



## The representational and phenomenal richness of perceptual experience

*(La riqueza representacional y fenoménica de la experiencia perceptiva)*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper deals with the issue of the admissible content of perceptual experience at the centre of the debate that opposes Conservatives and Liberals—who advocate, respectively, a Sparse and a Rich Content-View—and aims, specifically, to consider how this debate interacts with the Externalism/Internalism debate in philosophy of perception. Indeed, apart from a few exceptions (Siegel, 2006, 2010, 2013; Bayne, 2009; Ashby, 2020a; Raleigh, 2022), this issue has not yet been sufficiently addressed, and the present paper, in the wake of the aforementioned works, aims to focus on this issue in order to assess whether it would be more congenial for a Liberal to adopt content internalism or rather content externalism. In my paper I argue that the best move the Liberal should make is to endorse externalism with regard to the content of perceptual experience and internalism with regard to its phenomenal character. But, as it will turn out, this combination can only be sustained consistently if the Liberal discards the standard interpretation of one of its central claims, the so-called (Ashby, 2020a, p. 689) “phenomenal reflection claim” (PRC)—the claim according to which perceptual properties are reflected in/reverberate in the phenomenology of the experience—and adopts a different interpretation of it. To indicate what alternative interpretation of PRC the liberal should provide is one of the main goals of the paper.

**KEYWORDS:** Sparse vs Rich View of Perceptual Experience, Content Externalism, Phenomenal Internalism, Phenomenal Reflection Claim, Representationalism.

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo aborda la cuestión del contenido admisible de la experiencia perceptiva en el centro del debate entre conservadores y liberales, que defienden, respectivamente, una visión de contenido escaso y una visión de contenido rico. En concreto, pretende considerar cómo interactúa este debate con el debate externalismo/internalismo en filosofía de la percepción. De hecho, aparte de unas pocas excepciones (Siegel, 2006, 2010, 2013; Bayne, 2009; Ashby, 2020a; Raleigh, 2022), esta cuestión aún no se ha abordado suficientemente. El presente trabajo, siguiendo la estela de los trabajos mencionados, pretende centrarse en este asunto para evaluar si sería más adecuado para un liberal adoptar el internalismo del contenido o más bien el externalismo del contenido. En mi trabajo sostengo que el liberal debería respaldar el externalismo con respecto al contenido de la experiencia perceptiva y el internalismo con respecto a su carácter fenoménico. Sin embargo, como se verá, esta combinación solo puede sostenerse consistentemente si el liberal descarta la interpretación estándar de una de sus afirmaciones centrales, la llamada «afirmación de reflexión fenoménica» (PRC) (Ashby, 2020a, p. 689), y adopta una interpretación diferente de la misma. Indicar qué interpretación alternativa de la PRC debería proporcionar el liberal es uno de los principales objetivos del trabajo.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Visión Escasa vs Rica de la Experiencia Perceptiva, Externalismo del Contenido, Internalismo Fenoménico, Afirmación de Reflexión Fenoménica, Representationalismo.

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## Introduction

The paper focuses on a debate that has recently taken centre stage in the philosophy of perception, and it concerns which properties can be experientially perceived and, therefore, show up in the phenomenal character of the subject's experience. At the heart of this debate is the question of the scope of perceptual phenomenology, and the main controversial issue is whether only low-level properties (i.e., properties like colour, shape, motion) or even high-level properties (i.e., properties like being a thing of a given —natural, artefactual, social, emotional, affective— kind) can be reflected in it. While so-called Conservatives choose the first disjunct, Liberals opt for the latter, claiming that our perceptual experiences are phenomenally rich and that this richness has a sensory nature.<sup>1</sup> Since the debate is usually addressed within a representationalist account (i.e., an account that takes perceptual experiences to be endowed with representational content), the sparse/rich contrast is considered both at the level of content (i.e., with regard to representational properties) and at the level of phenomenology (i.e., with regard to phenomenal properties). While most Conservatives are happy to concede representational richness (Prinz, 2013, p. 829), none of them is willing to grant phenomenal richness. On the contrary, the idea that our perceptual experience is rich in both senses is fundamental to the core of the liberal position.

The debate at issue presents interesting interactions with many other ongoing debates in the philosophy of perception. While some attention has been devoted to its interaction with, for example, the cognitive penetrability debate (Macpherson, 2011; Siegel, 2012; Brogaard & Chomanski, 2015; Toribio, 2018), and the debate on conceptual vs. non-conceptual content (Stokes, 2021; Montague 2023), apart from a few exceptions (Siegel, 2006, 2010, 2013; Bayne, 2009; Ashby, 2020a; Raleigh 2022), only scant attention has so far been devoted to its interaction with another important debate that, while not confined solely to the philosophy of perception, is crucial in this field of inquiry as well. I refer to the debate between externalism and internalism as regards the individuation conditions of the content of a mental state. One of the aims of this paper is to focus on this issue in order to assess whether the liberal position is ultimately compatible with both content externalism and content internalism and, if so, whether one of the two combinations is preferable and on what basis. It must be said that there is no unanimous consensus in the relevant literature on this issue.

According to Siegel (2010, pp. 113-115; 2013, pp. 851-852), one of the most prominent supporters of the liberal position, liberalism is itself neutral with respect to the question of what determines the content of perception and how that content is to be individuated, and therefore, in her view, liberalism is compatible with both content externalism and content internalism. However, this claim has been contested. According to Prinz, for example, what externalism implies is “that the phenomenally available aspects of content are modest, not rich” (2013, p. 833). If Prinz were right, it would follow that a Liberal should

<sup>1</sup> In the way I am here using labels, I take a Liberal to be someone who holds that not only low-level properties, but also high-level properties of different sorts are perceivable, that is, not only kind properties of various types, but also non-kind properties that still qualify as high-level. In this sense, my terminology differs from that of other authors (i.e., Ashby, 2020a), who instead distinguishes between Liberals and High-Levelists. Since the distinction between kind and non-kind properties within the encompassing domain of high-level properties is not relevant to my present purposes, I have preferred to use a unique label to cover both types.

reject content externalism and endorse content internalism instead. Some Liberals have indeed taken this route (Bayne, 2009; 2016) and have pursued an internalist defence of the liberal position. However, the idea that content internalism fits the liberal cause has recently been challenged by Ashby (2020a) who has argued that perceptual content internalism entails conservatism when coupled with a premise so plausible that no one should reject it.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, in his view, what the Liberal should do is perform *modus tollens* on the entailment of conservatism by content internalism.

Who is right? And on which basis could such an issue be settled? In my paper, I intend to move from Siegel's "neutrality assumption" according to which the liberal position does not imply any thesis about the individuation of the content of perceptual experience and is therefore compatible with both content internalism and content externalism. Taking this assumption on board, I want to consider which of the two individuating theses would be more congenial for the Liberal to adopt, given the implications that the respective choices have for the extent of the scope of permissible high-level properties and their nature. To settle this issue some criteria for deciding which combination is to be preferred are needed. In my paper, I provide two such criteria: one having to do with the width of the range of perceivable properties that a given combination allows, and another having to do with the nature of the theoretical commitments undertaken.<sup>3</sup> I shall label them the "*appropriate content criterion*" and the "*theoretical criterion*", respectively. Mobilizing them, I will argue that the combination that the Liberal should prefer is the one that best satisfies both criteria. That is: the combination that admits a wider domain of perceivable properties and makes less controversial theoretical commitments.

In my paper I will argue that the optimal satisfaction of these two criteria depends crucially on which interpretation is provided of the claim according to which perceptual properties are reflected in/reverberate in the phenomenology of the experience. Borrowing from Ashby (2020a, p. 689), I will refer to it using the label "phenomenal reflection claim" (PRC). Unfortunately, despite its importance, there has so far been an insufficient critical reflection on it. This has, in my opinion, been enormously detrimental to the debate in question, which has mostly taken place by uncritically assuming a certain interpretation of the claim whose mandatoriness is far from obvious, even though it is the one adopted by all Conservatives and accepted by most Liberals (Ashby, 2020a, p. 703). According to this interpretation, which I shall henceforth call the "standard interpretation", for a property that features in the representational content of the experience (i.e., the property of being yellow that my experience of seeing a yellow lemon represents) to be reflected in the phenomenology of the experience, it must supervene on it with metaphysical necessity. Although this reading may seem at first glance to have a strong intuitive appeal on its side, I will argue that it should be rejected by any Liberal who wants to comply with the two above mentioned criteria. For, as I will show, if this interpretation is resorted to, the Liberals find themselves in difficulty in adequately satisfying those criteria, regardless of which individuating thesis they choose to adopt. In fact, as it will turn out, if they uphold content inter-

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<sup>2</sup> The premise Ashby is referring to is what he labels the "Symmetry claim" which he characterizes as "the claim that we should not draw arbitrary distinctions when attempting to determine which perceptual experiences are veridical and which are non-veridical" (Ashby, 2020a, p. 690).

<sup>3</sup> I do not exclude that other criteria could be proposed in addition to those indicated. However, for the purpose of my paper, these two criteria are sufficient.

nalism (content supervenes only on the subject's intrinsic features), they have troubles adequately satisfying the appropriate content criterion—as they are obliged to circumscribe the domain of perceivable properties only to those that feature in the phenomenally common content of perception. Conversely, if they uphold content externalism (content supervene also on the subject's extrinsic features), they have trouble adequately satisfying the theoretical criterion, as this move, along with the standard interpretation of PRC, requires on their part to endorse phenomenal externalism, which is a rather controversial position regarding the nature of phenomenal character. In my view, the best move the Liberal should make to satisfy both criteria is to support externalism as far as the content of experience is concerned and internalism as far as its phenomenal character is concerned. But this combination can be sustained consistently, only if the Liberal discards the standard interpretation of PRC and adopts a different reading of it.<sup>4</sup> To indicate which alternative interpretation of PRC the liberal should offer is one of the main goals of the paper.

Before concluding this introductory section, let me outline the roadmap of the paper. In section 1., after providing an overview of the debate at issue, I introduce and motivate the criteria that I will use in the foregoing to evaluate the main variants of the liberal view. In section 2., I will examine the internalist and externalist variants of the liberal view that endorse the standard reading of PRC. As will be seen, all of them have considerable costs, and none of them seems to provide a fully satisfactory account of the stated criteria. In section 3., I turn to consider whether there are possible interpretations of the phenomenal reflection claim, alternative to the standard one, that might enable the liberal to preserve the conjunction of content externalism and phenomenal internalism. In addressing this issue, I propose a revision of Papineau's (2021) "pure qualitative view" of the nature of sensory experiences. While my position retains the gist of Papineau's view, insofar as it treats phenomenal properties as metaphysically distinct and irreducible to representational properties, it departs from it by attributing an essential presentational role to phenomenal properties. Finally, I will consider some objections that might be raised to my proposal.

### 1. *What is at stake in the debate between Conservatives and Liberals*

A central issue in the ongoing debate in the philosophy of perception concerns the kinds of properties that human beings can experientially perceive, that is: which properties, among

<sup>4</sup> These two points —that (i) Liberals should embrace content externalism and (ii) provide a different interpretation of the phenomenal reflection claim— are very well argued and defended in Ashby (2020a), the reading of which has been central to the development of the ideas presented here. However, two important differences between my position and his should be highlighted. Regarding (i) I do not argue, as Ashby does, that Liberals should embrace content externalism because content internalism, along with the symmetry thesis, implies conservatism. Rather, I argue that they should embrace content externalism because it is the individuation thesis that best satisfies the appropriate content criterion. As for (ii), although I consider Ashby's interpretation of PRC —wide perceptual content supervenes upon narrow phenomenal character but only for a given subject within a world— to be perfectly adequate to solve the "wide content-narrow character" issue, in my paper I have preferred to opt for a different interpretation insofar as, in the wake of Papineau (2021), I subscribe to the thesis of the (metaphysical) independence and mutual irreducibility of representational content and phenomenal character.

those that humans can perceptually represent, show up in the phenomenal character of their experience.<sup>5</sup> Of course, no one doubts that there are genuinely perceivable properties for each of the various sensory modalities with which we are endowed. Nor does anyone doubt that, for example, properties such as colour, shape, location, illumination, motion (for vision), volume and pitch (for audition), odour (for olfaction) are to be included in this list. Likewise, no one doubts that there are properties that we cannot experientially perceive, such as being a virus, a real estate agent, a poisonous food. Although the distinction between the two types of properties (i.e., those that are experientially perceivable and those that are not) is not generally drawn on the basis of a set of precise and well-defined criteria (something like: a property of type P is perceivable by organisms of type O in situations of type S if and only if conditions C1, ..., Cn obtain), there is nevertheless some sort of intuitive, rough criterion at play. According to this intuitive criterion, in order for a property P to be perceivable by an organism O it should be possible for O to immediately,<sup>6</sup> consciously detect its instantiation simply on the basis of how the bearers of P (phenomenally) appear to O.<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, this criterion is satisfied by the first, but not the second class of properties: one can detect the presence of a red object in one's perceptual field because being red is something that immediately manifests itself in the sensory phenomenology of an observer (ditto for the other properties of the first class). But the same is not true for the other class of properties, either because being such a thing (i.e., being a virus) is not something that can consciously strike our senses, or because it is not associated with any distinctive way of appearing (i.e., being a real estate agent). While the above criterion is sufficient to (intuitively) distinguish clearly perceivable from clearly non-perceivable properties, it is of little help when it comes to properties whose (conscious) perceptual detection requires more than just the smooth functioning of one's perceptual apparatus. To take an oft-cited example (Siegel, 2010, p. 100) consider the property of being a pine-tree. Of course, pine-trees have a characteristic look (say, a pine-treeish look) that is different from the look of other types of trees. Moreover, it is precisely because they have such a characteristic look that one can acquire the ability to spot them by sight. But is this sufficient to give them the status of perceivable properties? As a matter of fact, there is an obvious difference between such a property and a colour property such as redness, for example. While in the latter case it is enough to have open and well-functioning eyes for redness to pop out at you, in the former case something more is required, such as acquiring some recognitional ability towards instances of the property (Siegel, 2006, p. 491). Is the fact that their grasping requires on the subject's part the acquisition of more sophisticated skills than those involved in the case of low-level properties sufficient to rule out that some such properties are genuinely perceivable rather than (merely) cognizable? As is often the case, there is no unanimous consensus on this issue, and those involved in the debate are divided

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to stress that the debate concerns perceptual experiences, that is, perceptual phenomenal states, and not just perceptual states. Perceptual states may be unconscious (as is the case, for example, in blind-sight cases), but perceptual experiences cannot, they are conscious by definition.

<sup>6</sup> This qualification is meant to rule out that the detection of the relevant property is achieved through some conscious inferential process involving the experiencer's background knowledge.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to immediacy, other features are often mentioned as typical of the perceptual grasp of a property. These include for example: automaticity (Mandelbaum 2015); speed (Ransom, 2019), adaptation aftereffects, pop-out effects (Block 2023).

on how to answer this question. According to some, usually referred to as the Conservatives, the only properties that we can perceptually experience are those of the first class, that is, low-level properties. In contrast, the people who oppose this restriction, the so-called Liberals, argue that the range of perceivable properties is much wider, encompassing also high-level properties.<sup>8</sup>

The debate opposing Liberals and Conservatives thus concerns the range of perceivable properties. While not related to any particular framework about the nature of perceptual experience, this debate is normally addressed within a representationalist account of perceptual experience. According to representationalism, perceptual experiences, like any other kind of mental states (i.e., beliefs, desires), have a representational nature, that is, they are endowed with content. Accordingly, within this framework, the question at the centre of the debate concerns which properties may feature in the contents of our perceptual experiences and, therefore, which contents turn out to be admissible as possible contents of perceptual experience. While Conservatives argue that only low-level properties are permissible, and that therefore the content of our experience is sparse, Liberals argue that typical adults *sometimes* perceive at least *some* high-level properties,<sup>9</sup> and that therefore the content of our experience is rich. Both parties agree that experiences have content. Therefore, they both support a “Content View” of perceptual experience (a view according to which perceptual experiences are associated with accuracy conditions that are similar in many ways to the satisfaction conditions of cognitive states, i.e., states like beliefs and desires). What they disagree on, to repeat, is whether this content is sparse or rich. While Conservatives defend a “Sparse Content View”, Liberals defend a “Rich Content View”, that is, a specific version of the Content View according to which the contents of our perceptual experiences are richly complex. As I said in the Introduction, according to Liberals, human perception is rich from both a representational and a phenomenological point of view. In fact, not only do they claim that some high-level properties can sometimes be represented in the content of perceptual experience (let us call this *the liberal’s representational claim*), but also, and more importantly, that such represented properties are reflected in/contribute to the phenomenal character of experience (to what-it-is-perceptually-like for someone to entertain it) as much as and in the same way as low-level properties (this is *the liberal’s phenomenal reflection claim* (PRC)) (Ashby, 2020a, p. 689)). While Liberals support both representational and phenomenal richness, Conservatives mostly accept representational richness but rejects phenomenal richness and support phenomenal modesty instead.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Examples of high-level properties that are allowed to feature in the content of experience are, e.g.: natural kind features, semantic features, artefactual features, event-causal features (Bayne, 2009; Butterfill, 2009; Siegel, 2006, 2009, 2010), agency features, action features, the emotional and intentional features of others, social features and moral features (Bayne, 2009; Block, 2014; Butterfill, 2009, 2015; Fish, 2013; Masrour, 2011; Nanay, 2011, 2012; Siegel 2010, 2014; Toribio 2015, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> “Sometimes” because some conditions must be met (such as, for example, the acquisition of recognitional abilities on the part of the perceiving subject) for such properties to be perceived. “Some” because only a sub-class of high-level properties is allowed. As to the exact scope of this sub-class, the Liberals diverge. However, they all agree that such a sub-class is not empty.

<sup>10</sup> Accepting representational richness while rejecting phenomenal richness is tantamount to arguing that only a small subset of the properties represented in the experience are reflected in its phenomenal character, that is, the subset constituted by low-level properties.

Hereafter, following Siegel (2006, 2010), I will refer to the liberal thesis using the label “Thesis-K” (with “K” standing for Kind).<sup>11</sup> Thesis-K, to repeat, is the thesis that in some perceptual experiences, some K-properties are experientially perceived (i.e., are reflected in the phenomenology of the experience). Although which K-properties are admissible varies considerably within the liberal camp, any Liberal admits that there are properties, not included in the list of low-level properties, that we can experientially perceive and that, therefore, make Thesis-K true. Thesis-K has typically been argued for by mobilizing so-called “contrast-arguments”, that is arguments involving a pair of experiences (a “contrasting experience” and a “target experience”) that are supposed to differ in their phenomenal character but not in their low-level properties.<sup>12</sup> In Siegel’s (2006) classic “pine-tree case”,<sup>13</sup> we are asked to assume the following: we are hired to cut down all the pine-trees in a forest without having any botanical expertise. The hirer tells us in *t*<sub>1</sub> what the pine-trees are, and, on this basis, we begin to do our work. Let us label our visual experience of the pine-tree in *t*<sub>1</sub>, *E*<sub>1</sub> (*E*<sub>1</sub> is the contrasting experience). As time passes, we progressively improve our ability to distinguish pines from non-pines and, at some point, say at *t*<sub>2</sub>, we become able to immediately spot the former (“Aha! Another pine-tree over there to cut down”). Let us label our visual experience of the pine-tree in *t*<sub>2</sub>, *E*<sub>2</sub> (*E*<sub>2</sub> is the target experience). At this stage, all the Liberal asks us to admit is the minimal intuition that the overall experience of which our contrasting experience is a part differs phenomenologically from the overall experience of which our target experience is a part.<sup>14</sup> Assuming this premise, the argument moves toward the conclusion that what best explains the assumed phenomenal difference is that the target experience, but not the contrasting experience, represents some K-properties (in the scenario considered the property of being a pine-tree). Is the Liberal right that high-level properties are represented in our experience?

Although I believe that a positive answer to the above question is truer to the fact than a negative one, in this paper I will not provide any defence of the liberal view. Rather, taking it as a plausible and sensible position, what I want to consider is which, among its several possible variants, would be preferable to adopt. Let me explain what I mean by “variants” of the liberal view. Indeed, as many Liberals point out, Thesis-K is itself neutral with respect to several metaphysical/semantic issues such as, for example, the nature of the representational properties that feature in the content of our perceptual experience, the nature of the phenomenal properties that constitute the phenomenal character of our perceptual experiences, and how the two kinds of properties (i.e. representational properties and phenomenal properties) are to be individuated. According to the Liberal, this neutrality applies not only to The-

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<sup>11</sup> However, as I said in fn. 1 where I specified my terminological uses, I here apply the label “Liberal” to those who deny that only low-level properties are perceivable. Although K-properties are paradigmatic examples of high-level properties, I do not rule out that the set of high-level properties is broader than the set of K-properties.

<sup>12</sup> For a critical discussion of phenomenal contrast arguments see Jorba & Vicente (2019). It must be stressed that not all Liberals use the phenomenal contrast methodology. People like Block (2023), for example, appeal instead to empirical works in their arguments for liberalism.

<sup>13</sup> Bayne (2009) presents a different type of contrast argument, based on associative agnosia, in which patients, while having normal percepts, are unable to recognize objects as belonging to familiar categories.

<sup>14</sup> This intuition is taken to be based on introspection. It should be emphasized that introspection is required only at this initial step of the phenomenal contrast argument; while being essential for the entire argument to get off the ground, it is not appealed to at any other point in the argumentative strategy.

sis-K but also to the main argument in its support, the so-called “phenomenal contrast” argument. As Siegel (2006, p. 502) explicitly points out in this regard, the argument for Thesis-K does not appeal to any particular thesis about what determines the content of our perceptual experiences, nor does it assume any particular view about the relation between content and phenomenology. Yet, depending on which such theses one adopts, one arrives at different verdicts regarding which K-properties are represented in the content of experience. Granting this “neutrality assumption”, it follows that the liberal view can present itself in many different variants depending on how the aforementioned metaphysical/semantic issues are settled. In this paper I will focus primarily on the individuating issue, which is at the centre of the Externalism/Internalism debate and consider how this issue impinges on the liberal position and, more generally, on the debate over the admissible perceivable properties. The implicit supposition at play is that the different possible variants are not on a par. Each has its own costs and benefits. So, the question I want to consider is whether there is a variant whose advantages clearly outweigh its costs and that, consequently, should be preferred. But on what basis should a particular variant be preferred over other possible ones?

In my view, there are at least two kinds of criteria to consider in addressing this issue. First, *the appropriate content criterion*; namely, a criterion that concerns the width of the domain of the high-level perceivable properties that any given version is able to admit. Second, *the theoretical criterion*; namely, a criterion that concerns the nature of the theoretical commitments that any given version carries. Accordingly, the preferred variant would be one that admits a wider domain of high-level perceivable properties, including in it most of the properties that we, intuitively, and pre-theoretically, consider perceivable, and that makes less controversial theoretical commitments. Assuming these two criteria—which I take to be neutral enough to be accepted by all Liberals—I will consider whether there is a variant of the liberal view that is preferable on the basis of those criteria.

To anticipate, what I will argue is that the variant that best meets the stated criteria is the one that combines externalism as regards representational properties (content externalism) and internalism as regards phenomenal properties (phenomenal internalism). Yet, the combination of these two theses is blatantly in conflict with the standard interpretation of PRC, the claim, let us remember, according to which the content of our perceptual experiences is reflected/reverberates in the phenomenal character of the experiences.<sup>15</sup> According to this interpretation, in fact, for content to be reflected in the phenomenology of the experience, it must supervene on it with metaphysical necessity. But how is this possible if the former is wide and the latter is narrow? Indeed, the conjunction of the following three theses patently generates an inconsistent triad:

- (1) (Content externalism —externalism as regards representational properties): representational properties are wide— they supervene with metaphysical necessity on external factors;
- (2) (Phenomenal internalism —internalism as regards phenomenal properties): phenomenal properties supervene with metaphysical necessity only on the subject’s internal factors;
- (3) (Standard interpretation of PRC): for content to be reflected in the phenomenology of the experience, it must supervene on it with metaphysical necessity.

<sup>15</sup> This point has been stressed by Ashby (2020a) and Raleigh (2022).



Being (1)-(3) inconsistent, at least one of them must be abandoned. Even though (3) is almost never rejected, I will claim, that the Liberal should get rid of it. In fact, if (3) is retained, she must reject (1) or (2). In the first case, she is forced to say that the properties that can be reflected in the phenomenology of the experience are only those that supervene with metaphysical necessity on phenomenal character, that is, narrow representational properties. The inevitable upshot of this move is to reduce the domain of perceivable properties to a smaller subset than the one a Liberal might have initially wished to admit, since many K-properties (natural kind properties, for example) are left out. As I will show, the internalist move can be implemented by the Liberal in at least two different ways, depending on the account of the content of perceptual experience that is provided, namely: a Russellian account or a Fregean account. While admitting that the Liberal who opts for a Fregean account (i.e., Bayne, 2009) seems to fare better than the Liberal who endorses a Russellian account, she too does not optimally meet the criteria stated. As I will later show, if to avoid these drawbacks, the Liberal decides to retain (1) and reject (2), her situation does not improve at all. In fact, the price she has to pay for not restricting the range of perceivable properties to those that supervene only on the subject's internal factors is to uphold a metaphysical picture of the phenomenology of the experience, i.e., phenomenal externalism, that is regarded by many as highly problematic. Based on these observations, I will argue that the Liberal's best move is to abandon (3).

## 2. *Go for content internalism or content externalism?*

Let me start by considering why the Liberal, qua liberal, could be tempted to endorse content internalism. A plausible answer is that she could make such a move precisely to contrast the claim made by some Conservatives to the effect that content externalism is incompatible with the liberal view, so that if the former is true, the latter is false. A paradigmatic proponent of this claim is Prinz who in his (2013) argues that content externalism, in particular as regards natural kinds properties, is hard to square with the liberal claim that the phenomenology of our experience is sensuously rich and that therefore, externalism about K-properties—a thesis that many philosophers nowadays are happy to subscribe, he adds—implies that the phenomenology of our experience is not rich, but modest. Whereas phenomenal modesty is compatible with the possibility for K-properties to be represented in the content of experience (“representational richness”), it is incompatible with the claim that K-properties are reflected in the phenomenal character of the experience (“phenomenal richness”). For, he maintains—by mobilizing a Twin-Earth style argument—“if I moved to twin-Earth and my pine experiences became twin-pine experiences, I wouldn't notice any difference” (Prinz, 2013, p. 832). This last remark is important to understand Prinz's train of reasoning. How could K-properties feature in the phenomenal character of the experience if different types of K-properties could turn out to be indiscernible? Possible indiscernibility, according to Prinz, implies phenomenal inadmissibility.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Whether he is right in so claiming is actually a controversial point (Bayne, 2009, pp. 397-400; Ashby 2020a, pp. 702-705). In his article, Ashby argues that existing conservative arguments that appeal to Twin-Earth plausibly overgeneralize with the risk of generating a “boomerang effect” that ends

Whether Prinz is right in claiming that content externalism implies the falsity of the liberal view is controversial. Actually, in her reply to Prinz's objection, Siegel (2013, pp. 851-852) rebuts Prinz's verdict laying out two possible moves that, in her view, a Liberal could take. One move is to reverse the direction of the supervenience relation between representational and phenomenal properties; the other is to reject content externalism as regards K-properties and endorse content internalism. Before considering the internalist move, let me say a word about the first move. According to Siegel, the Liberal may concede that the representation of (superficially) indistinguishable, albeit different, properties (i.e., being a pine-tree/twin-pine-tree) may make no phenomenal difference and that therefore, if content externalism is true, representational properties cannot be identified with, or taken to supervene on, phenomenal properties. Yet, she adds, such a move "is compatible with the view that visual phenomenology supervenes on the contents of visual experience" (Siegel, 2010, p. 114). Does this help the liberal cause? Prinz, for one, answers in the negative. In his view, a Conservative has no problem accepting that any phenomenal difference corresponds to a content difference. The sore point, he adds, is rather that natural kind properties make no phenomenal difference, and this is enough to debunk the liberal view. This dialectic clearly illustrates how crucial the issue of the interpretation of PRC is in the debate between Conservatives and Liberals. As a matter of fact, if the standard interpretation of PRC is adopted, then Prinz is right to argue that the liberal position is wrong. Indeed, how could phenomenal richness hold if differences in content do not correlate with differences in phenomenal character? But the question is whether such an interpretation is mandatory.

As I hinted at, I don't think it is. However, although I think Siegel is right in challenging the mandatoriness of the standard interpretation of PRC, I think that the alternative interpretation she proposes in the passage just quoted is actually too strong. For the claim that the phenomenology of an experience supervenes on its content does not allow for experiences with the same content to be associated with different, though similar, phenomenal characters. Although the thesis that identity at the level of content implies identity at the level of phenomenology looks plausible when applied to low-level perceptual phenomenology, it seems much less plausible when applied to high-level perceptual phenomenology. Perhaps it is true that whenever a given botanical expert sees a pine-tree, her experience always instantiates one and the same type of quale (or a collection thereof). However, to assume that this uniformity should apply, not only intra-subjectively, but also inter-subjectively, is much more demanding and, in my view, a commitment to this thesis does not do a

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up challenging the perceptual admissibility not only of high-level properties, but also of most low-level ones. In fact, he claims, not only are most high-level properties twin-earthable, but so are many low-level ones. Twin-Earth cases have been provided, among others, for colour (Block, 1990), shape (Davies, 1997; Hurley, 2008; Thompson, 2010; Chalmers, 2012), size (Thompson, 2010; Chalmers, 2012), distance (Davies, 1992; Thompson, 2010; Chalmers, 2012). If this extension of twin-earthability is accepted, it follows, according to Ashby, that cases such as those presented by the Conservatives to rule out the phenomenal admissibility of high-level properties can also be worked out for many low-level properties. Since there is no principled reason why a different treatment should be adopted for cases involving twin-earthable low-level properties than for those involving high-level properties, if one is willing to grant that possible perceptual indiscernibility implies phenomenal inadmissibility in the latter case, then such a verdict, he concludes, should be applied across the board.

good service to the liberal cause, which should rather stay as neutral as possible with respect to theoretical issues not strictly required for its defence.

As I said, although I disagree with the alternative interpretation that Siegel proposes, I do believe that the move that a Liberal should take is precisely to get rid of the standard interpretation of PRC. Unfortunately, this is not the move that most Liberals have taken. In fact, the prevailing attitude has been to endorse content internalism. This amounts to the second possible move that Siegel illustrates (2013, p. 851) and to which I now turn. In her view, Prinz overlooks the possibility that the properties showing up in the phenomenology of the experience can be narrow K-properties, that is, high-level properties that, by supervening with metaphysical necessity on the subject's internal features, are shared among duplicates.

In what follows I shall assess the internalist variants of the liberal position that accept the standard interpretation of PRC (i.e. those variants that reject proposition 1 of the inconsistent triad and that keep both 2 and 3). One can distinguish at least two sub-variants that differ as regards the way in which the content of our perceptual experiences is conceived: a Russellian and a Fregean sub-variant. Both sub-variants take contents to be complex, structured entities. But while the former takes them to be constituted by ordinary entities, for the latter what constitutes the content are modes of presentation, that is, abstract entities whose function is to (at least partly) determine what a given state refers to or is about. If the former provides a one-layer account of content, the latter opts for a two-layers account, transposing to the analysis of mental content an analogue of the distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* that Frege famously drew in his semantical account of language. Although both the Russellian and the Fregean analysis of content can be implemented in an externalist framework —allowing ordinary objects/properties or object-dependent modes of presentation, respectively, to feature in the content of experience— here I will consider only their internalist implementations.

According to Russellian internalism, the content of our perceptual experiences is constituted by narrow properties, while according to Fregean internalism the content (or at least an “aspect” of it) is constituted by narrow modes of presentations. Being narrow, both properties and modes of presentation are taken to supervene with metaphysical necessity only on the subject's internal factors. Before considering the respective pros and cons of the two positions, let us focus on what they both share, that is, internalism as regards the content of our experiences, and consider whether a commitment to content internalism on the part of the Liberal is the best way for her to meet the two criteria stated. Let us start from the theoretical criterion. As a matter of fact, although content internalism has its own advocates in the philosophy of mind camp (e.g., McGinn, 1989; Segal, 1991; Farkas, 2008; Kriegel, 2008), it has also met with harsh criticism, such as for example that the notion of narrow content cannot be coherently specified (Fodor, 1994; Sawyer, 2007; Burge, 2010; Yli-Vakkuri & Hawthorne, 2018), or that narrow content is not real content because it does not put us in cognitive contact with the world (Putnam, 1975). To the extent that content internalism is certainly not uncontentious, if a less controversial position turns out to be available, then *ceteris paribus*, the Liberal should opt for it. In any case, as I will argue, the thorniest problem that the internalist variants of the liberal position encounter concerns the appropriate content criterion. For, as I will show, if the Liberal opts for content internalism, the domain of perceivable properties that she can admit is likely to be much narrower than she would like, excluding from it most of the ordinary, mundane properties that we intuitively take to experientially grasp.

Let us start with Russellian content internalism and consider what kinds of properties turn out to be permissible if this framework is adopted. Given that narrow properties must be shared among duplicates, the range of admissible properties should not include any property that could turn out to be superficially indistinguishable from some other property while having a different underlying nature or composition. In fact, for any such property (generally referred to as twin-earthable properties) it is possible to devise a Twin-Earth style argument to the conclusion of its perceptual inadmissibility. Some such arguments have been put forward by several Conservatives (Tye, 1995; Pautz, 2009; Price, 2009; Brogaard, 2013) in their attempt to discard the liberal position. These arguments typically make use of Twin-Earth scenarios and take the form a *reductio* of the liberal position by showing that its assumption would have the implausible consequence that either the earthling subject, or her twin-earthling duplicate, would be victim of a perceptual illusion, insofar as she would represent what she sees as what it is not.

To mobilize an example featuring in Price (2009, pp. 516-517), let us consider a subject, call it Oscar, who having acquired the capacity to recognize tomatoes, is able to spot them by sight and single them out from similar, but different fruits. According to Price, even granting that consequently to such an acquisition, tomatoes (phenomenally) look some new F to Oscar, being F cannot be the property of being a tomato. In support of this claim, the following scenario is introduced. Let W2 be a possible world in which there are fruits which, while being phenomenally indistinguishable from tomatoes in W1 (be W1 the actual world in which Oscar inhabits), have a different physical structure and composition. Let us call them twin-tomatoes. Suppose that Oscar in W1 has a twin in W2. Since Oscar and twin Oscar, qua twins, share the same types of brain states, narrowly construed, it follows, given phenomenal internalism, that they will be phenomenally identical. Therefore, their respective recognitional acquisition will bring about the same kind of visual phenomenal shift. Let F be the property that accounts for this phenomenal shift. Now, the question we are asked to consider is whether F could be the property of being a tomato, as the Liberal wished to claim. Price answers in the negative, and his reason for doing so is that if that were the case, it would follow that twin-Oscar would be victim of an illusion in so far as twin-tomatoes would appear to him as they are not. Ditto for Oscar if being F were the property of being a twin-tomato. But, Price goes on claiming, since there is no reason for maintaining that either Oscar or twin-Oscar are guilty of some kind of misrepresentation “to avoid an asymmetric treatment of the cases, it seems that the only option is to hold that being F is neither the property of being a tomato nor the property of being a twin tomato” (Price, 2009, p. 517).<sup>17</sup> Given this situation, the only possible move open to a Liberal who wants to stick to perceptual content Russellian internalism is to narrow down the range of admissible perceivable properties to non-twin-earthable ones, that is properties for which no Twin-Earth style argument can be devised.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> That perceptual content internalism in conjunction with the claim that no arbitrary distinctions should be made when trying to determine which perceptual experiences are veridical and which are not entails that perception cannot represent kinds as such has been argued for by Ashby (2020a) in a very interesting paper which aims at showing that both the conservative and the liberal responses to the entailment of Conservatism by Internalism come with a price whose import has up to now been underestimated.

<sup>18</sup> More precisely: a property is non-twin-earthable if its representation, mental or linguistic, is non-twin-earthable. Let us say that a subject’s representation is non-twin-earthable if there cannot be a

Of course, natural kind properties, as well as many other K-properties, would be excluded, but perhaps there are some non-low-level properties that resist twin-earthability after all. According to Chalmers (2012), this is precisely so as regards, for example, properties like being a bachelor, a friend, the number two, an action, a part. Yet, none of these properties would be allowed to be perceivable, either because their instantiation is not accompanied by any sensory phenomenology, or because they are not associated with a characteristic and distinctive way of appearing. The question, then, is whether there are non-twin-earthable properties that turn out to be associated with characteristic and distinctive ways of appearing. If they did exist, they would have to be properties that not only sensorily appear, but also such that their nature coincides with their appearance, that is, properties that are exactly what they appear to be. Well, do such properties exist? Plausible candidates could be, for example, *appearance properties*—i.e., appearing to be water (Shoemaker, 1994; Kriegel, 2002) —*response-dependent properties*—i.e., being disposed to elicit watery responses in normal subjects in normal conditions (Kriegel, 2008) —or maybe also *grouping properties*—i.e., being a pine-like configurations (Jagnow 2015; Voltolini 2023). The problem now is whether some such properties actually qualify as high-level, that is, properties a Liberal could resort to. This is quite a critical point; what a Conservative could object is that these properties are not high-level at all. Brogaard, in fact, argues for this very point, and states that the properties of looking in a certain way (which she labels “pure qualitative properties”) “are conglomeration of low-level and intermediate-level properties” (2013, p. 40).<sup>19</sup> Thus, as far as Russellian internalism is concerned, my conclusion is that, even granting that it could satisfy the theoretical criterion, it can hardly satisfy the appropriate content criterion. Indeed, if only non-twin-earthable properties can ultimately feature in the content of perceptual experiences, then, even assuming that these properties exist and (contra Brogaard) qualify as high-level ones, their range would hardly include any of the ordinary properties that we intuitively and pre-theoretically take to perceive. It can also be granted that whenever a twin-earthable property is instantiated (being water, being a pine-tree), a corresponding appearance/response-dependent/grouping non-twin-earthable property is also instantiated and, therefore, if the latter qualify as high-level, the range of high-level perceivable properties turns out to be as wide as expected.<sup>20</sup> The fact remains, however, that the properties featuring in that range are not the ordinary, mundane properties that intuitively and pre-theoretically we take to grasp, and it is these properties that, in my view, the Liberal should primarily strive to allow for. In my opinion, this result (if it would not trivialize), would greatly depower the import of the liberal position.

Let us now turn to the other content internalist variant and consider whether Fregean liberalism might fare better than its Russellian counterpart. At first glance, it seems so, particularly if one considers those Fregean variants that provide a two-layers account of perceptual content, allowing one layer to be broad and thus constituted by ordinary, worldly properties. A paradigmatic example of this stance is that put forward by Bayne (2009; 2016).

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twin of the subject in a different possible world whose corresponding representation has a different extension (refers to a different property or does not refer to any property at all). For this characterization of the notion see Raleigh (2022, p. 620).

<sup>19</sup> Whether Brogaard’s assessment also applies to grouping properties is however controversial. On this point see Voltolini (2023).

<sup>20</sup> Kriegel (2008) defends this point.

According to Bayne (2009), most Twin-Earth-based arguments against the liberal position tend to assume a Russellian account of the phenomenal perceptual content (i.e., as he characterizes this notion, that component of a perceptual state's representational content which supervenes on that state's phenomenal character) identifying phenomenal contents with represented properties. This is clearly so, in his view, as regards Tye's anti-liberal twin-earth-based argument (Tye, 1995, p. 141) that aims to rule out the phenomenal admissibility of K-properties on the basis that objects with different K-properties could be perceptually indiscernible. However, according to Bayne, the Russellian account is problematic and should be replaced by a Fregean one, because the latter, but not the former, is able to account for the possibility that phenomenal states of the same type (with the same phenomenal content) may represent different, though indistinguishable, properties in different contexts. In developing his account, Bayne draws on Chalmers's (2004) proposal by distinguishing between two layers of perceptual content. While one layer is narrow and consists of modes of presentation (conditions on extensions), the other layer is wide and consists of the extensions determined by the modes of presentation relatively to a given environment. Against the backdrop of this Fregean account, Bayne addresses the conservative objection as to how states of the same type, can be directed towards different types of objects (i.e., pine-trees *vs.* twin-pine-trees) without misrepresenting any of them, responding that the shared content is a narrow mode of presentation that picks up different properties in different external environments.

Although I consider Bayne's to be the best internalist position within the liberal camp, I have some doubts about its capacity to adequately account for the claim that our ordinary, worldly properties are reflected in the phenomenology of our experiences. It is true that such properties can feature in the broad content of the experience, but this is not sufficient to make them appear in the phenomenal character. In fact, according to the standard interpretation of PRC (that Bayne endorses), only the content that supervenes with metaphysical necessity on the phenomenal character of the experience can satisfy this requirement. Therefore, it is the narrow but not the broad content that can properly satisfy the phenomenal reflection claim, and, in this regard, liberal Fregean internalism does not seem to fare much better than its Russellian counterpart. It is true that the Fregean, unlike the Russellian, can say that our mundane, ordinary properties, while not featuring in the content that is properly reflected in the phenomenology of the experience, are nonetheless determined by it, relative to a given external environment. However, being determined by a given mode of presentation relative to a given environment does not seem to make a property phenomenally available to the subject of the experience.

It must be said that Bayne is aware of this weakness and, in fact, in (2016, pp. 119-120) he introduces a distinction between two different senses in which a property can be taken to be reflected in the phenomenology of perceptual experience, that is, strongly or weakly. Accordingly, he admits that a property can be *weakly reflected* in the phenomenology of perceptual experience without being metaphysically necessitated by it. Unfortunately, he does not address in detail what it takes for a property to be weakly reflected. I find Bayne's proposal very interesting, and in the next section I will return to it in an attempt to develop an account of PRC alternative to the standard one. As it will turn out, although my proposal retains the gist of Bayne's suggestion (in particular, his distinction between the different senses in which a property can be taken to be reflected in a state's phenomenal character), it departs from it in several respects which I will spell out. For now, let us conclude this critical discussion of the liberal internalist position by saying that neither the Russel-

lian nor the Fregean variant seems ultimately able to adequately satisfy both the appropriate content criterion and the theoretical criterion. Based on what has been said so far, while not ruling out the possibility of elaborating more sophisticated internalist liberal positions, I believe that, on balance, what a Liberal should do is to abandon perceptual content internalism and endorse perceptual content externalism.<sup>21</sup>

Below I will consider this externalist move, focusing my attention on a possible variant of the liberal view that endorses content externalism while keeping the standard reading of PRC. To the extent that content externalism is taken to hold of most high-level properties, this variant seems to be better placed than its internalist counterpart to adequately satisfy the appropriate content criterion and acknowledge that the properties that manifest themselves in our perceptual experience are precisely the ordinary, worldly properties that external objects exemplify, rather than their internal qualitative counterparts. Having said that this variant seems to be better suited than its internalist counterpart to adequately satisfy the appropriate content criterion —by virtue of its commitment to content externalism— let us now consider how things stand with the theoretical criterion. As I clarified in the previous section when I introduced what I called the “inconsistent triad”, rejecting phenomenal internalism is the only possible move for anyone who wants to stick to both (1) —content externalism— and (3) —the standard interpretation of PRC. By rejecting (2) —phenomenal internalism—, the Liberal can claim that to the extent that the content of the twins’s experiences changes from one external environment to the other, the phenomenology of their experiences also changes correlatively, so that the supervenience relation between content and phenomenology holds. This is tantamount to advocating phenomenal externalism. But is phenomenal externalism a peaceful, unproblematic commitment for a Liberal? As a matter of fact, this position, whilst having its own defenders (Dretske, 1995; Tye, 1995; Lycan, 2001), is certainly not enthusiastically embraced by the majority of philosophers, basically because it promotes an awkward notion of phenomenology, for which the distinction between phenomenal appearance and phenomenal reality applies (two experiences could be metaphysically indistinguishable yet phenomenally different). But it can plausibly be argued instead that phenomenal appearance does collapse onto phenomenal reality (Sacchi & Voltolini, 2017). On balance, I feel compelled to conclude that not even this position seems able to adequately satisfy the conjunction of the two criteria stated.

Let me now take stock. If what I have been said so far is correct, it follows that none of the possible moves available to the Liberal who endorses the standard interpretation of PRC is ultimately satisfactory. In fact, as I have argued, if the Liberal endorses content internalism, either of a Russellian or a Fregean variety, then the appropriate content criterion and perhaps even the theoretical criterion cannot be adequately satisfied; if she endorses

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<sup>21</sup> That this is the move that the Liberal should take is very well argued for by Ashby (Ashby, 2020a) who, in his paper, shows that perceptual content internalism, together with a very plausible claim (“Symmetry”) —i.e. the claim that one should not make arbitrary distinctions when trying to determine the veridicality conditions of phenomenally identical experiences— entails conservatism, hence a Liberal should perform *modus tollens* on that entailment, thereby rejecting perceptual content internalism by virtue of her rejecting conservatism. In my paper, I have preferred to argue for this point by starting from the “neutrality assumption” advocated by Siegel (according to which the liberal position is compatible with both externalism and internalism) and evaluating which of these two individuating theses would be more congenial to adopt in light of the criteria I have indicated.

content externalism, then she ends up having problems with the theoretical criterion. In fact, I believe that to adequately satisfy the appropriate content criterion the Liberal should endorse content externalism, and to adequately satisfy the theoretical criterion she should endorse phenomenal internalism. But how can the conjunction of these two theses be coherently adopted if the standard interpretation of PRC is held in place? For it is impossible for content to supervene with metaphysical necessity on phenomenal character if the former is wide and the latter is narrow. Therefore, it seems that the best way out of the inconsistent triad that the liberal should consider is precisely the rejection of (3). In the next section I will present a way of conceiving the relationship between phenomenal character and representational content, alternative to the standard interpretation of PRC, which allows to preserve the conjunction of content externalism and phenomenal internalism.

### 3. *Toward an alternative interpretation of the phenomenal reflection claim*

As I said at in the Introduction, despite its crucial role, the issue of how the phenomenal reflection claim should be interpreted is not extensively treated in the relevant literature. In fact, most people in the debate take the standard interpretation of this claim almost for granted, and rarely question its mandatoriness. There are, however, some noteworthy exceptions. One is Siegel who, in addressing Prinz's criticism, suggests reversing the direction of the supervenience relation between content and phenomenal character allowing for phenomenal character to supervene on representational content. As I said in the previous section, I do not find such an alternative account of PRC very promising, insofar as its adoption implies a rather demanding and heavy theoretical commitment as regards the phenomenology of high-level perception to which, in my view, the Liberal should instead remain neutral. Another exception is provided by Ashby who in his (2020a) presents a proposal that draws on the way perceptual content externalists have traditionally approached the "wide-content-narrow-character" issue. Based on the suggestion originally made by Davies (1997, § 6), Ashby proposes the following interpretation of PRC: wide perceptual content supervenes upon narrow phenomenal character but only for a given subject within a world. Although I believe that this way of interpreting PRC is able to provide a Liberal who wants to stick to externalism with a way out of the problems that Twin-Earth cases raise, in what follows, I wish to bring forward a much more radical position than the two just mentioned, namely one that rejects any dependence or co-variation relationship between content (representational properties) and phenomenology (phenomenal properties). As a matter of fact, if no dependence or co-variation relationship (be it identity, or supervenience, or whatever) is taken to hold between phenomenal and representational properties, then nothing can prevent the conjunction of content externalism and phenomenal internalism to come out true. Although this move is bound to be opposed by all those who pursue some reductionist project in philosophy of mind (be they representationalists or phenomenologists),<sup>22</sup> it is not without enthusiastic supporters. Prominent among them is Papineau, to whom I shall now turn.

<sup>22</sup> They both reject the claim that representational and phenomenal properties are independent from each other, but while representationalists take the former to be more fundamental than the latter, phenomenologists defend the opposite view.



In his (2021), Papineau, taking up ideas anticipated in previous works—in particular, in his 2016—presents an account of the nature of sensory experience in which phenomenal properties are treated as distinct from and independent of representational properties. He rejects representationalism (which he defines as the thesis that sensory experiences are essentially representational) and develops an alternative account that he labels “pure qualitative view”, according to which conscious sensory properties are intrinsic qualitative properties of subjects that do not essentially involve any relation to anything outside them. In his view, “conscious sensory experience is *all* paint (plus possibly some blurry, orgasmic, etc. oil)” (2021, p. 86).<sup>23</sup> While admitting that experiential properties may play a representational role, he points out that they do so only by virtue of contingent facts related to the way they are embedded in a given environment: if the environment changes, their representational significance also changes or even vanishes. He compares experiential properties to written marks on a paper, that is “dumb arrangements of contentless signs” (*ibid*, p. 5) which “stand to the representational powers of experience just as the typographical properties of words stand to the representational powers of words” (*ibid*, p. 6). Toward the end of his book, Papineau considers how his theoretical stance impacts on the debate opposing Conservatives and Liberals and argues that his position allows him to defend a much stronger liberal view than that held by most people in that camp. According to him, in fact, one can take in principle as perceivable any property capable of functioning as the normal reliable cause of a certain configuration of mental paint, insofar as the satisfaction of this condition is for him all that is required to experientially perceive a given property. The explanation he provides for the phenomenological change resulting from the acquisition on the experiencer’s part of the relevant recognitional ability is that, as a result of that acquisition, the subject attains a new sensory vehicle for (contingently) representing things of that kind, something like a new “word” for them. While open to the possibility of alternative explanations, in his view what best explains the change in phenomenology is precisely the subject’s deployment of this new sensory vehicle.

Let me conclude this part by saying what I find problematic in Papineau’s account. Although I agree with him that the best way to defend the conjunction of content externalism and phenomenal internalism is precisely the one he indicates,<sup>24</sup> I ultimately find that the interpretation of PRC that his position promotes fails to provide a sufficiently substantive reading of it.<sup>25</sup> In fact, according to this interpretation, all that is required for a property to be experientially perceived, and therefore to be reflected in the phenomenology of the experience, is for it to be the normal reliable cause of a given sensory vehicle that happens to stand for such a property, due to purely environmental contingencies. Even assuming that the fulfilment of this requirement is sufficient to account for what it is for a given experiential state to represent (even though only contingently) a given property, it can be

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<sup>23</sup> Papineau makes use here of the distinction drawn by Block (2003). According to Block, there are two different kinds of sensory qualia. He uses the label “mental paint” for conscious sensory properties that have representational content, although only contingently. In contrast, he uses the label ‘mental oil’ for elements of the experience that serve no representational role, not even contingently.

<sup>24</sup> I defended this point in Sacchi (2018).

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that Papineau does not explicitly mention this claim. Yet, to the extent that he provides an account of what it is for a property to be experientially perceived, he can be considered to be providing an interpretation of PRC of his own, even if he does not explicitly use the label.

argued that it is hardly sufficient to account for what it is for a property to be presented to the experiencing subject. On this point, I agree with Raleigh (2022) who, in discussing Papineau's proposal, observes that while in one sense the pure qualitative view may be considered a maximally rich position, in another sense it turns out to be a maximally sparse one. The reason in his view is that "on this sort of view no external properties whatsoever, neither high-level nor low-level properties, are ever really *presented* in perceptual consciousness" (Raleigh, 2022, p. 625). What is given to the experiencer, in fact, are only certain configurations of mental paint, but in so far as these configurations are considered as dumb signs, it is difficult to see how entertaining them could bring the subject into experiential contact with the external properties that such signs contingently represent, being reliably caused by them.

In sum, what seems to me to be missing in Papineau's proposal is an account of what it is for a property to be presented in a perceptual experience. Providing such an account, in turn, is critical to delivering a satisfactory interpretation of PRC. To improve this point, I will introduce a revision of Papineau's pure qualitative view which, to distinguish it from his, I will call the "impure qualitative view". Like Papineau, I take phenomenal properties to be qualitative properties of the experiencing subjects that represent only contingently. But I reject their assimilation with merely typographical properties of words. Phenomenal properties, unlike words/sentences (i.e., vehicles of linguistic representations), while not being essentially representational, essentially have presentational properties and these properties, in my view, play a crucial role in accounting for what it is for something (an item of the external world) to be experientially perceived, and therefore to reverberate in the phenomenology of the experience. What qualifies my position as an impure version of the qualitative view is precisely the acknowledgement that the phenomenal properties of our perceptual experiences are not purely qualitative properties, but rather, qualitative properties that essentially present something to their subject.<sup>26</sup>

It has to be said that the idea that phenomenal properties have a presentational aspect is not foreign to Papineau's proposal. In fact, in discussing Farkas's (2013) observations as regards the constancy and stability that many of our experiences display and that make it seem that they point beyond themselves to mind-independent items outside the experiential realm, he indeed acknowledges that our perceptual experiences have a presentational aspect. Not only that. He even goes so far as to talk about "quasi-objects" and "quasi-properties" (2021, pp. 94-105) to indicate the sensory items that feature in our experience. As he already stressed in his (2016)

<sup>26</sup> A clarification is useful at this point. The impure qualitative view that I am here presenting as an alternative to Papineau's view should not be confused with a view defended by both Block (2003) and Peacocke (2008) that Papineau critically discusses (Papineau, 2021, pp. 85-87). According to this view, sensory experiences involve qualia in addition to representational properties. On this regard I side with Papineau in denying that our experiences essentially involve representational properties. But unlike Papineau—as well as Block and Peacocke—I do not allow that our sensory experiences involve qualia meant as purely qualitative properties. What I claim is that our sensory experiences, while not involving elements that are constitutionally representational, do involve elements that are constitutionally presentational. Being constitutionally presentational, phenomenal properties cannot be purely qualitative properties.

There may be a genuine chair-ish entity in my experience all right, in the sense of a sensory item that maintain its visual position, shape and colour, even as I move around, shift perspective and undergo changes in illumination. And, given such structural feature of experience, we might usefully talk of “phenomenal objects” and their properties, and even acknowledge that they display a kind of “mind-independence”, in that they maintain certain constancies even as we walk around and bob up and down. [p. 340; see also 2021]

This way of speaking, while correct and acceptable from a phenomenological perspective, should in his view be taken with great caution, because it risks leading us astray with regard to the metaphysics of our experience. This happens, according to him, when people in the philosophical debate go so far as to identify those sensory entities and their properties with the mundane objects and properties that our experiences represent. But, according to Papineau, this is a mistake that engenders confusions and errors. Ordinary objects and their properties are not constituents of our experience.

That said, it seems to me that in ruling out, and correctly so in my view, that ordinary objects and their properties feature in our experience, he tends to equate the property of being present in an experience with the property of being presented by it (Papineau, 2021, p. 146). And yet, the two properties are different. Hence, the rejection of the idea that ordinary properties are present in the experience is utterly compatible with the idea that they are/can be presented by it. It has to be said that he is happy to concede (Papineau, 2016, p. 335) that in having a perceptual experience we are aware of ordinary objects and their properties, and that we enjoy such an awareness precisely in virtue of the fact that our experiences instantiate qualitative properties (i.e., I am aware of the yellowness of the lemon before me by instantiating yellowness\* —the qualitative property that is present in/ features in my experience). Yet, what in my view is lacking in Papineau’s account is precisely an explanation of that by virtue of which the latter make us aware of the former. In my opinion, such an explanation can only be provided by giving the presentational aspect of qualitative properties its due role. For, how could phenomenal properties make us aware of worldly properties (properties that ordinary objects instantiate) if they did not essentially have a presentational aspect capable of revealing those very properties to us? Acknowledging that phenomenal properties are essentially presentational makes the analogy with the mere typographical properties of words less strict than it might have seemed at first. It is true that Papineau acknowledges some differences between the two cases and admits that “the analogy with words isn’t perfect” (2021, p. 6), but the distinctions he draws —which have to do with the different facts that make the two kinds of vehicles representing something— do not go so far as to individuate in the presentationality of mental (sensory) vehicles the main feature that distinguishes them from linguistic vehicles. If I am correctly grasping his position, I believe that what is holding him back from taking this step is the concern that it would end up bringing water to the mill of the essential representationalists, in particular of those among them who, by making use of the idea that there is a mental paint that intrinsically points (Loar, 2003), go as far as equating such a pointing with intentionality, and therefore come up with the claim that consciousness (or phenomenology) is enough for intentionality (or at least for a basic kind of it).<sup>27</sup> Even though I share

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<sup>27</sup> The claim that phenomenal properties are not a mere “mental paint”, but a mental paint that points, is pivotal within the “phenomenal intentionality research project” (Kriegel, 2013) which today is one

Papineau's concern here —and roughly for the same reasons that he adduces (2016, p. 341; 2021, pp. 104-105)<sup>28</sup>—, I think that acknowledging the essential presentational aspect of phenomenal properties is compatible with denying that these properties are (essentially) *intentionally* directed at something beyond themselves. While rejecting the idea that mental paint *points* in the representational sense of this somewhat ambiguous word, one could say that it points but in a different, presentational sense. However, in order not to engender misunderstanding, it is preferable to avoid any pointing-talk and say that mental paint, unlike mental oil, has an (essential) presentational aspect that is distinct and irreducible to any (contingent) representational aspect it may happen to have.<sup>29</sup> But what is it that mental paint presents? In addressing this question, I shall distinguish between two different ways in which something can be presented, i.e., a direct way and an indirect way, and, consequently, between two different types of presented items, i.e., directly presented items and indirectly presented ones. Since my focus here is on high-level perception, I shall consider only high-level properties, leaving aside the question of whether the proposed picture also applies to low-level properties.<sup>30</sup>

According to my proposal, the “impure qualitative view”, what is directly presented to us is not an ordinary high-level property, but rather an *appearance-type property*. Let me give an example. When I look at a tomato, what the mental paint of my experience directly presents to me is not the property of being a tomato, but rather the property of being *tomato-like*, or of having a characteristic and distinctive tomato-look, or tomato-aspect.<sup>31</sup> The

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of the most promising alternatives to the traditional externalist-naturalistic project in philosophy of mind. While I agree with the idea that (some) sensory mental vehicles have a presentational aspect (they present something to their subject), I disagree with the intentionalist-representationalist interpretation of such a presentation (see fn. 29 below).

<sup>28</sup> For an analogous criticism of the equation of presentationality with intentionality see Sacchi (2022).

<sup>29</sup> It is important to highlight some key similarities and differences between my position and Papineau's qualitative view on the one hand, and the phenomenal intentionality view on the other. We all agree that phenomenal properties have a presentational aspect, and for more or less the same reasons: this is what the phenomenology of our experience tells us from our first-person engagement with it. And yet we disagree about whether such an aspect is constitutive of the phenomenal character of our perceptual experience and about its underlying nature. On the first question, Papineau gives a negative answer (mental paints are like dumb signs with no constitutive presentational aspects), whereas both phenomenal intentionality theorists and I give a positive answer. But whereas the former provide an intentionalist/representationalist account of its nature, taking the presentational aspect of our conscious states as the original source of their intentionality (or of a primitive kind of it), I radically part company with them on this issue. I take *presenting* as distinct and irreducible to *representing* (or being intentionally directed toward something). Space does not permit me to elaborate the issue here. For my treatment of this issue, I refer the reader to Sacchi (2022).

<sup>30</sup> I must say that I am strongly inclined to the idea that the picture outlined here applies to any twin-earthable property and thus, on the basis of the above (see fn. 16), also to many low-level properties (i.e., to all those low-level properties for which Twin-Earth style arguments can be conceived).

<sup>31</sup> Actually, what I think is directly presented to us on any given occasion is a token of a given appearance-type property. This allows for the possibility that different people, or the same person, can be directly presented with different items on different occasions. From this point of view, my proposal leaves open the possibility that high-level sensory phenomenology may vary inter-subjectively and intra-subjectively. However, to the extent that these different items are tokens of the same type, we can say that high-level sensory phenomenology, while not constant, is nevertheless uniform across subjects.

directed presented property is not identical with the phenomenal/qualitative property: the latter is a property of the experience (it is present in the experience and, while being a presenting property, it is not—at least in normal outward perceptual cases—the property that is presented), whereas the former is not a property of the experience. Being tomato-like is not a property that anything in my experience might exemplify. In fact, nothing in it is tomato-like. Rather, being tomato-like is a property that extra-experiential worldly items can instantiate, that is, all those items that resemble tomatoes, that is: actual real tomatoes, twin-tomatoes, plastic tomatoes, holograms of tomatoes, and so on and so forth. Let me now move to the second way, the *indirect* way, in which a property can be said to be presented by an experience. This is where the ordinary high-level properties come into play. While high-level ordinary properties are not directly presented by the experience, they are indirectly presented by it in virtue of being (contingently) represented, and having a look that matches the appearance-type property that the experience directly presents.

Within the picture I am promoting, to be experientially perceived (i.e. to be reflected/to reverberate in the perceptual experience), an ordinary high-level property must not only be the normal reliable cause of a given sensory vehicle that happens to stand for that property, due to purely environmental contingencies, as it is in Papineau's account. What more is required, in my picture, is that such a vehicle directly presents an appearance-type property that matches (in a sufficiently accurate way)<sup>32</sup> the look of the represented high-level property. Let me make an example. If facing a tomato I had an experience as of an onion—i.e., an experience that directly presents the appearance-type property of being onion-like—I would say that the property of being a tomato is not experientially perceived (is not reflected in the phenomenology of the experience) in so far as what the experience directly presents to me does not match the way in which normal tomatoes normally look to normal observers in normal conditions. The extra requirement I have added to Papineau's account is intended to put constraints on which high-level ordinary properties a given sensory vehicle can be taken to present (even though only indirectly) to a given subject on a particular occasion.<sup>33</sup> A phenomenal property within the impure qualitative view is not (as

<sup>32</sup> Providing a full-blown theoretical criterion for what makes a given matching sufficiently adequate (something along the lines: A matches accurately enough B if and only if such and such obtains) is not something I can provide here. To be honest, I am not even sure that such a criterion can be worked out given the fuzzy nature of the notion in question. For my present purposes, it is sufficient to mobilize an intuitive characterization of the notion. I will say that A matches adequately enough B, if A is the normal way in which B appears to normal subjects under normal conditions. When this obtains, the experiencer is enabled to perceive B experientially on the basis of experiencing A. If S is not misperceiving and is in fact representing a B-thing, then the fact that A is directly presented to her reveals the presence of a B-thing in her environment.

<sup>33</sup> While committing myself to the claim that phenomenal properties impose constraints on what a given sensory vehicle can be taken to indirectly present to the experiencer, I here prefer not to take side on whether they also impose constraints on which properties the experience represents. This further claim has been defended by Ashby (2020b) under the label “phenomenal schematics”. According to phenomenal schematics “the phenomenal characters of our experiences have structures that place a priori, formal, and sometimes semantic constraints on our experience's possible intentional contents” (Ashby, 2020b, p. 395). I find Ashby's claim that phenomenal structure (understood as grammatical structure) necessarily constrains the possible contents that our experience can take extremely attractive, insofar as it shows that there is logical space for an intermediate ground between Papineau's

in the pure qualitative view) an arbitrary vehicle that could in principle (indirectly) present anything to the subject instantiating it. Rather, it is a vehicle that can only and by necessity (indirectly) present to the subject a given subset of properties, that is, all the lookalikes, i.e., all the ordinary properties whose look matches the appearance-type property that the experience directly presents.

On the basis of this revision of Papineau's account, I will present my interpretation of PRC. Let us say that an ordinary property OP (e.g., being a tomato) is reflected in the phenomenal character C of an experience E of a subject S, if (i) E (contingently) represents OP; and (ii) E directly presents an appearance-type property (ATP) that matches (accurately enough) the look of OP. The roles that ATP and OP play in S's experience are different: by having E, S is at the same time phenomenally directly presented with ATP and perceptually aware of OP. What makes it the case that S is perceptually aware of a particular ordinary property is not determined by the ATP that her experience directly presents to her, which merely constrains the range of ordinary properties of which S can be perceptually aware of on any given occasion. Instead, what a subject is perceptually aware of (say: a tomato rather than a twin-tomato) is determined by external features such as, for example, her current environment, evolutionary or learning history and/or the causal correlations between her mental states and worldly items.

In a sense, my proposed interpretation of PRC can be seen as a way of articulating Bayne's (2016, pp. 119-120) notion of weak reflection that I mentioned in the previous section.<sup>34</sup> And yet, my proposal differs significantly from his. Indeed, in my account, the phenomenal properties that constitute the phenomenal character of the experience are neither representing properties —here I side with Papineau's anti (essential) representationalism— nor (Fregean) modes of presentation of represented properties. Rather, they are presenting properties that directly and necessarily present appearance-type properties and indirectly present ordinary properties (as long as the latter are represented by the experience).<sup>35</sup> Moreover, while Bayne explains the similarity between the twins in terms of a shared narrow aspect of the respective entire contents of their experiences, an aspect he cashes out in terms of Fregean modes of presentation, I explain it differently. In my view, what I share with my twin is not an aspect of content. Rather, it is a property of the experi-

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au's qualitative view, on the one hand, and representationalism and phenomenal intentionality, on the other. However, I here want to make a different point regarding what a given experience can present to a subject. The notion of presentation that I am mobilizing is not to be equated with the notion of representation or of intentional directedness as the latter is often spelled out. In my view, what is presented is not an intentional object insofar as the presentatum does not possess the two main distinguishing features of intentional objects, namely aspectuality and possible inexistence. For space reasons I cannot here enter into this issue. However, I can refer the interested reader to Sacchi (2022) where I argued against the assimilation of phenomenal presentationality with intentionality.

<sup>34</sup> The high-level ordinary properties that the experience indirectly present can be said to be weakly reflected in the phenomenology of the experience (to use Bayne's terminology) insofar as they are not necessitated by the experience's phenomenal character. To be so necessitated are instead the appearance-type-properties that the experience directly presents. To mobilise Bayne's terminology again, they are the latter, but not the former to be strongly reflected in the experience.

<sup>35</sup> Although the former partly concur in indirectly presenting the latter, they do not do so by laying down descriptive conditions on extensions, as it is in Bayne's Fregean account.

ence, a mental paint that directly presents an appearance-type property and indirectly presents different, albeit superficially indistinguishable, ordinary properties in the two worlds due to differences in our respective environments.<sup>36</sup>

I conclude by considering two possible objections to my proposal. The first objection can be put like this.<sup>37</sup> How does directly presenting an appearance-type could solve the alleged problem that I have claimed Papineau's view suffers from? Or, in other words, why would essentially presenting an appearance-type property to the subject be better than phenomenology that is 'dumb' on Papineau's account? My answer to this objection is the following. If the appearance-type properties that the experience directly presents were actually internal to the subject's own consciousness, then the objector would be right in saying that my proposal does not improve the situation at all. Yet, since those properties, as I have characterized them, do not qualify as internal to the subject's own consciousness, the objection loses its strength, or so I claim. As I said, appearance-type properties are not properties of the experience, they are not present in the experience. Rather they are properties that only ordinary entities can instantiate.

A second possible objection is the following. One could contest that my interpretation of PRC does not ultimately provide a sufficiently substantive rendering of the claim that the contents of our experiences are/can be reflected in the phenomenology of the experience. I agree that, given my interpretation of PRC, the content of a subject's experience cannot be "read off" from its phenomenal character. But this is precisely what is to be expected if content externalism holds true. Yet, there is still a sense (substantial, in my view) in which the content I entertain can be taken to be reflected in my phenomenology. If instead of being confronted with the property of being a tomato, I were confronted with a different, non-indistinguishable ordinary property towards which I have acquired different recognitional dispositions (e.g., the property of being an eggplant), then my experience would be phenomenally different and present something different to me. This, in my view, vindicates the idea that our perceptual experiences are rich, both representationally and phenomenologically, and this holds true even if there is no perfect correspondence between the two kinds of richness, to the extent that one may be greater than the other.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, I believe that the liberal claim that our experiences are richly complex, both representationally and phenomenologically, can be vindicated as long as one upholds an externalist account of content and provides an interpretation of the phenomenal reflection claim that allows the externally determined content to be, albeit indirectly, reflected in the phenomenology of the experience, while not supervening on it. To demand that every possible external difference be directly reflected in the phenomenal character of the experi-

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<sup>36</sup> It is important to emphasise that although PRC has been weakened with respect to the standard reading of it, the resulting picture is still incompatible with the conservative position of the type presented by, for example, Brogaard and Prinz. In fact, in my framework, both direct and indirect presented properties are high-level ones. This is an important point of difference between my position and theirs. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for urging me to make this point explicit.

<sup>37</sup> I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for having pressed me to better clarify this point.

ence, even when that difference makes no detectable difference (a difference that a normal subject under normal conditions could perceptually detect) is asking too much. Experience is neither more nor less rich than can plausibly be taken to be. To ask for more is to fall prey of a philosophical pernicious illusion.

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