

Attention and Metaphysics of Perception

佐藤 亮司 (Ryoji Sato)

東京大学 (the University of Tokyo)

There is an increasing number of literature about the debate if representationalism can accommodate facts involving attention (e.g. Block, 2010; Ganson & Bronner, forthcoming; Nickel, 2006; Speaks, 2010; Wu, 2011). In this talk, I will attempt to evaluate how these objections undermine representationalism and naïve realism. It is because at least some versions of representationalism and naïve realism endorse the following claim: when there is phenomenological difference between two experiences and both of them are good cases, there is a corresponding difference in external properties/objects. And many objections appealing to attention simply deny there is any such difference in the world.

I argue most challenges can be given some answers by appealing to subtle differences in external properties/objects, but the most serious objection will defeat direct realism and force representationalism to accept a *prima facie* unfavorable consequence.

The objection is Block's (2010). Based on recent psychophysical evidence that attention alters experience in perceived contrast, he argues experiential contents include something over and above worldly objects and properties. Block starts with the experimental evidence that an experience of a specific pattern when attention is directed to that is different from the one when attention is not directed to the stimulus. I. e., the former experience is experienced as higher in contrast than the other. However, there is no corresponding change in the world. Moreover, both experiences seem good cases since there are no reasons to think they are illusory. But, according to representationalism and naïve realism, if experiences are veridical, there should be difference in worldly properties corresponding to phenomenology. Hence, direct realism and representationalism is wrong.

One possible reply from representationalism is appealing to indeterminate contents. But I rather argue the best reply from representationalism is denying the alleged assumption that both experiences are good cases. I also claim direct realism cannot take the option and seriously damaged by the argument.

References

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