the following principle (cf. Carnap 1950, 382ff; Spectre 2009, 91ff):

(EP) r is a reason for s only if $\Pr(s/r) \geq \Pr(s)$.

But now consider the following example:

(Lp) It looks as if there is something red in front of you.

(p) There is something red in front of you.

(q) There is something white in front of you that is illuminated with red light.

It clearly holds that $\Pr(p/Lp) \geq \Pr(p)$. But it holds equally clearly that $\Pr(q/Lp) \geq \Pr(q)$. Moreover, $\Pr(q/Lp)$ clearly is *greater* than $\Pr(q)$, which means that it is not the case that $\Pr(\neg q/Lp) \geq \Pr(\neg q)$. Consequently, that it looks as if there is something red in front of you if anything provides you with a reason *for, not against* believing that there is something white in front of you that is illuminated with red light. Of course, this reason will (normally) be much weaker than that simultaneously provided for believing that there is something red in front of you, but nevertheless: Experiences do not provide reasons against phenomenally compatible skeptical hypotheses.

Davidsonians might think that – despite the ‘contingent’ nature of schema (S) inferences – general considerations of content determination might help. While I have my doubts about that, the phenomenal belief account of experience is perfectly compatible with both a Davidsonian account of content determination and Davidsonian epistemology in general. For more on this, see my (2012) and Stroud (2002).

5. Superman's Looks

In this final section, I want to take up another challenge to the phenomenal belief account. So far, my overall claim has been that to the extent that we can provide a plausible account of the intuitive inferential integration of experience into systems of propositional attitudes, we thereby provide the strongest motivation available for construing experience as having content in the first place. I have argued that the phenomenal belief account does precisely that: By construing experiences as beliefs with phenomenal contents it accounts for their intuitive inferential integration without either jeopardizing modularity or falling prey to the dilemma of stuttering and silence. Silence is avoided by understanding experiential reasons as *prima facie* reasons in the Pollockian sense. A phenomenal semantics for experience thus does not only not obstruct a plausible epistemology of experience-based belief – it makes providing one quite easy.

The challenge I want to consider now is the following: Even if phenomenal contents allow us to get the epistemology of experience-based belief right, experience cannot plausibly be construed as having phenomenal contents. The looks-operator used by the phenomenal belief account is modeled on the so-called “phenomenal” use of looks-locutions in natural language, specifically English. And in English, phenomenal ‘looks’ is itself a propositional attitude operator. An operator modeled on English phenomenal ‘looks’ therefore cannot be used to specify the content of any first order propositional attitude.²⁷ Let’s call this the ‘attitude operator argument’.

I shall argue that phenomenal ‘looks’ – ‘looks_p’ – is *not* a propositional attitude operator. The argument will be simple in structure: Propositional attitude operators create hyperintensional contexts. But ‘looks_p’ does not. Therefore, it is not a propositional attitude operator.

I take it that the assumption that any propositional attitude operator worth its name creates hyperintensional contexts is uncontroversial. What is controversial is the claim that ‘looks_p’ does not. In fact, observations to the effect that perception verbs *do* create such contexts have been used in the literature to

²⁷ Arguments like this have been suggested to me by several people in conversation, first by Susanna Siegel.

defend the very claim that perceptual experiences have contents at all, and also that they have contents of a particular kind. In Searle, for instance, we find the following argument:

An additional clue that the 'sees that' form expresses the Intentional content of the visual experience is that this form is intensional-with-an-s (...). The most obvious explanation of this (...) is that the 'sees that' form reports the Intentional content of the perception (Searle 1983, 41f).

This, however, is not the best of arguments. For one thing, intensionality is not sufficient; (alethic) modal operators such as 'it is necessary that' create intensional contexts, and in their case, the most obvious explanation is not that the 'it is necessary that' form reports the content of any mental state. In order to have a better argument, we should require the creation of *hyperintensional* contexts. But even if 'sees that' creates such contexts, we still would not have a good argument for the claim that this form reports the content of perception. Arguably, 'sees that' implies belief, and if it does, 'sees that' reports probably report not the content of experience but the content of beliefs formed on the basis of experience.

Nevertheless, a better argument might seem to be very close by: All we need to do is replace 'sees that' by 'it looks_p as if'. For those doubting the hyperintensionality created, examples of substitution failure of the relevant kind seem readily available. For instance:

- (1) It looks to Lana Lang as if Superman is flying by.
- (2) It looks to Lana Lang as if Clark Kent is flying by.

That (1) is true in no way guarantees that (2) is. Assuming that 'it looks as if' in sentences such as (1) and (2) is used phenomenally and as a propositional attitude operator, Brogaard has argued that the content of visual experience, just like the content of belief, is Fregean (cf. Brogaard 2011a). While I agree with a slightly more careful claim – that experience content, just like (all other) belief content, cannot be modeled by possible worlds propositions *alone* – I do not think that 'looks_p' creates propositional attitude contexts. Examples like (1) and (2) are misleading. Before we look into that, however, a few words characterizing the phenomenal use of 'looks' are in order.

Following Chisholm (1957) and Jackson (1977), it has become customary to distinguish between at least the following three uses of phrases like 'it looks as if *p*', '*x* looks *F*', or '*x* looks like an *F*': The 'epistemic' use, the 'comparative', and the 'non-comparative' or 'phenomenal' use. While none of these uses seems to have any dedicated grammatical form (cf. Brogaard 2011b), they can be illustrated by means of example. For instance,

(3) It looks as if the neighbors are away,

is most naturally used epistemically. Using (3) epistemically, the speaker says something like that she has good reasons to believe that the neighbors are away. These reasons can, but do not have to be visual, or even perceptual – as illustrated by saying 'it looks as if Obama won the election' after listening to the news on the radio.

(4), on the other hand, is most naturally used comparatively:

(4) The neighbor's car looks like a tank.

Comparative uses arguably are best analyzed as existentially quantifying over ways of looking, or over looks: Roughly, there is a way of looking such that both the neighbor's car and tanks have it (Byrne 2009, Brogaard 2011b). That is, the car and the tank are compared with respect to their looks, and found to be alike. What exactly the similarity consists in is, of course, a matter of context; it is often suggested that the object of comparison (normally) is the way a certain kind of object, here tanks, normally or under standard conditions look (to normal subjects). But we can easily think of contexts in which the object of comparison is the way these things look under non-standard conditions. If you are looking for red apples on a dark summer evening, for instance, you might well use 'that looks like a red one' to say that the demonstrated apple has the look that red apples on dark summer evenings have (cf. Jackson 1977, 32; Chisholm 1957, 46).

Analyzing the comparative use of 'looks' along these lines, we make use of 'looks' in the analysis, however. To complete the analysis, we need an explanation of what these ways of looking are, an explanation that does not itself make (comparative) use of 'looks'. It is therefore often argued that the comparative use of 'looks' presupposes another, third use of 'looks'. This third use is then identified as the non-comparative, or phenomenal use (cf. Maund

1986, 171; Byrne 2009, 441, Brogaard 2011b). This amounts to analyzing comparative looking in terms of comparisons between non-comparative or phenomenal looks.

The crucial question for *any* completion of the analysis of comparative ‘looks’ is the following: What is it that comparative uses of ‘looks’ quantify over? What *are* these ways of looking that get compared when we compare the looks of things? Intuitively, the look of an object *o* is a property of *o* that varies with the conditions under which *o* is viewed. Thus, a white object can look red if viewed in red light. And a red apple can look a certain shade of grey when viewed on a dark summer evening. Moreover, such looks intuitively also vary with the viewer; things look different with my glasses on or off, and the way a red apple looks to my color blind father might well be the way it looks to me on dark summer evenings. A very natural idea therefore is to ‘phenomenalize’ looks along the following lines: Ways of looking are *relational properties* of material objects, properties somehow involving the experiences of subjects looking at these objects. They might, for instance, be dispositions to cause experiences of certain phenomenal kinds under certain conditions. Or they might be properties objects have precisely when causing experiences of certain phenomenal kinds.²⁸

Whatever looks precisely are, the basic idea behind the claim that the comparative use presupposes the phenomenal use of ‘looks’ is that what gets compared by comparative uses are precisely such phenomenalized looks. But

²⁸ Martin (2010) also suggests that comparative ‘looks’ be analyzed as existentially quantifying over looks. But according to him, looks are intrinsic properties of objects, more precisely, they are identical to the basic visible properties such as redness and squareness (Martin 2010, 161; 207ff). Moreover, Martin argues, most ‘looks’-statements – even those not obviously comparative on the surface such as ‘*o* looks red’ – are to be analyzed as comparative, i.e. as comparing an object’s look to that characteristic of a contextually relevant class of objects. According to Martin, there is no semantic reason to prefer an account according to which looks are relational properties involving the phenomenal character of our visual experiences of objects to what he calls “parsimony”, i.e. to identifying looks with basic visible properties (cf. Martin 2010, 222). And indeed, the semantics he suggests can account for our intuition that ‘*o* looks bent’, said of a straight stick halfway immersed in water, is true. According to Martin, we here do compare the stick’s straightness to the characteristic look of bent things, i.e. bentness, but we do so with respect to a contextually fixed similarity measure: “The stick is similar to bent things simply with respect to how it strikes me, or the subjective bearing it has on me” (Martin 2010, 215). This requires the semantics to be doubly context-dependent, however: Martin needs both a contextually fixed comparison class, and a contextually fixed similarity measure to get the intuitive truth values of ‘looks’-sentences right. In my (2013) I argue that there nevertheless is semantic reason to prefer construing looks as relational properties involving the phenomenal character of our experiences – because it allows for a significantly simpler semantics for ‘looks’-sentences. I also argue that, contrary to appearances, “parsimony” has no advantage when it comes to explaining the intuition (if it is one) that things have looks even if no-one is around to see them (cf. Martin 2010, 209; 220).

when using ‘looks’ comparatively, the way the object looks remains (literally) unspecified: What is ‘said’ is that there is *a* way of looking that the object shares with (an)other object(s) with a certain property (cf. Maund 1986, Byrne 2009, 440). In phenomenal uses of ‘looks’, by contrast, the way an object looks gets specified, or referred to, in a (more) direct way.²⁹

It seems very plausible to me that we make phenomenal use of ‘looks’ in natural language. There are some difficult questions regarding our use of ‘looks’, questions like whether the phenomenon we are observing is one of genuine ambiguity or polysemy, and how to secure a compositional semantics for phenomenal ‘looks *F*’.³⁰ For the purposes of this paper, we can work with the understanding of phenomenal ‘looks’ developed so far. I’ll assume that there is such a use in natural language and I shall indicate it by means of ‘looks_p’.

I should point out, however, that for me, nothing really hangs on this latter claim. Should it turn out that there is no phenomenal use in natural language, I’ll just *define* a phenomenal looks operator (and predicate modifier) that works in the way indicated and use it in my semantics for experience.³¹ This might (or might not) pre-empt the attitude-operator argument, but if it does, so much the better for me.

Jackson thought that the phenomenal use of ‘looks’ is restricted to, and maybe even induced by, combining ‘looks’ with predicates of color, shape, and distance (1977, 33). However, it seems plausible that sentences of the form

(5) *x* looks red,

²⁹ For those of us impressed by the possibility of inverted spectra (or inverted phenomenal qualities more generally), there is a complication here: There is no ‘direct’, intersubjectively accessible way of specifying phenomenal kinds of experiences. We can still refer to any phenomenal kind, however, for instance by specifying it functionally as that phenomenal kind that in the subject plays a certain epistemic or reason-providing role. For a construal of sensation terms that could be used as a model here, see Pagin 2000. In recent conference talks, both Maund and Pagin have suggested analyzing phenomenal ‘looks’ along such lines.

³⁰ Byrne (2009, 444) suggests in passing that ‘looks_p *F*’ is “idiomatic in the interesting way ‘red hair’ is”. Given the great variability of ‘*F*’ here, that would be bad news for the compositionality of natural language. As hinted in the previous note, it might be possible, however, to analyze phenomenal looks in terms of prima facie reason providing. Such an analysis might preserve the compositionality of ‘looks_p *F*’. My own preferred solution acknowledges that ‘looks_p *F*’ is not compositional (in the traditional sense). But it is not idiomatic, either. Instead, it is general compositional – which arguably is just as good (see below, fn. 38 for a tiny bit more on this. See Pagin and Westerståhl 2010a; b for the notion of general compositionality). This is a topic for another paper, however.

³¹ Of course, the precise semantics for this operator needs to be worked out more precisely. But that holds whether or not this operator exists in natural language.

can be used comparatively (and probably even epistemically). It also is very plausible to think that sentences of the form

(6) *x* looks old,

can be used non-comparatively or phenomenally. Consider (7):

(7) *x* looks red and old.

(7) is clearly well-formed, and that means that there is at least one uniform interpretation of (7). To me, it seems more difficult to read (7) as uniformly comparative than to read it as uniformly phenomenal. If read phenomenally, what we say by means of (7) is that *x* both has the ‘red-look’ and the ‘old-look’ (cf. Byrne 2009, 442; example originally from Thau 2002, 230).

Byrne (2009) uses observations like these to make trouble for the idea that phenomenal looks “index” the content of experience.³² We cannot read off experience contents from phenomenal uses of ‘looks’, Byrne argues, because objects can look_p *F* without being represented as *F* by the subject’s experience. Take Byrne’s own example: naked mole rats. Naked mole rats are bald, pink, and wrinkled; they look_p old no matter how old they are. All their life, that is, naked mole rats have the ‘old-look’. But, Byrne submits, that does not mean that experience represents them as old. Rather, experience represents naked mole rats as bald, pink, and wrinkled. Using “exing” as his term for the experiential propositional attitude, Byrne concludes: “If a naked mole rat looks_{nc} old to *S*, then *S* exes, of the rat, that is wrinkled, pink, etc. – not that it is old” (443).³³

Even though Byrne thinks that the possibility of using ‘looks old’ phenomenally thus spells trouble for the idea that ‘looks_p’ “indexes” the content of visual experience, he probably does not think that these observations ultimately prevent us from construing ‘looks_p’ as a propositional attitude

³² Travis (2004) argues that there is no notion of looking that “indexes experience content”, i.e. determines a unique content for a given experience. He does not consider phenomenal looking, however, and several authors have claimed that phenomenal looks do “index” experience content (cf. Brogaard 2011b, Schellenberg 2011). Byrne takes issue with this claim; according to him, not even phenomenal looks “index” experience contents.

³³ As already noted above (footnote 14), the phenomenal belief account of experience gets around the problem of indexing (if it is one). Phenomenal contents *are* indexed by phenomenal ‘looks’ – rather trivially so. Phenomenally speaking, ‘looks old’ and ‘looks bald, pink, and wrinkled’ are equivalent; both are ways of specifying the very same phenomenal look, and, thus, the very same experience content – according to the phenomenal belief account. This is precisely the feature of ‘looks_p’ that we shall use in what follows.

operator: Whenever something looks_p F to a subject S , there is a p such that S knows that p . It's just that p does not have to be x is F . Nevertheless, I think Byrne's observations do provide us with some important clues here. They point us towards features of 'looks_p' that ultimately undermine its construal as a propositional attitude operator.

Take some naked mole rat, for example, and call it Mora. By means of (8)

(8) Mora looks_p old,

I can ascribe the old-look to Mora. But I could ascribe *the very same look* to Mora by means of (9):

(9) Mora looks_p bald, pink, and wrinkled.

The 'old-look' and the 'bald-pink-and-wrinkled-look' are, in this context at least, one and the same.³⁴ Phenomenally speaking, that is, the predicates 'old' and 'bald, pink, and wrinkled' here are equivalent: When modified by 'looks_p', they ascribe the same property to Mora. I shall say that such predicates are '*co-phenomenal*' or '*phenomenally equivalent*'. I shall also say that the properties associated with these predicates themselves are 'phenomenally equivalent'. Semantically speaking, phenomenal equivalence, or co-phenomenality, is a very strange animal indeed. As we shall see directly, it is intriguingly independent of co-extensionality. Most intriguing, however, is the observation that looks_p-contexts are such that *phenomenally equivalent (or co-phenomenal) expressions can be substituted salva veritate*.

To better understand phenomenal equivalence, let's consider some examples. What the examples are supposed to illustrate is the very idea of phenomenal equivalence. When, precisely, are two expressions phenomenally equivalent? For two predicates F and G , that is the question of when the complex predicates 'looks_p F ' and 'looks_p G ' express the same property, i.e. ascribe the very same way of looking to the object they are predicated of.³⁵

³⁴ There is, of course, more than one way of looking_p old. Houses, for instance, look_p old in a different way than mole rats do. Which way of looking_p old is the relevant, or salient, one depends on the context. I shall abstract from this complication here.

³⁵ On the assumption that a subject S needs to know what looking_p F is like (to S) to fully understand the predicate 'looks_p F ', it seems reasonable to assume that if F and G are indeed phenomenally equivalent, no rational subject understanding both 'looks_p F ' and 'looks_p G ' will assign different truth values to 'o looks_p F ' and 'o looks_p G '.

Our first example is that of Gretria. Gretria is green and has the shape of a triangle. We can truly describe Gretria by means of both (10) and (11):

(10) Gretria looks_p triangular.

(11) Gretria looks_p green.

But 'green' and 'triangular' are *not* co-phenomenal. Not even in worlds where everything green is triangular, and vice versa. They do not ascribe the same property, the same look_p, when modified by 'looks_p'.

The same holds of 'is a duck' and 'is a rabbit'. The duck-look_p is different from the rabbit-look_p. Interestingly, that holds even of Dura, the duck-rabbit. Even though Dura in a certain sense 'has' both looks_p, Dura never simultaneously looks_p ducky and rabbitly to anyone. Looks_p that require a Gestalt-switch to be instantiated by the same object are *not* the same, and the relevant predicates are *not* co-phenomenal.

Necessarily co-extensional predicates, however, seem to be phenomenally equivalent – at least, if they are “phenomenal” at all.³⁶ Take Gretria again. In (10), we can replace 'triangular' by 'trilateral' without changing the look_p ascribed to Gretria. But as shown by the example we started with, the example of Mora, predicates do not have to be necessarily co-extensional for there to be contexts in which they are phenomenally equivalent. Moreover, they do not even have to be co-extensional. But if two predicates are phenomenally equivalent, they can be substituted *salva veritate* in looks_p-contexts.

Phenomenal equivalence is not restricted to predicates. Proper names can be co-phenomenal, too. Take two qualitatively identical tomatoes, Tim and Tom. Their names, like many others, can be used to ascribe looks to objects. Tim and Tom are interesting, however, because the Tim-look_p clearly is the same as the Tom-look_p. 'Tim' and 'Tom' are co-phenomenal proper names. But Tim and Tom are different tomatoes. 'Tim' and 'Tom' do *not* co-refer. Consequently, 'Tim' and 'Tom' are not *co-intensional*, either. Nevertheless, (12) is true whenever (13) is. In looks_p-contexts, 'Tim' and 'Tom' are intersubstitutable *salva veritate*:

³⁶ It is an interesting question which predicates are what we might call “phenomenal”, i.e. are such that there are, or can be, objects satisfying the complex predicate formed by means of combining them with the predicate modifier 'looks_p'.

(12) It looks_p as if Tim is sitting on the table in front of me.

(13) It looks_p as if Tom is sitting on the table in front of me.

This is in stark contrast to (1) and (2), of course. ‘Superman’ and ‘Clark Kent’ do co-refer, but cannot be substituted *salva veritate* in (1). And on the assumption that ‘Superman’ and ‘Clark Kent’ have the same intension – an assumption that I do not share, but will not challenge here – the contrast is even starker. But now, we can explain why ‘Superman’ and ‘Clark Kent’ cannot be substituted *salva veritate* in sentences such as (1) – without having to say anything about (1) being a propositional attitude context: ‘Superman’ and ‘Clark Kent’ cannot be substituted *salva veritate* in (1) because the Superman-look_p is very different from the Clark Kent-look_p: ‘Superman’ and ‘Clark Kent’, even though co-referential and co-intensional, are not only not co-phenomenal – they are such that nothing can have both looks at the same time.³⁷

Co-phenomenality thus is rather special when compared to co-extensionality. More precisely, co-phenomenality and co-extensionality appear to be independent properties. Proper names can be co-extensional and co-phenomenal, but they can also be co-extensional without being co-phenomenal, and most importantly, they can be co-phenomenal without even being co-extensional. The same holds for predicates. For (phenomenal) predicates, it also seems to hold that they are co-phenomenal if they are necessarily co-extensional. These observations suffice for present purposes. The claim I have put forward is the following:

(LP) Co-phenomenal expressions can be substituted *salva veritate* in looks_p-contexts.

Together with the observations about the relation between co-phenomenality and co-extensionality, it follows from this that looks_p-contexts are not hyperintensional. On the hopefully uncontroversial assumption that every

³⁷ Even though Superman both can have the Superman-look_p and the Clark Kent-look_p, he cannot have them at the same time. So, even though it is true that Superman (sometimes) looks_p like Clark Kent (and vice versa), substitution of the names *within looks_p-contexts* not only can result in truth value change – it *always does*. If it is true that Superman looks_p like Clark Kent at time *t*, it is not true that he looks_p like Superman at *t*. And vice versa. Note, however, that there are plenty of non-identical looks_p that an object can have at the same time, for instance the red-look_p and the old-look_p. Substituting ‘red’ for ‘old’ in a looks_p-context thus does not necessarily change truth value.

propositional attitude operator worth its name creates hyperintensional contexts, this means that looks_p is *not* a propositional attitude operator.³⁸

³⁸ In her *Introduction* to this volume, Brit Brogaard points out that there is an understanding of hyperintensionality on which an operator is hyperintensional “just in case substituting an expression for a logically (or metaphysically) equivalent expression under the operator changes the truth-value of the whole” (page ref to be inserted). Let’s call any understanding of hyperintensionality according to which a context is hyperintensional iff substitution of “co-intensional” expressions (in the relevant sense of ‘co-intensional’) can result in truth value change “weak hyperintensionality”. On the assumption that ‘Superman’ and ‘Clark Kent’ are indeed co-intensional (in the relevant sense), ‘ looks_p ’ is weakly hyperintensional simply because substituting the one for the other in sentence (1) does result in truth value change.

So, what did I have in mind when arguing that ‘ looks_p ’ is not hyperintensional? Well, first of all, I was thinking of extensional, intensional, and hyperintensional contexts along the following lines. In extensional contexts, co-extensionality suffices for *salva veritate* substitutibility. In intensional contexts, it does not. What suffices instead, is co-intensionality (the relevant form of which, of course, can be understood in different ways – e.g. as sameness of classical possible worlds intension or, on two-dimensionalism, as sameness of secondary intension or, on evaluation switcher semantics, as sameness of actualist intension). But co-intensionality entails co-extensionality. And analogously for hyperintensional contexts: Here, co-hyperintensionality (whatever that amounts to) suffices for substitutibility. But co-hyperintensionality entails co-intensionality and co-extensionality.

Thought of along these lines, hyperintensionality requires more than weak hyperintensionality: it also requires that what suffices for substitutibility entails co-intensionality and co-extensionality. Let’s call this “strong hyperintensionality”. My point then is that, while weakly hyperintensional, looks_p -contexts do not seem to be strongly hyperintensional: Looks_p -contexts are such that what suffices for substitutibility is co-phenomenality. And co-phenomenality does *not* entail either co-intensionality or co-extensionality. In looks_p -contexts, ‘Tim’ and ‘Tom’ are substitutable, and so are ‘old’ and ‘bald, pink, and wrinkled’ (in the context of describing Mora’s looks).

Secondly, it is precisely with respect to strong hyperintensionality that looks_p -context differ from paradigmatic propositional attitude contexts such as belief contexts. These *are* strongly hyperintensional. Moreover, strong hyperintensionality would seem to be *required* for being a propositional attitude operator. Looks_p -contexts thus share a certain more superficial characteristic – weak hyperintensionality – with propositional attitude contexts, but deeper down, it seems to me, they are a very different kind of animal. So, whatever we ultimately think ought to be called ‘hyperintensionality’ (and Brogaard may well be right that her understanding is more standard than what I had in mind), an operator that does not create strongly hyperintensional contexts is not a propositional attitude operator.

Why would being a propositional attitude operator require strong hyperintensionality? Roughly, because the use of expressions within the scope of propositional attitude operators can be sensitive to the precise *content of the attitudes* ascribed by means of them. It is a consequence of such “content-sensitivity” that substitutions within the scope of an attitude operator that do *not* preserve ascribed content can change the truth value of the ascription. And ascribed content is preserved across substitution only if substituted and original expressions are both co-intensional and co-extensional.

It is precisely this kind of content-sensitivity that expressions within the scope of ‘ looks_p ’ do not exhibit. As pointed out, in looks_p -contexts, co-phenomenality suffices for *salva veritate* substitutibility, but co-phenomenality does not require either co-intensionality or co-extensionality. It is this rather peculiar behavior of the looks_p -operator that I wanted to draw attention to. This behavior, I think, precludes the looks_p -operator from being a propositional attitude operator.

But why would ‘ looks_p ’ behave in this peculiar way? My hypothesis right now is that ‘ looks_p ’ is such that co-phenomenal expressions within its scope *have the same meaning*. For instance, if F and G are co-phenomenal predicates, the expressions ‘ $\text{looks}_p F$ ’ and ‘ $\text{looks}_p G$ ’ mean the same. Precisely how that works is a subject for another paper. Pace Byrne (cf. above, fn. 30), I think we should prefer the meaning of the complex looks_p -expressions *not* to be a matter of idiomatic usage. To achieve the desired identities of meaning, however, we cannot construe the meaning of the complex looks_p -expressions compositionally. Instead, we need to think of ‘ looks_p ’ as what Peter Pagin and I have called an “evaluation switcher”: an operator that switches the function used to semantically evaluate what is in its scope. The resulting semantics won’t be compositional (in the traditional sense), but it will be what Pagin and Westerståhl call “general compositional” – which arguably is just as good (for

The attitude operator argument was that the phenomenal notion of looks cannot be used to specify the very content of visual experience because ‘looks_p’ is a propositional attitude operator and thus cannot occur in the content of any first order propositional attitude. I have argued that ‘looks_p’ is *not* a propositional attitude operator. Nothing we have encountered in the course of these considerations therefore prevents it from ‘going into’ the content of visual experience.

In this paper, I have further developed and defended the phenomenal belief account of perceptual experience I have suggested earlier. In particular, I have defended the account against two objections against phenomenal contents: The objection that phenomenal contents prevent us from developing a plausible epistemology for perception based belief, and the objection that phenomenal ‘looks’ cannot ‘go into’ the content of experience because it is a propositional attitude operator. Construing experiences as beliefs with phenomenal contents allows us to account for the intuitive inferential integration of perceptual experience into our systems of beliefs and other propositional attitudes. This inferential integration in turn provides us with one of the best motivations for construing experience as having propositional contents in the first place. By offering an account of this inferential integration I have thus ipso facto defended the claim that experience indeed has content.

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more on switcher semantics and general compositionality, see Glüer and Pagin 2006; 2012, and Pagin and Westerståhl 2010a; b; c).

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