

Intentionality and the Role of Concepts in Visual Perception

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Abstract: Whenever we perceive, we perceive something. Our perceptual experience is always directed toward something. Through perceptual intentional content, we directly obtain information about our environment. Perceptual experience should have intentional and so representational content. The concepts we have of an object influence to develop the nature of intentional content of perceptual experience. As a rational agent, we apply our concepts properly to be in an intentional state and to have an intentional content of intentional objects. Recognition needs the application of concepts. The particular intentional state I have as a state of visual experience is a kind of conceptual state. If the experiential state has conceptual content, it can justify the acquired belief state. If we do not possess an appropriate concept, we will believe something which we think we perceive but it merely appears to us like this because we cannot properly identify the object.

Keywords: Visual perception, intentional content, representational content, intentional object, reason guided behavior, perceptual belief, conceptual content

Intentionality and the Role of Concepts in Perceptual Experience

Whenever we perceive, we perceive something. It strikes us as a creature, as a property of something, as states of affairs, as something or someone whom I know or recognise as known.¹ Even sometimes we perceive some objects present in our environment which does not exist at that time or does not exist at all. But the fact is our perceptual experience is always directed toward something; some object inevitably becomes the object of our perceptual experience. When we perceive something, we habitually remain in such an experiential state which retains experiential content. It is one of the unique and essential features of our experiential mental state. The experiential state is always engaged with some particular object and the fact offers us the explanation of the distinct relation between our experience and the world around us. All these effects are claimed by the theorists who support that every mental state enjoys the nature of 'intentionality.' Ordinarily, it is believed that as perceptual experience is a kind of mental

state, it equally possesses this significant property. Through perceptual intentional content, we directly obtain information about our environment because intentionality demonstrates this specific functional ability. According to Karla Chediak, 'Therefore, a perceptual state is representational in the sense that it is possible to ascribe intentional content to the physical state that is individuated by the way that it informs about the surrounding environment.'² In presence of specific environmental conditions, we receive specific knowledge. Put differently, while perceives, we can 'track' our surroundings by the intentional states and intentional content of perceptual experience.³

We regard Brentano (1874) as the first proposer of the exceptional nature of our mind that every mental state retains the property of intentionality. Afterward Searle also, following Brentano, suggests an appropriate prescription of intentionality as 'the property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world.'⁴ Intentionality represents the property concerning 'aboutness' or 'ofness' of visual experience. I believe that I am gripping a red pen. This is something that we cannot maintain if we do not regard 'intentionality' as something which can occur exclusively when we are conscious of the fact. Consequently, there is an essential relation between consciousness and intentionality. Whenever we are conscious, we are conscious of something. Hence, consciousness includes intentional content, and the world is represented by that content in a certain way, i.e. it must be a representational content.⁵ As a result, as we describe that to gain perceptual experience is to be necessarily conscious about something, then perceptual experience should have intentional and so representational content.⁶ According to Lycan, we can unquestionably maintain perceptual experiences have representational content; because it is the unique feature of perceptual experience that it consistently has representational content.⁷ Whenever we perceive something we assume the world exists like the way we perceive it. Therefore, my state of perception consistently represents something. Naturally, it is like an indispensable character of a perceptual state that it contains intentional content.⁸

I believe the pen I hold in my hand is red. In other words, my belief is about the red pen in my hand because my perceptual experience is about the pen in my hand. Every visual experience is accordingly directed at something, i.e. intentionality represents an exclusive trait of our experience. So we can consider these mental states as intentional states. In that case, the role of experiential content occurs here as the reason behind the states becoming intentional states.

Because these intentional states always by nature directed towards some objects, they always have contents and these contents always by nature intentional. These mental states are intentional states because they are about something and are about something because of the specific intentional content they have. In the previous example, the specific intentional content of my visual experience is 'the red pen in my hand.' So I can say my visual experience is directed toward the red pen. For Tye, intentional content is 'what is hoped for, believed, desired, and so on.'⁹ But for perceptual experience what we perceive delivers the intentional content. We also regard that what we believe depends on what we perceive. Now, I perceive a red pen in my hand and accordingly, I believe the pen I have in my hand is red. So I recognise the intentional object of my perception. The object of my intentional content is the red pen in my hand, and the intentional mode is my belief state. The mode and the object conjointly deliver the intentional content that 'I believe that I have a red pen in my hand.' The mode is the relation between the content and the object. According to Ryan Takenaga, initially, we can formulate a definition of an intentional object like - 'The intentional object of an intentional state is the real entity in the external world that the state is of or about.'¹⁰ So the red pen here is that real object which is the intentional object of the intentional content. In that case, an intentional content would be intentional content if it is a content of an intentional state and possesses an intentional object. All these things happen with the perceiver only, not with others because the world is represented in this particular way to the perceiver only.

If we summarize, after Takenaga, we will have 'Intentionality is a technical term for the directedness or 'ofness' of mental phenomena; intentional states are mental phenomena that exhibit intentionality; intentional content is how the world is represented or how things are represented by mental phenomena to the subject of the mental phenomena, and it is in virtue of its intentional content that an intentional state is of what it is of; the entity in the external world to which an intentional state is directed, and which is represented by the intentional state, is the intentional object.' We regard perceptual experience in a way an intentional state because we see that perceptual experience is always about something. Through perception, we receive data about the intentional object. We say we perceive something and we believe that thing is there. As a result, we always have a kind of attitudes towards the intentional object which together with the intentional object form the intentional content. How the perceiver observes the intentional object and what has represented to the perceiver, jointly determines the intentional content of the experience which includes that intentional object.¹¹

We see the main argument of intentionalism is every 'sensory experience' is intentional, and some states can be intentional when it refers to or about of or directed towards something. At this time, we can consider this is a mental property by which a relation is established between the world and the property-holder. But we equally consider a valid relation is that where we find at least two real existents that 'the relata' are. These two relata are - the subject enjoying the sensory experience and the other one is the content of the experience. The content of the experience is also considered as 'intendum'. Some intentionalists go with this opinion. They are entitled as 'Relational Intentionalism.' But there are instances where we have intentional content of our experience but we realize later that the intendum is not the real one. Customarily, we think that what we perceive exists in the world, or we assume that the world is like the way we perceive. The ordinary sensible objects are broadly the intendum of any intentional content and we perceive them as they are in the world. We can consider it if we encompass the perception as the genuine one. Though experience reveals things as they appear but according to Travis, maybe the objects do not exist in the similar way in the world.¹² Or our intentional states can represent the object which does not exist in reality. We must consider cases of hallucination, illusion, and misperception as well as a veridical perception in the area of the theory of intentionality, though in those cases 'the perceptual experience will have content as always, but there may be no object or no contextual relationship - and no successful acquaintance-to worry about.'

In case of hallucination, we face some problems because here intendum cannot be an ordinary physical object. Therefore, we find theorists called 'Non-Relational Intentionalism' who states that the relationship need not be a 'genuine' one, because the intendum may not be a substantial one. Suppose I feel I perceive a red pen in my hand. But imagine it is only a kind of hallucination. I have content of my hallucination state, and it is about some specific thing. Hence, this state additionally allows an intentional content though there is no real intendum. As a result, an actual perception, as well as a hallucination, can retain intentional content and both the contents can reveal the same fact.¹³

When we want to recognise the intentional relation between the intentional object and the experience, we must look at the intentional content of that experience. Experience must have specific content and that content must denote a specific object it has. Accordingly, the object is the object the act of intentionality directed to. The object must have the satisfaction conditions

by fulfilling what we will inherit an intentional object. As a result, in the case of intentionality, we find two kinds of relation – one is between experience and its content and the other is between content and its object. As follows, the intentional relation between experience and an object comprises the combination of these two relations. Perceptual intentionalism is a theory where it is assumed that perceptual experience is directly related to the external object, there is no medium in between them. The content of visual experience has intentionality, or it has representational content means it is about something. The object is external to the perceiver and belongs to the surrounding environment. At that point, the content of perception is related to the nature of the environment. The content represents the object through representational content. Therefore, the content notifies the perceiver about her surroundings.¹⁴

According to Sebastian Watzl, intentional modes are responsible for guiding or informing by the intentional state.¹⁵ When an intentional state is informing something, it has a representational mode. At that time we will find the necessity of correctness condition or accuracy condition. We may suppose that intentionality also follows the correctness conditions. When we perceive something, we have a perceptual belief about that thing. Whether my belief is accurate or not we have to verify. If the world is like my belief then the perceptual belief is correct or accurate otherwise it is not. In order to be a correct one it must satisfy the accuracy condition, i.e. should be in accordance with the real situation. But if the intentional state is guiding one, then it should have a motive behind the act. If it has the situation according to the purpose, we can say that it has the satisfaction conditions. The ‘direction of fit’ of these two intentional states is different. ‘Informing states have a mind-to-world direction of fit, while guiding states have a world-to-mind direction of fit.’ In case of perceptual experience, we do not have informing and motivational states simultaneously. When we perceive, first we have a belief about the perceived situation; then we may have another intentional mode about that situation. If I do not believe that I perceive a red pen, I do not desire to have that one. So in this case and may be for every perceptual experience we have the informational modes of intentional state first, then comes the motivational mode of intentional state. We always find both the modes in a single experience. It seems that we cannot differentiate the modes in an experience. Visual experience is a combination of both the modes. So perceptual experiences are such conscious experiences those include informational as well as motivational parts. In that case, all intentional modes of perceptual experiences have informational as well as guiding nature in them.

According to David Woodruff Smith, the relation between perceptual experience and its object is established by intentionality. When we perceive something we in fact 'acquaint with' the perceived object.¹⁶ The act of intentionality produces such intentional state about something that we are conscious of. So when we perceptually acquainted with something, that thing supposed to exist and have all those properties supposed to be seen. There is a spatial and causal relation between the object and the perceiver because perceiver perceives an object and acquaints with it in a particular context. Perception gives her intentional content. We have mentioned the causal relationship between the intentional content and the intentional object. At the time of perception, the object we perceive assists us to form the experience. If the object which is the cause of the experience becomes the object of that experience, the perception will be veridical, i.e., '... the object stands in an appropriate causal, spatiotemporal relation to the perceiver.'¹⁷ After all we should consider a perceptual experience as 'a causal theory of the intentionality of veridical perception' if 'a perception is veridically of an object if and only if that object stands in an appropriate causal relation to the perception'.

Now, consider the theory that the said object must be in a 'causal contextual relation' with the perceiver. Two people may have the same content of their experience but different object because of their belonging different context. As a result, by perceiving different objects, their senses are influencing them differently. So the causal theory admits 'the context-dependence of perceptual acquaintance.' But in this kind of explanation, we will find that we can have perceptual experience even if we are not aware of our perceived object. If we can hold this then we can question the existence of intentional relation between perceptual experience and external objects. If the object is the cause of perception, then whoever perceive the same object can perceive the object as it is if the context is the same one. But we see that different perceivers see the same object differently. In a normal condition, I perceive and believe there is a red pen in my hand. But someone who does not have the concept of 'red' or 'pen' perceive the same object but not believing in 'red pen' but something else that I cannot understand because I already have the concepts of red pen and have to see the object as a red pen. But we at least understand that she is not aware of 'red pen.' May be the same brain processing is going on in us after the stimulation of the visual senses by the ray of light and we observe the object in the same direction. But my experiential content has a different object than the other perceiver. Proper contextual relation between perceiver and the object cannot set up the proper explanation of intentional relation between experience and object. It is a problem for giving an

explanation of perceptual consciousness. In that case, we must consider 'appropriate causal and spatiotemporal relation' between perceiver and perceived object when the perceiver is perceptually aware of something. Only then we will accustom with the object in her surroundings. This kind of causal relation is somehow controlled what we receive. All the events carry out a relevant role in a coordinated causal way. We may consider this incidence, after Searle, 'intentional causation.'¹⁸ Searle considers that whenever we perceive something, we acquire perceptual experience. Those perceptual experiences are caused by 'states of affairs.'¹⁹ The characteristic of perception expresses the fact of 'the intermingling of intentionality and causality.' As a result, we cannot put forward intentionality over causation, i.e. we cannot say that causal relation is the cause of intentional states; neither intentional act is the cause of the causal relation of perceptual experience and objects. Intentionality and causality are interconnected with each other.

When we perceive something, our intentional system performs some action.²⁰ We have representational content and we have some purpose. But it is not that the perceiver evaluates every moment of perception that whether she applies reason to perceive the object in a particular way or not. She does not have any prior motivation to be in a particular intentional attitude. But all these things are not mechanical happenings. When I hold the red pen at an angle so that I can write down something in a white page, it shows that I have a control on my experiential states having intentional content; although for Christopher Peacocke, 'For a state to have a given intentional content, however, it must stand in an extremely complex network of relations to other states and to the subject's environment.'²¹ What I believe, I realise it in coordination with my surroundings. Overall experience gives me a kind of feeling of satisfaction. I must grasp some senses from my experiences so that my next behaviour must be understandable from my side. So perceptual experience as an intentional act cites us reason to believe what we see as well as regulate what we should believe.

In this regard, we also assume the act of intentionality in perceptual experience is guided by our reason. We as a rational agent can secure intentional states. According to B. Yoon, we should regard that non-human animals are also able to have intentional states.²² If I bring forward that red pen towards a monkey, it is a very much possibility that that monkey would show the eagerness to snatch the pen from me. The monkey perceives the pen, and she is in an intentional state which is directed towards the pen. The monkey must have a belief that she perceives a thing which she can acquire or something like that. So she has intentional content

concerning some intentional object. So the monkey does not merely perceive the object, and she intelligently behaves according to her intentional content of perceptual experience. In addition, we should consider that she has enough reason to behave in this way.

Now, what are the components of intentional content? We can say that the concepts we have about the world are the component parts of the intentional content. The concepts we have of an object influence to develop the nature of intentional content of perceptual experience. Experience is produced by the help of such concepts, and concepts make all the experiences separated from each other. When our concepts attach with an object, we are acquainted with that object. We apply our concepts to represent the world properly and to behave properly. If we don't have the appropriate concept, we cannot apply the capacity to represent something. We cannot use the intentional content of our perceptual experience behave consistently as we cannot think about what to do. So as a rational agent we apply our concepts properly to be in an intentional state and to have an intentional content of intentional objects. If we do not recognize the object we cannot do all these things.²³ Recognition needs the application of concepts. If I do not recognise the thing in my hand as something by which I can write down something, maybe I cannot ever try to write down something with the pen. (We always have the possibility in such a situation to argue about the first usage of a pen, but here I have consciously put aside the point.) Accordingly, we can assume that intentional act actually 'dependent upon certain assumptions about the concept of representation and the role of representational systems in the explanation of intelligent or conceptually driven behaviour.'²⁴ Perceiver perceives the object and accustomed with it in relation to her surroundings.²⁵ The act of intentionality confers the power to be familiar with and later on to recognise the object. It has seemed that this nature of perception can determine the experience of the perceiver, the behaviour of the perceiver and proposes an explanation of how the perceiver regulates her behaviour with the environment. Hence, we cannot neglect the act of intentionality.

We may think, after Justin Tiehen, that an intentional perceptual state is a conceptual state if in being that state requires that the perceiver must have an adequate concept to be familiar with the content of the intentional state.²⁶ In our example, if I am adept to believe that I perceive a red pen in my hand, I must have many concepts including the concept of 'red' and 'pen'. These are the special concepts which unify the content of my perceptual experience which is an intentional state. It is possible to be conscious about my particular perceptual content only

if I have those particular concepts otherwise I cannot separate them from other objects and cannot recognise the object I perceive as a red pen. As a result, according to the previous explanation, we can say that the particular intentional state I have as a state of visual experience is a kind of conceptual state. If every visual experience is a kind of conscious experience and if utilizing every visual experience is actually in being in a kind of intentional state, then every visual experience should provide intentional content. on that occasion, every visual experience is a conceptual one.²⁷ After we have those conceptual state and content, we form beliefs, which can be called perceptual belief.

When we perceive an object repeatedly, it will encourage us to figure an abstract intentional content about this object. In this way we can conceive a concept about the object and that intentional content is the representational content of that concept. In the case of a child's learning process, we see she can misperceive a pen with a stick. At the first time of her grasping a pen, it's only a mere representation to her. But gradually she earns the relevant concept and acquires the use of her vision. We also learn to extend any particular concept to classify unknown objects in the uniform manner, we also form new concepts. If I perceive one or more objects and classify them as consisting of the same category, I must perceive one or more same properties in them which can be assigned to them accurately. I employ the relevant concepts of them to organise them properly. But it is equally significant to note that when we represent properties of objects through the intentional content of our perceptual experience, the properties reside in the object also plays a crucial role. At the time of nonexistent object perception, we perceive some properties which do not exist. So, we can have the concept of those properties also which do not belong to any real object.²⁸ By employing concepts, we 'can employ existing content to alter or fix the content of a new concept.'²⁹

When we perceive something, simultaneously we have perceptual belief. Perceptual belief must have some intentional content because any belief state must be about something. Belief state is always a conceptual state because it represents something of which I must have some kind of concept. If I do not have 'conceptual capacity', intentional content of my belief state cannot be developed. If I believe that the pen is red, I must deploy the concept of red and pen. In this way, all belief states have conceptual intentional content. In this way, conceptualist thinks that all perceptual experience has conceptual intentional content.³⁰

We have discussed that perceptual experience is the beginning of perceptual belief.

According to Brewer, we have the assumption that every perceptual experience has intentional content. The belief originates from this experience also has intentional content. We also postulate every belief state has conceptual intentional content. We see the experiential state provides the reason for the belief state. We believe the world to be in a certain way because we perceive the world in that way. If the content of perceptual experience and the content of belief state is the same one then the content of perceptual experiential state must be conceptual because only if the experiential state has conceptual content, it can justify the acquired belief state. Hence, perception restricts the content of belief state. If perceptual experience and perceptual belief do not have such a causal link, we would have separate intentional content of both the states. At that point, the verification condition would be different for both the states. Perceptual experience cannot be able to justify produced perceptual belief. We cannot comprehend the reason behind the perceptual belief. If a particular perceptual experience doesnot become the cause of a particular perceptual belief, then it would be meaningless to think about any causal relation between perceptual experience and a perceptual belief. I cannot say that as because I perceive the thing as a red pen, I believe the pen is red. Any perceptual experience may produce any kind of perceptual belief and no perceptual belief can have a relevant relationship with any particular perceptual experience. There will be no ordered sequence between perceptual experience and perceptual belief. On the other side, if we think there is no causal link between the intentional contents of perceptual experience and perceptual belief, then under normal circumstances, after perceiving the red pen, the content of my believe may include a very different kind of object, at least we have no guess about what will be the content.

But, in reality, normally it does not happen. If the intentional content of my perceptual belief is about a red pen, generally it is caused by my perception of a red pen. If it does not happen, I will not have any evidence to establish the fact that why I believe in seeing a red pen, and not anything else. Usually, we can discriminate between different kinds of intentional content. Hence, if we realise that a perceptual experience and acquired perceptual belief do not have the same kind of intentional content, that perceptual experience would not have any kind of relevance to that perceptual belief. On the other hand, if more than one perceptual experience has the same relevant level to a single perceptual belief, then it will also create a perplex problem. We have to decide the most appropriate option for that perceptual belief. That choice essentially depends on the similarity of the intentional content of experience and

belief. We do not randomly select one perceptual experience for a perceptual belief because we know irrationality will cause a conflict in our mind. The unpredictability will increase terrifyingly if two opposite kind of belief possesses equal kind of support from a particular perceptual belief.³¹

To avoid all these problems Brewer gives some arguments. He considers this argument as 'switching argument', and he thinks he is following Peacocke in this matter. His argument is like that:

- (P1) 'There is a class of beliefs about the spatial world ('*a* is *F*') whose members have the content which they do only in virtue of their standing in certain relations with various actual or possible perceptual experiences.
- (P2) Only reason-giving relations between perceptual experiences and beliefs could possibly serve the content-determining role required by (P1).
- (R) Perceptual experiences provide reasons for empirical beliefs.'³²

The truthness of the state of a perceptual experience depends on the intentional content it produces. The content of a perceptual experience is the condition fulfilling which the experiential state can be true. Perceptual experience obtains accurate if it is according to its intentional content. The truth conditions of perceptual belief state are furthermore under the intentional content of a belief. If the conditions are satisfied, the belief state will be true. Perceptual experience remains such a mental state that can be assessed and considered being accurate or inaccurate. Their intentional contents are the determiner of this particular nature.³³

Following Colin McLear we can rearrange our example. Suppose, for example, that an experience *E* has the following content *C*:

(C) That pen is red

This content determines a correctness condition *V*:

(V) *S*'s experience *E* is correct iff the pen visually presented to the subject as the content of the demonstrative is red and the content *C* corresponds to how things seem to the subject to be visually Presented.³⁴ We now understand that if we do not have the concept of 'red' and 'pen', (V) cannot be presented in such a manner to the subject. So the intentional content of an

experiential state should be conceptual.

Therefore, we believe in what we perceive, because the content of intentional states is conceptual. They are conceptual because they are accompanied by the rule of rationality. In normal circumstances, we believe the content of an intentional state, because we have a conceptual intentional state. If seeing red pen lifts up the belief of intentional states having intentional content about the red pen, then the content involves the concept of red and the concept of a pen. If we believe that the pen is red, we cannot have a belief that pen is not red. If the content of the belief state is conceptual then, we cannot have any contradictory belief state.

Another important feature of the intentional state is that if it is conceptual then it must recognise the object it refers to. It is an essential condition of any conceptual content that it must follow the nature of reference determinacy. We can call it, after some philosophers, the nature of 'determinateness' of conceptual intentional content. 'An intentional state with conceptual content is one where the bearer of the content is able to grasp what her state is about, that is, its semantic value (reference, normative conditions). ... In general, to determine the semantic value involves knowledge of, or an ability to identify, classify, and/or recognize the referent of *c*.'³⁵

In that case, it seems that, conceptual content can be erroneous for us. If we do not possess an appropriate concept, we will believe something which we think we perceive but it merely appears to us like this because we cannot properly identify the object. It is a 'cognitive limitation' for us. As the intentional content invariably refers to or directed toward something, if we do not possess proper knowledge, we misbelieve the object. Conceptual content demonstrates the way of what to believe. If the concepts as a source of belief are improper, then we can choose an inappropriate reference or maybe we cannot refer anything. We cannot refer maybe because the object may not exist or it may not exist in the way we believe it. Because of the epistemological deficiency of the perceiver, we should count the difference between 'what is right and what seems right.'

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