Defining Sensory Representation

*Comments by Umrao Sethi*

*Perception*, by Adam Pautz, is an excellent book. Its central focus is the question of what constitutes the character of perceptual experience. After setting up just why this question is so puzzling, Pautz proceeds to a thorough discussion of the most influential answers to the question. Over the course of the book, Pautz discusses the sense-datum view, identity theory (or the “internal physical state view”), naïve realism and representationalism. While the book serves as an extremely informative introduction to each of these views, it is self-avowedly an opinionated introduction. It outlines the strengths of each of the first three views, but ultimately argues that representationalism offers the most promising account of the character of perception.

It is rare in the philosophy of perception to find a treatment of the issues that provides the reader a sense of how all the different views fit together and proposes a unified set of criteria by which to evaluate them. Rather than engaging in a piecemeal discussion and critique of each of the candidate views, Pautz places two central observations about perception at the heart of his discussion: 1) that perception is, by its nature, externally directed; and 2) that perception is internally dependent. The former observation has it that a perceptual experience cannot be the experience that it is without seeming to present the subject with qualities “out there” in the external world, “spatially arranged in various locations, often at a distance from you.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The latter observation stems from empirical findings that purport to show that the character of our sensory experiences is dependent on internal neural processing, and not on any objective states of affairs they represent. Putting these two observations at the center of the debate gives rise to what Pautz calls the “External-internal puzzle about sensible properties”:

Even in totally normal perception, and not just in illusion and hallucination, your experience of sensible properties (pain qualities, smell qualities, color qualities) is shaped by internal processing. Yet you experience sensible properties as “out there”, together with shapes and in various locations, often at a distance from you. How is it that what you seem to experience as “out there” is shaped by internal processing “in here”?[[2]](#footnote-2)

Structuring the question about the character of perceptual experience around this puzzle immediately gives the knowledgeable reader a sense of how the different views are going to fare: it is easy to see that the sense-datum view and the internal state view will struggle to account for external directedness, while naïve realism will have a difficult time allowing for internal dependence. This sets the stage for representationalism to emerge as the most plausible account, given that it is a view that claims to have the resources to do justice to *both* observations.

It is a virtue of the book that even though its primary aim is to introduce the problems of perception to a general audience, it nonetheless manages to develop and defend a distinctive version of representationalism that will be of interest even to experts in the field. In an effort to keep with the spirit of the project, rather than focus on the details of the arguments for and against each of the views, I will direct my attention at the bigger picture and focus on the way in which Pautz defines and motivates representationalism. I will suggest that the version of representationalism Pautz sketches is, in some sense, *too good* *to be true*. By claiming that the view’s central notion—the theoretically defined relation of representation—can simultaneously explain both the distinctive phenomenology of perceptual experience as well as its epistemic power, all while remaining neutral on the existence of its objects, Pautz lays out a set of explanatory goals that are difficult to reconcile with each other and perhaps impossible to simultaneously meet.

1. Defining “Sensory Representation”

On the representational view, what it is (*all* that it is) for a subject to have an experience as of a state of affairs is for the subject to experientially represent that state of affairs. When discussing the view, Pautz often suggests that we can replace references to the notion of experiential representation with the notion of experiential seeming. But it is important to note that for representationalism to be a substantive *account* of sensory experience, the central notion—whether we call it “representation” or “seeming”—requires definition. Most philosophers are willing to grant that, on some pre-theoretical notion of “seeming”, all perceptual experiences involve the world seeming some way to the subject. But endorsing this pre-theoretical description does not amount to endorsing any substantive *account* of experiential seemings. If representationalism is meant to provide an accountof the character of experience, the notion of “seeming” or “representation” cannot be left uninterpreted.

How, then, should we define the notion of “representation”? When defining the view, Pautz warns us not to “read too much into the terminology of “representation”. Specifically, he cautions us against thinking that experiential representations are “in every way like beliefs and other mental states in which you represent the world.”[[3]](#footnote-3) A crucial difference between belief and experience, which Pautz himself emphasizes, is that while beliefs do not make their objects seem vividly present to their subjects, sensory experiences do. When Buddy hallucinates a purple flower, there seems to be a purple flower right before his eyes in a way that is entirely missing when Buddy merely forms a belief about purple flowers. So the notion of representation as it figures in more cognitive contexts like belief cannot do the work of explaining the rich presentational phenomenology of sensory experience.

Nor can we apply the notion of representation from worldly contexts to the case of sensory experience. In all cases of worldly representation—paintings, photographs, text—a worldly item can represent a state of affairs to a subject only if the subject is aware of features of the item doing the representing. When I look at a portrait of Barack Obama, it is because I am aware of the sensible qualities of the canvas—qualities that the painting likely shares with Obama—that Obama seems present to me. When I read the first episode of *Ulysses*, it is because I am consciously aware of the words on the page that I am able to represent the Martello Tower in Sandycove. Representationalists cannot appeal to this form of representation because it is essential to their view that subjects lack any awareness of the features of their representational vehicles. This is often presented, by the representationalists, as a central advantage of the view over qualia or adverbialist views which posit the existence of intrinsic phenomenal properties in sensory experience. The representationalist is keen to point out that introspection reveals no such intrinsic, mental properties and so any view that posits these properties as an essential component of experience is rendered implausible.

The fact that no existing notion of representation is suitable for sensory experience might lead us to wonder whether the notion of representation is at all suited to an account of sensory experience. Instead, Pautz recommends that we introduce a new theoretical term, “akin to the theoretical terms of science, and then apply the general *Ramsey-Lewis method* (Lewis 1970) for defining new theoretical terms.”[[4]](#footnote-4) In brief, the Ramsey-Lewis method defines a theoretical term, not by specifying any intrinsic characteristics of its referent, but rather, by appeal to what it is introduced to explain. “Dark energy”, for example, is defined as whatever explains the acceleration of the universe. The idea is that once such a term is introduced, further scientific investigation will reveal what, in reality, plays this role. At this stage, we will then be able to offer an intrinsic characterization of the entity that was initially defined purely functionally. Similarly, then, rather than trying to give an intrinsic characterization of what experiential representation is, Pautz recommends defining the term by specifying what role it plays within our theory.

So as not to confuse the notion of sensory representation with the more familiar forms of representation discussed above, we can follow Pautz and introduce the simple name, “R”. We can now redefine representationalism in the following way:

**Representationalism**: What it is for a subject to have an experience of a certain kind (with a certain phenomenal character, that is) is for her to stand in a relation R to a set of *properties* or *ways things might be* such that R plays the cognitive access role and the character role while being existence neutral.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This definition of the view also gives us a definition of the key notion, “R”. In line with the Ramsey-Lewis method, “R” just refers to that relation (if there is one) that a subject stands in to a set of properties, which plays the cognitive access role and the character role while being existence neutral.

Let’s unpack this definition. R plays the *character* role just in case all similarities and differences in the phenomenal characters of different experiences can be explained in terms of similarities and differences in the properties that one stands in R to. In other words, for R to play the character role, neither the subject, nor the relation, R, can make any differential contribution to the character of an experience over and above the contribution made by the properties that are on the other end of the relation from the subject. R plays the *cognitive access* role just in case standing in R to a certain property, *F*, gives the subject cognitive access to *F*; that is, gives the subject the ability to know what *F* is like. Finally, R must be an *existence-neutral* relation in that a subject can stand in R to *F* even if nothing instantiates *F.* Putting these three points together, standing in R to properties *F* and *G* explains how one knows what *F* and *G* are like*,* it explains how this experience is phenomenally similar to an experience in which one stands in R to *G* and *H* but phenomenally dissimilar to an experience in which one stands in R only to *H*, and it provides such explanations without requiring *F*, *G*, or *H* to be instantiated by anything.

The Ramsey-Lewis method is a perfectly legitimate way to define a theoretical term. Typically, once a term has been successfully defined, one would then seek to discover the entity in the world that actually does play these roles. But for the process of definition to succeed at singling out a real entity in the world, it must at least be *possible* for a single state/relation/object to explain all the phenomena that the referent of the term is posited as explaining. To see this point, imagine that physicists, knowing that there were a bunch of distinct physical phenomena that cutting-edge physics has not yet explained, introduced the new theoretical term “dark energy” as that entity that explains *all* of these physical phenomena. Unless physicists could provide some good reasons to think that a single entity could explain such seemingly disparate physical phenomena, “dark energy” would be a poorly defined term and empirical investigation would fail to turn up any single worldly entity that could serve as the referent of the term. Crucially (for what comes later), it would be a poorly defined term despite the fact that a single *explanans* would amount to the simplest hypothesis. Sometimes, too much simplicity is a bad thing.

The Problem of Existence Neutrality

What I am interested in investigating in this paper is whether we have reason to think that a single theoretical relation can, as Pautz’s definition of R requires, play both the character role and the cognitive access role, while also being existence-neutral. I will provide a few different reasons to think that it implausible to expect a single relation to do the work set out for it.

I want to begin by considering whether it is possible for a relation to satisfy the cognitive access role while being existence-neutral. Is it possible, that is, for a subject to gain knowledge of what a property is like in virtue of standing in an existence-neutral relation to that property? Let us begin with the very natural thought that experiencing a property *F* gives us knowledge of what *F* is like. Different theorists of perception accept this intuition for a variety of properties. Sense-datum theorists and naïve realists, on the one hand, insist that having sensory experience of sensible qualities like color and shape gives me knowledge of what these qualities are like. In the passage below, John Campbell gives voice to the idea that one cannot grasp what a color *is* without experiencing it:

To understand ascriptions of color, one must have, or have had, experiences of color. There is no other way of grasping what a particular color-property *is.* The character of the property is, though, transparent to this way of grasping it.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Qualia theorists, on the other hand, believe that a subject cannot know what a different set of properties—*qualia*—are like without having sensory experience. Qualia are not sensible qualities like colors, sounds, or shapes; rather, they are intrinsic properties of minds that constitute what it is like for a subject to undergo a sensory experience as of a color, shape or sound. Despite the differences among these views about *which* qualities experience gives us insight into, they all agree with the representationalist that sensory experience gives subjects knowledge of what some qualities are like.

The disagreement emerges when we note that all of these theorists, unlike the representationalist, take for granted that the qualities we come to know about on the basis of a sensory experience must actually be instantiated in the relevant experience. For sense-datum theorists and standard naïve realists, a sense-datum or a physical object must actually instantiate redness in order for a subject to know, on the basis of experience, what redness is like. Similarly, for the qualia theorist, a subject must instantiate a quale in order for her to know, on the basis of experience, what that quale is like. It is a distinctive feature of the representationalist view that Pautz sets out that experience can provide us knowledge of what a quality is like even though that quality is not instantiated in that experience.

Why do most theorists assume that cognitive access to a property requires instantiation of that property? I think the reasoning, though often inexplicit, is simple and goes hand in hand with the distinctive kind of knowledge that sensory experience is thought to provide. We think that sensory experience gives us access to what a property is like in virtue of the property actually being *present* in experience. The specific shade of purple that a flower instantiates is right there before my eyes when I see the flower. My knowledge of it is, therefore, immediate and direct. I no longer need to rely on descriptions of the shade or try to imagine the shade by relying on knowledge of other shades that I have seen; it is just there for me to apprehend. The point that I have just made for the shade of purple can also be made by qualia theorists with respect to qualia. Mary can know all the descriptions there are to be known about a red’ quale, but it is only when red’ is actually present in her experience that she can directly apprehend it and thereby come to know what it is like. So it seems that sensory experience gives us access to properties in virtue of those properties being *present* in experience. It is this feature of presencethat is distinctive of the character of sensory experience, as opposed to belief, and it is this feature of presencethat serves to explain why experience can provide me with a special kind of knowledge.

But now we can couple this point with the highly plausible metaphysical principle that a property can only be *present* in an experience via its instances. Abstract universals are not in space and time and so they cannot be present at any location in space or at any point in time. Universals can only be constituents of concrete events or episodes if their instances are constituents of those concrete events or episodes. And so, if knowing what a property is like on the basis of experience requires the property to be present in experience, and if a property can only be present in an experience via its instances, it follows that I can only know what properties are like, on the basis of a sensory experience, if the relevant properties are instantiated in that experience. This serves as an argument for the claim that an experiential relation that gives me genuine cognitive access to a property cannot be existence-neutral.

Now one might wonder why *presence* is required for cognitive access. If something is *absent*, I can still know about it via some description that tells me what the thing is like. Why can’t a representationalist argue that this kind of descriptive or propositional knowledge is perfectly adequate to give a subject cognitive access to a property; for her to know what the relevant property is like? This would not be an implausible view. Take our knowledge of shapes, for example. It seems quite intuitive to think that a subject knows what squareness is like so long as she knows that it is the property of having four equal sides meeting at four right angles. But she can gain this knowledge without being, or ever having been, in the presence of any square objects.

Whatever one makes of this idea, it is clear that Pautz does not endorse it; nor should he, given his other commitments. First, Pautz makes clear that he treats sensory knowledge as a distinctive kind of non-descriptive knowledge:

By having the flower-experience, Barry can now think that something is f17 [the specific apparent shape that Barry experiences]. He can think this by thinking that something is *shaped that way*. Before entering the room and having this experience, he didn’t have this specific cognitive capacity. True, using language, he could think, for instance, that “something in the next room is roughly flower-shaped”. But unaided by experience he couldn’t think that something is *precisely* f17. For he had no way of mentally singling out precisely this shape. It is only by entering the room and having his present experience that he can now attribute this shape to something in thought. His experience offers up an ostensible example of this precise shape.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In this passage, Pautz seems to suggest that experience is necessary for us to be able to think thoughts about properties that are too fine-grained or determinate for our language to capture. While Barry may be able to think thoughts about the determinable *being flower-shaped* without having ever seen this particular flower, he cannot think thoughts about *this* particularshape, f17. Experience gives us access to this fine-grained shape by providing an “ostensible example” of it. Passages like this make it clear that Pautz does not want to treat cognitive access to a property as a sub-species of propositional or descriptive knowledge.

Before moving on to why Pautz shouldnottreat experiential knowledge as a kind of descriptive or propositional knowledge, I want to flag that this passage is quite puzzling given the representationalist view of experience under consideration. Remember that on this view, when experiencing an irregularly shaped flower, Barry (or his hallucinating friend, Buddy) stands in R to the universal, F17, and not to any instance of that universal. And yet, in this passage, Pautz describes experience as providing Barry with *examples* of certain shapes. What is an example of a kind of shape if not an instance of that shape? If all that Barry is related to is the universal itself, however, there can be no “example” of that universal for him to ostend to or single out; all there is is the universal itself, and it’s not clear how one can ostend an uninstantiated universal in Platonic heaven. The problem here is not the intuitive idea that one can point to or single out *that shape* and thereby come to have thoughts about it (even if one is hallucinating); the problem is that Pautz’s version of representationalism does not seem entitled to appeal to this intuition when explaining the kind of access to qualities that experience provides.

Now for why Pautz *should not* treat cognitive access as a kind of ordinary, propositional knowledge. Consider the following passage in which Pautz connects up R playing the cognitive access role to R thereby playing the character role:

Once we think that having the flower-experience *necessarily involves* standing in an existence-neutral, representational relation *R* to the property of being f17 and purple42, the simplest view becomes that the flower-experience is nothing but standing in this special relation to this complex property. The relation is an *experiential* representational relation…Nothing more is required.[[8]](#footnote-8)

What Pautz seems to be suggesting here is that insofar as I am standing in an existence-neutral relation that gives me cognitive access to a property, and insofar as experience necessarily involves a subject standing in such a relation, we ought to conclude, on the basis of simplicity considerations, that this is all there is to having an experience of the relevant property. Nothing more is required—no qualia, no sense-data—to make the relation a *phenomenal* or *experiential* relation. As Pautz writes, “the experience is a pure representational state, or a pure seeming-state.” (108) The thought, then, is that all that is required for a subject to have a phenomenally rich experience is for the subject to stand in an existence-neutral relation that gives the subject cognitive access to the properties that she is related to.

Learning the definition of a square in a mathematics classroom in the absence of any objects instantiating squareness clearly does not amount to sensorily experiencing a perfect square. But when I learn the definition of a square in the absence of any squares, I do stand in an existence-neutral relation to squareness that gives me knowledge of what squares are. The only way Pautz can avoid the verdict that this thereby counts as a case of sensory experience, given his claim that standing in such a relation to *F* amounts to experiencing *F*, is to insist that the kind of knowledge I get by engaging in this kind of mathematical reasoning does not count as genuine “cognitive access” to squareness. And so, cognitive access cannot be analyzed as the kind of propositional knowledge we are familiar with, which we can obtain in the absence of the property we come to know about. [[9]](#footnote-9)

Now Pautz might suggest that I am misunderstanding the dialectic here. He may deny endorsing the claim that *any* existence-neutralrelation that gives a subject cognitive access to properties amounts to an experiential relation. Instead, he might insist that he only commits to the far more innocuous claim that once we acknowledge that there is *an* existence-neutral relation that plays the cognitive access role *in experience,* we should then conclude that that’s *all* there is to an experience being the way it is. But this would be an uncompelling clarification, I think. The representationalist is trying to give an account of what experience consists in. They cannot, then, make use of the notion of experience to distinguish between different candidate existence-neutral relations, all of which adequately play the cognitive access role. If they do this, then an immediate follow-up question arises, as to what makes some cognitive access relations experiential and others not. Having to give a substantive answer to this question would likely lead to renewed appeals to qualia or sensations. The exciting proposal that Pautz is trying to defend, if I understand him correctly, is one on which there is *nothing more* to the character of an experience than the subject standing in an existence-neutral relation that provides cognitive access to the properties it relates the subject to.

Furthermore, given the Ramsey-Lewis method of definition, Pautz cannot distinguish sensory experience from the case of mathematical reasoning by dogmatically asserting that even though the relation I stand in while engaging in mathematical reasoning might be an instance of *some* existence-neutral relation, it just isn’t an instance of R. On the Ramsey-Lewis method, we define R as whatever relation plays a certain role. If the relation I stand in during mathematical reasoning does indeed play the relevant role, it must count as an instance of R.

Here's a related point with respect to whether an existence-neutral relation can play the *character* role effectively. When Pautz first introduces the notion of experiential representation, he makes clear that he intends to use the locution “experientially represent properties” as shorthand for “experientially representing that things have properties.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Here, Pautz seems to acknowledge that experience is most naturally described as involving the seeming awareness of objects being certain ways. But then, when defining the character-role explicitly, Pautz states that differences in character can be fully explained by differences in which properties we stand in relation R to, and no mention of any objects is made. Note that even if we think of properties as *ways things might be*, representing a property does not amount to representing that something *is* that way; it merely amounts to representing that there may be something that is a certain way. Given that we are meant to stand in the same relation, R, regardless of whether we are perceiving or hallucinating a purple flower, this implies that standing in R to the uninstantiated universal *purple42* is somehow meant to make it seem to me as if there is some *particular* that instantiates *purple42*. But again, it’s unclear how we get this verdict given what we have been told about R. We know that standing in an existence-neutral relation that gives us knowledge of what a property is like is not sufficient for it to seem to the subject that the property is instantiated. Go back, one last time, to our discussion of mathematical reasoning: when I learn the definition of a square, I can stand in an existence-neutral relation that allows me to know what squareness is like and think about squares without representing any particular thing as square. So again, it must be something special about the notion of cognitive access or the relation R that obtains in sensory experience, that has not yet been specified, that gives it this additional power.

I will assume, then, that cognitive access must be quite a special kind of knowledge if, in conjunction with existence-neutrality, it is to *guarantee* the occurrence of experience. We have already seen that there *is* a distinctive kind of knowledge one can gain of an item, which many theorists accept is unique to perception, when one is able to directly apprehend or take in the item. But as I have already suggested, this kind of direct or immediate apprehension has typically been thought to require the actual *presence*, and thereby the instantiation, of the relevant properties. The actual presence of properties would also provide a straightforward, non-revisionary explanation of why properties *seem* present and instantiated in experience. But all of this requires giving up the condition of existence neutrality, which is at the heart of the representationalist proposal. The problem that the representationalist is left with then, is to provide some framework that makes intelligible how an existence-neutral relation could secure all the same payoffs that existence-dependent relations—like the traditional notion of “acquaintance” that plays a key role in sense-datum and naïve realist theories, for instance—have thought to be uniquely able to explain.

1. Character and Cognitive Access

Let us now shift our attention to the claim that one and the same representational relation can both play the character role and the cognitive access role. Remember, for R to play the character role, all similarities and differences in the character of two experiences must be explained in terms of similarities and differences in the “perceptible properties” that we stand in R to.[[11]](#footnote-11) Putting aside some of the worries expressed in the previous section, we can just stipulate here that it is a feature of R that when a subject stands in R to some property *F,* it will seem to the subject as if there is some *o* that is *F*.[[12]](#footnote-12) While building this feature into the nature of R captures how experience always seems to present objects as instantiating properties, it threatens R’s ability to successfully play the character role – that is, to explain all the similarities and differences in character in terms of similarities and differences in which properties one stands in R to.

Consider how Barry can have an experience of a purple flower in normal sunlight and an experience of a purple flower in the setting sun. If neither of these experiences is illusory—given color constancy, there is no reason to think that a subject cannot accurately track the colors across a variety of lighting conditions—the flower will continue to seem purple in both cases even though the character of the two experiences differs. Similarly, when Barry looks at a coin first top-down and then head-on, even though he may very well represent the coin as round in both cases, the two experiences will nonetheless be different in character. The differences in character within each pair of experiences are not differences in which color or shape properties the objects seem to instantiate. If a subject standing in R to a property can only ever make it seem as though some object instantiates that quality, then Barry stands in R to all the same properties in each pair of experiences and so which properties he stands in R to cannot explain the differences in these pairs of experiences.

When considering the objection to representationalism that not all differences in character amount to differences in how the represented objects seem, Pautz offers this general response:

Our final Ramsey-Lewis formulation of the representational view… merely says that experience consists in bearing some relation R to properties, where the relation plays a certain theoretical role. It places no constraints on what those properties might be. In particular, the properties needn’t always seem to qualify some physical object. Some forms of experiential representation may not take the form of attributing properties to physical things.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Here, Pautz is addressing cases of impoverished visual experiences or visual blur. The challenge to the representationalist stems from the fact that the phenomenal character of such experiences cannot be fully accounted for in terms of how objects seem. Pautz’s response is to reject the assumption that standing in R to a property always has to result in some object seeming to instantiate that property. Rather, he suggests, a subject can just stand in R to a property like blurriness where that contributes to the character of the experience without it making it seem like any object is blurry.

For this response to be available to the representationalist, they must give up the thought that R is a unitary relation such that one stands in R to all properties *in the same way*. When Barry stands in R to properties like color and shape, it seems to him as if some object is colored. But if Barry can also stand in R to blurriness without any object thereby seeming blurry, we do not have any unified account of what standing in R results in. To accommodate the differences in character based on different viewing conditions, one will also have to accept that Barry stands in R to viewing conditions in an entirely different way than the way in which he stands in R to colors and shapes or to properties like blur. For whatever one’s analysis of blurry experiences, that analysis won’t be straightforwardly extendable to something like viewing conditions. R now becomes an incredibly disunified relation.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Pautz might suggest at this point that the disunity is exaggerated and is a consequence of the mistaken view that a subject stands in R to individual properties. Instead, he might recommend, we should treat R as a relation that one stands in to a complex of properties or a state of affairs. On this view, we can treat Barry as standing in R to complexes like purpleness-in-daylight, or purpleness-at-dusk. When he stands in R to such a complex, it will seem to him as if there is a purple object in daylight (or at dusk).[[15]](#footnote-15)

While this approach may help with the disunity of R, two new problems emerge. The first is that differences in illumination conditions can make a difference to the character of experience without a subject explicitly representing those illumination conditions. Imagine that Barry is accustomed to the subtle differences in how purple things look as the sun rises and sets but has never explicitly attended to the lighting conditions themselves. Over the course of a day, he will continue to represent the flower as purple, but the lighting conditions are not in any way part of how he experiences the world; they are not part of the content of his experience. And yet the character of his experience changes as the sun goes down. Now this might be a minor problem for Pautz’s version of representationalism because R, being a new theoretically defined relation, need not track the explicit content of an experience. As long as the lighting conditions affect the character of Barry’s experience, we can assume he stands in R to these conditions, even if he in no way attends to them or is aware of them.

The second worry, however, is harder to get rid of. This worry returns us to the many explanatory roles that R is meant to simultaneously play. If the entities in R are no longer perceptible properties as is typically understood—colors, shapes, tastes, smells etc.—but complex states of affairs involving illumination conditions or perspectival conditions—then it becomes far less plausible to hold that R is a relation that gives subjects cognitive access to all entities that are at the other end of the relation. We do not get insight into the nature of illumination conditions or complex perspectival conditions that influence the character of our experiences just in virtue of those conditions affecting the character of our experience. It took centuries for the science of optics to advance and the fact that improvements in perspective drawing go hand in hand with these scientific developments strongly suggests that we cannot just know how perspective works by having experiences that are shaped by the perspectives we in fact inhabit.

The problem here seems to be that there are circumstances in which the cognitive access role and the character role pull in opposite directions. That is, there are elements that can shape the phenomenal character of our experience that we have no cognitive access to. Despite Pautz’s thought that defining representation using the Ramsey-Lewis method gives us a great degree of flexibility, in reality, introducing a single relation that must have the ability to explain both character and cognitive access leaves one with a surprisingly strong, and therefore implausible, version of the view.

References

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Pautz, Adam. 2021. *Perception*. Routledge.

1. Pautz (2021, 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Pautz (2021, 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Pautz (2021, 96). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Pautz (2021, 100). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Pautz (2021, 100). I have tweaked Pautz’s definition slightly to make clear that existence neutrality is not itself one of the roles that R plays, but rather places a constraint on how R can play the cognitive access and character role. I have also clarified that experiences are typed by their phenomenal characters. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Campbell (1993, 258-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Pautz (2021, 105, my emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Pautz (2021, 108). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. If one thinks, like Hume, that a subject could come to know what a missing shade of blue was like solely through an act of the imagination (along with sensory knowledge of other shades of blue), then this poses a problem for Pautz’s argument structure as well. For such an episode of the imagination involves the subject standing in an existence-neutral relation that gives her cognitive access to a property, but it does not amount to her experiencing that quality. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Pautz (2021, 98). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Pautz (2021, 99). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Let’s also put aside the worry that particular objects contribute to the character of our experiences, such that Buddy looking tired is a different experience than his twin, Barry, looking tired. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Pautz (2021, 110-11). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Once standing in R no longer amounts to an object seeming some way, it’s not clear why the resulting view is recognizable as a form of representationalism at all. Even if Pautz is happy to welcome this consequence, the entirely unconstrained nature of R is theoretically unattractive. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. It’s a bit strange to treat *being* purple in daylight as a possible state of affairs. One naturally thinks of viewing conditions as affecting how an object *looks*, not how it is. But the representationalist cannot treat *looking purple in daylight* as a possible state of affairs, because their analysis of *o* looking purple is something akin to S representing that *o* is purple. So one cannot be related to a state of affairs that itself involves any appearances. The appearances are constituted by a subject representing (or standing in R to) categorical ways the world might be. It seems even more difficult to factor in blur in this way. What is the possible state of affairs that one is related to when one sees the world without one’s glasses on? [↑](#footnote-ref-15)