
DO WE SEE APPLES AS EDIBLE?

BY

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Abstract: Do we (sometimes) perceive apples as edible? One could argue that it is just a manner of speaking to say so: we do not really *see* an object as edible, we see it as having certain shape, size and color and we only infer on the basis of these properties that it is. I argue that we do indeed *see* objects as edible, and do not just believe that they are. My argument proceeds in two steps. First, I point out that Susanna Siegel's influential argument in favor of the claim that we represent sortal properties perceptually does not work. Second, I argue that we can fix this argument if we replace the sortal property in question with the property of being edible, climbable or Q-able in general.

I. Introduction

We perceive objects as having various properties. We perceive them as having a certain color, a certain shape and a certain spatial location, for example. The question I would like to examine here is whether we perceive them as having a kind of property that is less obviously perceptual: the property of being edible, climbable or Q-able in general.

The first thing to note is that there are two ways of asking this question that correspond to two different ways of thinking about perceptual experiences. According to some, perceptual experiences represent objects as having various properties.¹ If we go along with this assumption, the question will be: what properties are represented by perceptual experiences. But according to others, perceptual experiences do not represent anything: they are not representations at all.² They may be thought of as 'presenting' or 'being sensitive' to some properties, but they do not represent these properties. If we accept this framework, the question is what properties perceptual experiences are sensitive to. The important point is that regardless of whether we accept a 'representational' or a 'relational' view of perceptual experience,³ the question about which properties are perceptually experienced and which ones aren't can (and should) be raised. In what

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1 follows, I will use the ‘representational’ terminology and assume that
2 perceptual states *represent* objects as having various properties, but the
3 argument can be rephrased to fit the relationalist framework.

4 Most of the discussion about what properties are represented by per-
5 ceptual experiences concerns sortal properties. When I am looking at the
6 object in front of me do I perceive it as a table or do I perceive it as having
7 a certain shape, size and color and I only *infer* that it is a table? In other
8 words, besides the properties of having certain shape, size and color, is the
9 property of being a table also represented in perception?

10 I will not take sides in this debate, as my aim is to show that properties
11 that could be thought of as even less obviously perceptual are represented
12 in perception: the property of being edible, climbable or Q-able in general.

13 But I will use some important considerations and arguments from the
14 debate about the perceptual representation of the property of being a
15 table. The structure of my argument is as follows. First, I try to show that
16 Susanna Siegel’s influential argument in favor of the claim that we repre-
17 sent the property of being a table perceptually does not work. Second, I
18 argue that we can fix this argument if we replace the sortal property in
19 question with the property of being Q-able.

20 The claim that we perceive objects as Q-able is not new. I myself argued
21 recently that our perceptual system represents objects as edible, climbable
22 or Q-able in general.⁴ My main concern there, however, is to establish that
23 our *perceptual system* represents properties of this kind – consciously or
24 unconsciously. For the purposes of that argument, explicitly remained
25 neutral about whether these representations, which I label ‘action-oriented
26 perceptual states’ are conscious.⁵ The present paper, in contrast, is about
27 *perceptual experiences*. The question is whether we are *perceptually aware*
28 of properties like edible, climbable or Q-able in general. Everything I say
29 in this paper is about perceptual experiences: when I talk about ‘seeing’ in
30 what follows, that is to be understood as ‘consciously seeing’ (much like
31 the concept is used by Fred Dretske).⁶ The argument in the present paper
32 supports my earlier, more general claim, but it goes further: it aims to
33 make a stronger claim: at least sometimes, we consciously perceive objects
34 as edible.⁷

35 36 **II. *Are sortal properties represented in perception?***

37
38 Susanna Siegel argues that some sortal properties (she calls them
39 K-properties), like being a pine tree or being a table, are represented in
40 perception. In this section, I will try to show that her argument is vulner-
41 able to an important objection. Then I will try to fix Siegel’s argument in
42 such a way that it does show that some not obviously perceptual proper-
43 ties, like that of being Q-able, are represented in perception.

1 Siegel's argument is the following. Take two experiences, E1 and E2: the
2 experience of a tree before and after taking a course on the typology of
3 trees, respectively. Here is what we can say about these two experiences:

- 4
- 5 (0) The overall experience of which E1 is a part differs from the overall
6 phenomenology of which E2 is a part.
 - 7 (1) If the overall experience of which E1 is a part differs from the
8 overall phenomenology of which E2 is a part, then there is a
9 phenomenal difference between the sensory experiences E1 and E2.
 - 10 (2) If there is a phenomenal difference between the sensory experiences
11 E1 and E2, then E1 and E2 differ in content.
 - 12 (3) If there is a difference in content between E1 and E2, it is a
13 difference with respect to sortal properties represented in E1 and
14 E2.
-

15
16 (Conclusion) Sortal properties are represented in perception.

17
18 So the overall experience of seeing a pine tree before learning about pine
19 trees is different from the overall experience after having learned this (0).
20 This difference is perceptual difference (1) and it is due to the difference of
21 the properties represented in perception in the two cases (2). Finally, this
22 difference with regards to the represented properties is a difference with
23 regards to the represented sortal properties.

24 I accept premise (0), (1) and (2), for the sake of argument – I will have
25 more to say about them in Section VI. I will argue against (3).

26 Denying (3) (while accepting (2)) would amount to saying that E2
27 represents some (non-sortal) property, whereas E1 does not and this
28 explains the difference in phenomenology without any need to talk about
29 sortal properties.

30 Siegel considers a version of this way of arguing against (3). The sug-
31 gestion is that E1 and E2 differ with respect to the Gestalt-properties (i.e.
32 complex shape, size and color-properties) they represent. E1 represents
33 some Gestalt-property and E2 represents some other Gestalt-property.
34 Neither of them represents any sortal properties. Siegel admits that this
35 explanatory scheme may work in some cases, but she argues that it does
36 not work in all cases.

37 She gives the following example for a case where the appeal to Gestalt-
38 properties breaks down. X has an unusual facial expression when he is
39 expressing doubt. When I first saw him making this face, I had no idea that
40 he was expressing doubt. But as I got to know him, I learned to recognize
41 his doubtful expression. E1 is my experience of X's face before I knew it
42 was expressing doubt and E2 is my experience after I came to know his
43 expression. Siegel assumes, rightly, that there may be a phenomenal dif-
44 ference between E1 and E2. Importantly, she claims that:

1 . . . it seems implausible to suppose that there must be a change in which color and shape
2 properties are represented before and after one learns that it is doubt that the fact so
3 contorted expresses.⁸

4
5 The structure of Siegel's argument is then the following. There are cases
6 where all the following are true:

- 7
8 (a) E1 and E2 represent the same Gestalt-properties.
9 (b) Still, there is a phenomenal difference between E1 and E2.
10 (c) The phenomenal difference between E1 and E2 must be a repre-
11 sentational difference (this follows from step (2) above).

12
13 (Conclusion) Hence, E1 and E2 must represent different sortal
14 properties

15
16 I will not question (b): it does seem that there is a phenomenal difference
17 between seeing X's doubtful expression before and after learning that it
18 expresses doubt. I have already accepted (c). But I will try to point out that
19 (a) is ambiguous and that it does not seem to be a plausible assumption if
20 we do some disambiguating.

21
22 **III. The importance of attention**

23
24 We attend to some, but not all, the properties we represent objects as
25 having. Some properties we represent without attending to them, but some
26 others we represent and attend to.⁹ As William James famously wrote,
27 'attention [. . .] out of all the sensations yielded, picks out certain ones as
28 worthy of notice and suppresses all the rest. We notice only those sensations
29 which are signs to us of *things* which happen practically [. . .] to interest us'.¹⁰
30 To put it very simply, some properties are represented pre-attentively and a
31 subset of these properties is also represented post-attentively.¹¹

32 In the light of this distinction, premise (a) of Siegel's argument can mean
33 one of the following two claims:

- 34
35 (a1) E1 and E2 pre-attentively represent the same Gestalt-properties.
36 (a2) E1 and E2 post-attentively represent the same Gestalt-properties.

37
38 My worry is that while we have good reason to believe that (a1) is true,
39 what would be needed for Siegel's argument to work is (a2). But it is far
40 from clear that we have any reason to hold (a2).

41 I will not question claim (a1), which seems convincing enough. In the
42 case of E1 and E2, we have the same object in front of us, and this object
43 has the very same properties. Our perceptual apparatus is also sensitive to
44 the same properties in the two cases. Hence, it seems reasonable to say that

1 E1 and E2 represent the same Gestalt-properties pre-attentively. But it
2 would be a much stronger claim to say that they represent the same
3 Gestalt-properties post-attentively.

4 At this point some could interject and question the assumptions I have
5 been making about the relation between attention and perceptual repre-
6 sentation. More precisely, it could be, and has been, suggested that in
7 order for a property to be represented in my perceptual experience, I must
8 be attending to this property. In other words, there is no such thing as
9 pre-attentive representation: attention is necessary for being represented in
10 a perceptual experience.¹² Note, however, that if we think about the rela-
11 tion between attention and perceptual representation this way, this does
12 not influence my argument: if attention is necessary for being represented
13 in a perceptual experience, then we have no reason to believe that (a1) is
14 true. But this leaves my argument, which questions (a2), intact. Again, the
15 structure of my argument is that *even if* we have reason to buy (a1), we
16 have no reason to believe that (a2) is true. If (a1) is untenable, all the better
17 for my argument.

18 Let it go back to the example of the pine tree again. After I have
19 familiarized myself with the various features of pine trees, when I see the
20 pine tree I am likely to attend to different features than the ones I attended
21 to before. I will attend to, say, the shape of the pine cones, the color of the
22 foliage, the diversity of the ways the needles are bundled in fascicles, etc. I
23 have not attended to any of these features before, as, according to the
24 example, I didn't know much about any of them: I was just looking at a
25 tree without knowing much about the specifics of pine trees. In short, we
26 do have reason to accept (a1), but we also have reason to have doubts
27 about (a2). Note that the same argument can be given in the case of each
28 of Siegel's examples: we have no reason to suppose, for example, that we
29 attend to the same features of a face before and after learning that the face
30 expresses doubt. After I have learned this, I will attend to features I have
31 not attended to before: the way the wrinkles run on the forehead, the
32 slightly raised eyebrows, etc.

33 Importantly, in order for Siegel's argument to work, she needs (a2). E1
34 and E2 may represent the same Gestalt-properties pre-attentively, but the
35 argument is blocked if the difference between the phenomenal character
36 of E1 and E2 is explained by the different Gestalt-properties E1 and E2
37 represents post-attentively. The difference between the phenomenal
38 character of E1 and E2 can be explained without appealing to sortal
39 properties: it can be explained by which Gestalt-properties of the object we
40 are attending to.

41 Thus, a plausible suggestion is that the difference between E1 and E2 is
42 a matter of a difference in attention. And this suggestion should not sound
43 too surprising. Attention, as the famous 'inattentional blindness' phenom-
44 enon shows, can dramatically change what we experience.¹³

1 This phenomenon has been known for a long time. Rezső Bálint, a
2 Hungarian physician after whom Balint-syndrome was named, wrote in
3 1907:

4
5 It is a well-known phenomenon that we do not notice anything happening in our surround-
6 ings while being absorbed in the inspection of something; focusing our attention on a certain
7 object may happen to such an extent that we cannot perceive other objects placed in the
8 peripheral parts of our visual field, although the light rays they emit arrive completely at the
9 visual sphere of the cerebral cortex.¹⁴

10
11 More recently, various experiments about inattentional blindness have
12 demonstrated that we fail to experience those features of our surroundings
13 that we are not paying attention to.¹⁵ Probably the most famous inatten-
14 tional blindness experiment is the following.¹⁶ We are shown a short
15 video-clip of two teams of three, dressed in white and black, passing a ball
16 around. We are asked to count how many times the white team passes the
17 ball around. On first viewing, most of the observers come up with an
18 answer to this not very interesting question. On second viewing, however,
19 when there is no counting task to be completed, they notice that a man
20 dressed in gorilla costume walks right in the middle of the passing game,
21 makes funny gestures and then leaves. The gorilla spends nine seconds in
22 the frame and most viewers do not notice it when attending to the passing
23 of the ball.¹⁷

24 What these empirical and everyday phenomena show is that attention
25 can make a huge difference in what we experience.¹⁸ My suggestion is that
26 attention also plays a key role in explaining the difference between the
27 phenomenal character of E1 and E2. We have the following explanatory
28 scheme: E1 and E2 pre-attentively represent the same Gestalt-properties.
29 But as we attend to different Gestalt properties in E1 and E2 (say, we
30 attend to different ways of grouping the same pre-attentively represented
31 properties), the difference between the phenomenal character of E1 and E2
32 can be explained by the different Gestalt-properties E1 and E2 represent
33 post-attentively. As Siegel's argument fails to rule out this explanatory
34 scheme, we have no reason to suppose that E1 and E2 represent different
35 sortal properties.

36 Does this explanatory scheme go against premise (2), a claim we have
37 already accepted? (2), again, was the following:

- 38
39 (2) If there is a phenomenal difference between the sensory experiences
40 E1 and E2, then E1 and E2 differ in content.

41
42 If what we mean by 'content' is 'post-attentive content',¹⁹ then (2) remains
43 correct: the phenomenal difference between E1 and E2 is explained in

1 terms of representational content: E1 and E2 represent different Gestalt-
2 properties post-attentively.²⁰

3 Thus, it seems that we have no justification for inferring (3) from (2),
4 which means that we have no reason to suppose that perceptual experi-
5 ences represent objects as having sortal properties.

6 The negative claim I made in this section is that Siegel's argument
7 cannot be used to conclude that perceptual experiences represent sortal
8 properties. But I want to go further and use these considerations to say
9 something positive about what properties are represented in perception. I
10 will argue in the next section that although Siegel's argument is not con-
11 clusive about whether sortal properties are represented in perception, if we
12 modify the argument slightly, it can yield a probably even more surprising
13 result: that the property of being edible and climbable is represented in
14 perception.

15 16 *IV. Action-properties*

17 We experience objects we are looking at as having a number of properties.
18 Some properties one experiences objects as having can't be fully charac-
19 terized without reference to one's action. I call these properties *action-*
20 *properties*. Being edible or climbable for me is an action-property, for
21 example. An object's action-properties are relational properties: they
22 depend both on the properties of the object and of the agent: whether a
23 tree is climbable for me depends both on the tree and on my climbing
24 skills. (Quick warning about my terminology: I have been, and will be,
25 using the term 'being edible' as a synonym for 'being edible for me'. There
26 may be a sense of the term 'being edible' that would be different from this,
27 but this would not express an action-property. My focus here is the expe-
28 rience of action properties and not the ordinary language analysis of the
29 concept of 'edible'.)

30
31 Properties can be characterized by actions in many ways. Experiencing
32 an object as having an action-property can mean that I experience it
33 as something that affords²¹ or invites an action, as something not to
34 perform an action with, as something that can be used as a means of
35 performing the action I want to perform or as a potential obstacle that
36 should be overcome if I want to perform a certain action. I use the term
37 'experiencing an object as having an action-property' to cover all these
38 diverse cases.

39 The awareness of action-properties is in some circumstances a very
40 salient feature of our experience of the world. Suppose that I am running
41 on the street to catch my bus and a lamppost is in my way. I am likely to
42 experience the lamppost as an obstacle to the performance of my action of

1 catching the bus: this property (the property of being an obstacle to the
2 performance of my action) is likely to be more salient than the color or
3 shape of the lamppost.

4 What this example is supposed to show is that we sometimes experience
5 objects as having action-properties. But I may do so perceptually or non-
6 perceptually and the example does not tell us which one is the case. The big
7 question is whether we experience objects as having action-properties
8 *perceptually*. Even though our awareness of action-properties of objects
9 seems more salient than their shape-, size- and color-properties, this does
10 not show that action-properties are represented in perception. In the next
11 section, I will use what remained of Siegel's argument to show that at least
12 some of them are.²²

13 My claim is not that all action-properties are perceptually represented
14 but that *some* are. Just which action-properties are represented in percep-
15 tion is a delicate and complex question but for the purposes of this paper
16 it is enough to note that some of the action-properties that are perceptually
17 represented are properties like being edible, climbable or Q-able in gener-
18 al.²³ A further qualification: my claim is not even that for every action Q,
19 being Q-able is perceptually represented. It is not true of many mental
20 actions and it is not true of highly complex actions like winning a war.²⁴
21 Attributing the property of being winnable to an election is unlikely to be
22 an instance of perceptual attribution. But it is important to note here that
23 the claim I defend in this paper is that there are *some* actions, Q, such that
24 we (sometimes) perceive objects as Q-able. I do not claim that this is true
25 of all actions.

26 Before arguing for the claim that some action-properties are represented
27 in our perceptual experience, a couple of clarifications are in place. First,
28 we may experience an object as having a certain action-property, say, as
29 edible, but the object may fail to have this property. Our experience may
30 misrepresent action-properties. Conversely, often an object has a number
31 of action-properties, say, a tree is climbable for me, but I may not neces-
32 sarily experience it as having an action-property.

33 Second, we may experience the same object as having different
34 action-properties: I can experience a newspaper as having various action-
35 properties in different contexts: I can experience it as having an action-
36 property that cannot be fully characterized without reference to the action
37 of killing a fly, an action-property that cannot be fully characterized
38 without reference to my action of reading about the election results, etc.

39 Finally, experiencing action-properties is neither necessary, nor suffi-
40 cient for the performance of actions. Often, the agent experiences an object
41 as having an action-property, but the action itself is not performed. Con-
42 versely, we can perform actions without experiencing anything as having
43 any action-properties; if, for example, we act without attending to what we
44 are doing.

1 **V. Are action-properties represented in perception?**

2
3 Let us now go back to Siegel's argument for the claim that sortal proper-
4 ties are represented in perception. Here is the equivalent argument
5 concerning action-properties. Take two experiences, E1* and E2*: the
6 experience of representing a tree as climbable for me and the experience of
7 representing the same tree as climbable for my twin sister (assuming that
8 my twin sister is as tall as I am and has similar climbing skills).

9 These mental states are defined in terms of what property they represent:
10 the property of being climbable for me and the property of being climbable
11 for my twin sister, respectively. The definition of E1* and E2* leaves it
12 open whether they represent these properties *perceptually*. And I argue
13 that they do.

14 Here is what we can say about these two experiences:

15
16 (0*) The overall experience of which E1* is a part differs from the
17 overall phenomenology of which E2* is a part.

18 (1*) If the overall experience of which E1* is a part differs from the
19 overall phenomenology of which E2* is a part, then there is a
20 phenomenal difference between the sensory experiences E1* and
21 E2*.

22 (2*) If there is a phenomenal difference between the sensory experi-
23 ences E1* and E2*, then E1* and E2* differ in content.

24 (3*) If there is a difference in content between E1* and E2*, it is a
25 difference with respect to the action-property represented in E1*
26 and E2*.

27
28 (Conclusion) Action-properties are represented in perception.

29
30 I aimed to show that Siegel's argument about sortal properties does not
31 work, because we can block the move from (2) to (3). Now I need to
32 show that when it comes to action-properties, (3*) does follow from (2*).
33 The main consideration against (3) was that it is possible that the dif-
34 ference between the phenomenal character of E1 and E2 is due to the
35 fact that while they represent the same Gestalt-properties pre-attentively,
36 they represent different Gestalt-properties post-attentively. Thus, the
37 difference is due to the difference in which non-sortal properties we
38 are attending to and not to the difference in what sortal properties are
39 represented.

40 I need to show that the same way of blocking the move from (2)
41 to (3) does not work in the case of the transition between (2*) and
42 (3*). In the case of Siegel's example, it seems unreasonable to
43 suppose that we need to attend to the same feature of the object we are
44 looking at in E1 and E2. After I have learned about pine trees, I will be

1 attending to different features of pine trees from the ones I attended
2 to before.

3 But, and this is where the difference lies between Siegel's argument
4 and mine, in the case of E1* and E2* above, we are attending to the
5 very same features. Experiencing a tree as climbable for me and
6 experiencing it as climbable for you involve attending to the very same
7 features of the tree: the height of its lowest branches, the texture of its
8 bark, etc.

9 It is important to be clear about the structure of this argument. In the
10 case of Siegel's example, I argued that in order to have experience E2, we
11 need to attend to features of the tree we could not attend to when having
12 E1, simply because we didn't know about these features. In the present
13 case, in contrast, it is difficult to see what features one would need to
14 attend to in order to experience the tree as climbable for oneself that one
15 could (and would) not attend to when experiencing it as climbable for
16 someone else (with similar climbing skills). The plausible explanation of
17 the difference between E1 and E2 in terms of the difference in what we are
18 attending to, which blocked Siegel's move from (2) to (3), does not seem
19 very plausible in the present case, as in the present case, we have reason to
20 believe that the two experiences represent the same Gestalt-properties not
21 only pre-attentively, but also post-attentively.

22 We can now put together the argument for (3*) adjusting Siegel's
23 argument:

- 24
25 (a*) E1* and E2* represent the same Gestalt-properties both pre-
26 attentively and post-attentively.
27 (b*) Still, there is a phenomenal difference between E1* and E2*.
28 (c*) The phenomenal difference between E1* and E2* must be a rep-
29 resentational difference (this follows from step (2*) above).
30

31 (Conclusion) Hence, E1* and E2* must represent different
32 action-properties

33
34 As E1* and E2* represent the same Gestalt-properties not only pre-
35 attentively, but also post-attentively, the objection I raised against Siegel's
36 original argument does not work here: the phenomenal difference between
37 E1* and E2* cannot be explained in terms of what we are attending to,
38 because we are attending to the same properties. And this argument can be
39 generalized to any pairs of experiences where the first experience is that of
40 seeing x as Q-able for me and the second experience is seeing x as Q-able
41 for you (as long as my and your Q-ing capacities are sufficiently similar).
42 Perceptual experiences may or may not represent sortal properties, but we
43 have an argument in favor of an even surprising claim, namely, that they
44 do represent (some) action-properties.

VI. Sortal properties versus action-properties

I need to make an important clarification about the structure of the argument I presented in this paper so far. I argued that Siegel's move from (2) to (3) is not justified, whereas my move from (2*) to (3*) is. But Siegel's argument for the claim that sortal properties are represented in perception is a three-step argument and I have not analyzed Siegel's arguments for (1) and for (2) at all. And, as I accepted these steps of Siegel's argument in the case of action-properties, I also simply accepted (0*), (1*) and (2*) without any argument. So strictly speaking, I have not argued for the claim that action-properties are represented in perception. I only argued for a conditional claim: if (0*), (1*) and (2*) are correct, action-properties are represented in perception.

There is a further complication: Siegel talks about pine trees, whereas I talk about climbability. We have seen how this difference makes the transition from (2*) to (3*) different from the transition from (2) to (3). But doesn't this difference matter when it comes to the transition from (0*) to (1*) and from (1*) to (2*)? The worry is that even if (1) and (2) were correct, it may still be possible that (1*) or (2*) are false, if there is a significant asymmetry between (1) and (1*) or between (2) and (2*) that would make the application of Siegel's arguments in the case of action-properties problematic. Note, however, that Siegel's arguments for (1) and (2) make no reference to the details of E1 and E2, they should apply to any pair of experiences that satisfy (0). Thus, if her arguments for (1) and for (2) stand, I could import them without any further complications into my argument for (1*) and (2*).

But not everyone will accept Siegel's argument for (1) and (2) (see Brogaard ms, for example).²⁵ As a result, I will sketch my own argument for (1*) and (2*). Like Siegel, I assume that (0*) is true: I will assume that the overall experience of which E1* is a part differs from the overall phenomenology of which E2* is a part. To take a different, but structurally similar example, suppose that I am playing basketball against you (who has similar skills/height/weight as I do). The basketball bounces towards us. Now, few would deny that experiencing it as being catchable for myself has very different phenomenal character from experiencing it as being catchable for you – it just feels different. These two experiences follow the exact pattern I used to describe the difference between E1* and E2*. Again, (0*) does not claim that this phenomenal difference is perceptual in nature – all it says is that experiencing the tree as climbable for me feels different from experiencing it as climbable for you.²⁶

It is an entirely different question whether this phenomenal difference is a perceptual, or, as Siegel would say, a sensory one, and I don't really

1 know how intuitions or introspection could help us to decide what phe-
2 nomenal difference is sensory and what is non-sensory.²⁷

3 In some cases, (1) may sound convincing. Consider the following
4 example. At a dinner party, I'm eating a piece of meat that I take to be
5 chicken, when my host tells me that it is in fact a piece of rat meat (or
6 pigeon, etc.; use your favorite disgusting animal). My (gustatory) experi-
7 ence before she told me this is E1; my experience after that is E2. If I
8 am really disgusted by rats, then E1 and E2 are clearly different and
9 the difference seems to be a sensory/perceptual one: the meat will *taste*
10 different.

11 But I am not sure that we can find an example where everyone's intu-
12 tions would converge to conclude that (1*) is correct. And even in the case
13 of the gustatory example above, the opponent of (1) can insist that the
14 difference in phenomenal character is not a sensory one. The same move
15 would be open to the opponent of (1*) as long as the argument I give in
16 favor of (1*) relies on intuitions and/or introspection.²⁸

17 Remember, (1) and (1*) are claim about our perceptual phenomenol-
18 ogy: they are not about what properties are represented in perception, but
19 about what properties are part of our phenomenology. (1) and (1*) are not
20 about content: they are about perceptual, or as Siegel says, sensory, phe-
21 nomenology. The challenge is to find a non-intuitive, non-introspective
22 way of resolving this debate about phenomenology.

23 I argue at length for (1*), and for a general methodology for keeping
24 perceptual and non-perceptual phenomenology apart elsewhere.²⁹ Here,
25 let me just sketch the gist of the argument. This argument does not rely on
26 either intuitions or introspection. It relies on a set of visual search experi-
27 ments. Patients with symptoms of unilateral neglect³⁰ are slow and some-
28 times even unable to find objects defined by a salient visual property (such
29 as their color). Yet, they are capable of, and relatively efficient in, finding
30 objects defined by the action they can be used for.³¹ Two aspects of these
31 experimental findings need to be highlighted: first, these patients do experi-
32 ence the property of what an object can be used for. And, second, they
33 were, like most unilateral neglect patients, unaware of the shape, size and
34 color properties of the objects presented to them.

35 It is important to be careful about what these experiments demonstrate.
36 They do not directly show that the property of 'being used for a certain
37 action' (or 'to be used for a certain action') is perceptually represented in
38 healthy humans or even in patients with symptoms of unilateral neglect.
39 These findings only tell us what properties are part of the overall phenom-
40 enology of these patients (and what properties they are not). I aim to show
41 that these experiments nonetheless help us to show that normal humans
42 experience action-properties perceptually.

43 Remember Siegel's argument in favor of (1): if the phenomenal differ-
44 ence between E1 and E2 is not sensory, then it must be due to an event that

1 occurs somewhere later in the processing that has its own non-perceptual
2 phenomenology.³² Siegel goes on to argue that no candidate for such
3 non-sensory event counts as a plausible candidate, but this argument may
4 be questioned by some as it does not rule out that some non-sensory event
5 type that Siegel failed to consider could account for the phenomenal
6 difference.

7 But what the unilateral neglect patients' visual search experiments show
8 is that in the case of these patients the phenomenology of what an object
9 can be used for is preserved while the phenomenology of seeing undoubt-
10 edly sensory properties, like color and shape was missing or delayed. Thus,
11 the phenomenology of what an object can be used for is temporarily prior
12 to the phenomenology of seeing color and shape.

13 This does *not* prove that the property of what an object can be used for
14 is processed earlier in the perceptual system than the property of color and
15 shape in healthy humans. What it does prove is that in healthy humans the
16 phenomenology of what an object can be used for is not an event that
17 comes after, and that is based on, the perceptual phenomenology of seeing
18 the object's shape and size. If it were, then in those humans who have
19 missing or delayed phenomenology of seeing the object's shape and size
20 would also have missing or delayed phenomenology of what the object can
21 be used for. But, as the experiments show, they don't.

22 To sum up, the denier of (1*) would need to say that the event that
23 makes the overall phenomenology of E1* and E2* different occurs some
24 time after the perceptual processing. In other words, they would need to
25 say that the experience of whether the tree is climbable for me or for my
26 twin sister comes after the perceptual processing. But as we have seen,
27 patients with unilateral neglect experience properties of this kind without
28 experiencing undoubtedly sensory properties like shape and color. The
29 event that makes the overall phenomenology of E1* and E2* different
30 comes before (and in some cases completely without) sensory phenom-
31 enology of shape and color. But this means that the event that makes the
32 overall phenomenology of E1* and E2* different is a perceptual event: the
33 phenomenal difference between E1* and E2* is a sensory difference: (1*)
34 is true.

35 But there are some more general and more serious problems that the
36 denier of (1*) faces. More precisely, denying (1*) yields some very implau-
37 sible consequences for the way we should describe the phenomenal char-
38 acter of the experience of unilateral neglect patients when they are
39 performing the visual search task.

40 Again, the suggestion was that shapes and colors are unconsciously
41 processed and action-properties are part of the patients' non-perceptual
42 phenomenology. What about their perceptual phenomenology then? The
43 objector is forced to conclude that these patients lack any perceptual
44 phenomenology while they are performing this visual search task. The

1 only properties they are aware of are action-properties, but these proper-
2 ties are, by supposition, not part of their perceptual phenomenology. This
3 is an extremely problematic conclusion as these people are staring at
4 objects, perform visual tasks with what they see, talk about what they see,
5 manipulate what they see, and, importantly, consciously experience what
6 they see, nonetheless, the objector needs to say that they lack perceptual
7 phenomenology: there is nothing it is like for them to see these objects.

8 In other words, the objector is forced to say that it is possible to have a
9 conscious perceptual experience of an object and nonetheless lack visual
10 phenomenology altogether. If we allow for unconscious perception, it is
11 possible to perceive an object without any accompanying phenomenology,
12 but the consequence of denying that action-properties are part of percep-
13 tual phenomenology is something much more radical: it amounts to saying
14 that it is possible to have a *conscious* perceptual experience of an object
15 without any accompanying perceptual phenomenology – a claim that
16 comes dangerously close to a straight logical contradiction. If denying that
17 action-properties are part of perceptual phenomenology forces us to pos-
18 tulate such empty perceptual phenomenology during conscious percep-
19 tion, then we have strong reasons to accept (1*).

20 Two quick worries about this conclusion before I turn to (2*). First, this
21 argument was about unilateral neglect patients. Why is any of it relevant
22 when we try to understand what properties are part of the perceptual
23 phenomenology of healthy humans? The answer is that the argument from
24 unilateral neglect is a *reductio* argument: if we assume that in healthy
25 humans action-properties are not part of perceptual phenomenology, then
26 we get implausible results for unilateral neglect patients.

27 The second worry is the following. Even if the argument from unilateral
28 neglect is conclusive, how can we address the following intuitively plau-
29 sible idea: the difference between experiencing the tree as climbable for me
30 or for my twin sister is the matter of having some kind of (maybe imag-
31 ined?) experience of the action I would have to undertake.³³ In the former
32 case, I do have an experience of this action (of climbing the tree) I would
33 have to undertake, whereas in the latter case, I don't. I see the pull of this
34 intuition but I don't see a conflict between this intuition and (1*). It may
35 very well be the case that I do (also) experience the action I would have to
36 undertake when I experience the tree as climbable for me. But (1*) is about
37 *perceptual* phenomenology: if I do in fact experience the action I would
38 have to undertake, do I experience it perceptually or non-perceptually?
39 Does it show up in my perceptual or in my non-perceptual phenomenol-
40 ogy? And my argument, if correct, shows that it must show up in my
41 perceptual phenomenology.

42 How about (2*)? (2*), like (2), is a special case of the general view called
43 intentionalism. Intentionalism is the view according to which the phenom-
44 enal character of an experience supervenes on the content of this

1 experience. There are many versions of intentionalism, but the one that
2 (2*), and (2), is a special case of is intentionalism about specific sense
3 modalities: the claim that the phenomenal character of our perceptual
4 experiences supervene on the content of these perceptual experiences.

5 Not everyone is an intentionalist in this sense. Hence, not everyone will
6 accept (2*) automatically. But it is important to emphasize that the most
7 convincing counterexamples against intentionalism fail to apply in the
8 case of (2*) because they all, in one way or another, have to do with
9 attention. They all have the same structure: two perceptual experiences
10 have the same content, but they have different phenomenal character
11 because our attention is different in the two cases. As David Chalmers
12 says, 'the most plausible potential cases of phenomenally distinct visual
13 experiences with the same representational content involve differences in
14 attention'.³⁴ If someone is moved by these counterexamples,³⁵ they should
15 conclude that intentionalism is false: the phenomenal character of percep-
16 tual experiences does not supervene on the content of this experience, as in
17 these examples two perceptual experiences have the same content and yet
18 they have different phenomenal character.

19 I am not sure that these counterexamples to intentionalism are convinc-
20 ing.³⁶ But what is important from our point of view is that they do not
21 count against (2*) as in the case of (2*) the difference between E1* and E2*
22 does not entail any difference in attention. In fact, as we have seen, this is
23 the most important difference between Siegel's argument and mine that
24 allows me to argue for (3*) and blocks her argument for (3).

25 In order to argue for (2*) we do not have to accept intentionalism *tout*
26 *court*. We only need a much weaker claim: that the phenomenal character
27 of an experience supervenes on the content of this experience *as long as the*
28 *attention does not change*. We could call this claim intentionalism*. We
29 have seen that the reason why intentionalism has been considered to be
30 problematic is that there are scenarios where attention does change and
31 this may or may not bring about a change in phenomenology without a
32 change in content. But these counterexamples by definition do not count
33 against intentionalism*. And (2*) is a special case of intentionalism* given
34 that, as we have seen in the last section, there is no difference between E1*
35 and E2* in terms of the allocation of attention.

36 Thus, we have good reason to hold (0*), (1*) and (2*). And as I argued
37 that we can infer (3*) from (2*), we can conclude that at least some
38 action-properties are perceptually represented.

39 Finally, one may question the sharp distinction between sortal proper-
40 ties and action-properties. After all, action-properties like being Q-able
41 could be taken to be sortal properties. Hence, if the argument I presented
42 in this paper is correct, it provides indirect support for Siegel's original
43 claim that sortal properties are perceptually represented. If we think of
44 sortal properties this way, I have no problem with this conclusion. I did

1 not argue that sortal properties are not represented in perception. They
2 may very well be. I argued that some properties that are even less obvi-
3 ously perceptual, that is, action-properties, are represented in perception.
4 Those who take action-properties to be sortal properties can take my
5 argument to show *which* sortal properties are perceptually represented.

7 *VII. Conclusion*

8
9 Although saying that we literally see objects as edible or climbable may
10 sound quite provocative, it is not such a radical claim. The proposal I
11 defended here is that we *sometimes* see objects as edible or climbable. I do
12 not claim that we always do so. It happens quite often that we do not
13 perceive anything in our visual field as having action-properties.

14 More importantly, if our perceptual system was evolutionarily useful, it
15 must have been because it came in handy when our ancestors were per-
16 forming actions (on which their survival depended). Thus, our perceptual
17 system was selected for helping us to perform actions. It is hardly a very
18 surprising claim, then, to say that it was selected for representing objects as
19 having properties that cannot be fully characterized without reference to
20 the agent's action.³⁷

21
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24 25 NOTES

26 ¹ Peacocke, C. (1992). *A Study of Concepts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Siegel, S. (2010).
27 *The Contents of Visual Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press; Pautz, A. (2010).
28 'An Argument for the Intentional View of Visual Experience', in B. Nanay (ed.) *Perceiving*
29 *the World. New Essays on Perception*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Nanay, B. (2010).
30 'Attention and Perceptual Content', *Analysis* 70, pp. 263–270; Crane, T. (2006). 'Is There a
31 Perceptual Relation?' in T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds) *Perceptual Experience*. Oxford:
32 Oxford University Press, pp. 126–146.

33 ² Travis, C. (2004). 'The Silence of the Senses', *Mind* 113, pp. 57–94; Martin, M. G. F.
34 (2004). 'The Limits of Self-Awareness', *Philosophical Studies* 120, pp. 37–89; Martin, M. G.
35 F. (forthcoming). *Uncovering Appearances*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Campbell, J.
36 (2002). *Reference and Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Brewer, W. (2006).
37 'Perception and Content', *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, pp. 165–181.

38 ³ Campbell, 2002.

39 ⁴ Nanay, B. (forthcoming). 'Action-oriented Perception', *European Journal of Philosophy*;
40 Nanay, B. (forthcoming). *Perception, Action, and What's in between*. Oxford: Oxford Uni-
41 versity Press.

42 ⁵ Nanay, B. 'Action-oriented Perception', Section V.

43 ⁶ See Dretske, F. (2010). 'What We See: The Texture of Conscious Experience, in B.
44 Nanay (ed.) *Perceiving the World. New Essays on Perception*. New York: Oxford University
45 Press.

⁷ This claim is consistent with the claim that we sometimes also represent objects as edible, climbable, etc. unconsciously, for example, when we are performing actions we are very much used to, as I suggest in 'Action-oriented Perception', Section V.

⁸ Siegel, S. (2006a). 'Which Properties are Represented in Perception?' in T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds) *Perceptual Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 481–503, at p. 499.

⁹ See, for example, Dretske, 2010 and Prinz, J. (2010). 'How Do Perceptual States Become Conscious?' in B. Nanay (ed.) *Perceiving the World. New Essays on Perception*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ James, W. (1892/1961). *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, G. Allport, ed. New York: Harper & Row, p. 39.

¹¹ See Nanay, 'Attention and Perceptual Content'.

¹² See Prinz, 2010; cf. Dretske, F. (2006) 'Perception without Awareness', in T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds) *Perceptual Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 147–180; Dretske, 2010.

¹³ Simmons, D. J. and Chabris, C. F. (1999). 'Gorillas in our Midst: Sustained Inattentional Blindness for Dynamic Events', *Perception* 28, pp. 1059–1074; Mack A. and Rock, I. (1998). *Inattentional Blindness*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

¹⁴ Bálint, R. (1909). 'Seelenlahmung des "Schauens", optische Ataxie, raumliche Störung der Aufmerksamkeit', *Monatsschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie* 25, pp. 51–81. (English translation: *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 12, pp. 265–281.)

¹⁵ Mack and Rock, 1998.

¹⁶ Simmons and Chabris, 1999.

¹⁷ The philosophical implications of inattentional blindness are far from clear. See Wolfe, J. M. (1999). 'Inattentional Amnesia,' in: V. Coltheart (ed.) *Fleeting Memories. Cognition of Brief Visual Stimuli*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 71–94; Prinz, 2010.

¹⁸ See Hill, C. (1991). *Sensations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 123–126; Block, N. (1995). 'A Confusion about Consciousness', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18, pp. 227–247, esp. p. 231.

¹⁹ If we are persuaded by the line of argument about the relation between attention and perceptual representation I mentioned above, then this is the only way of interpreting 'content', see also Nanay, 2010.

²⁰ This conclusion seems to come close to the way William James was thinking about perceptual experience. He wrote: 'In a world of objects thus individualized by our mind's selective industry, what is called our "experience," is almost entirely determined by our habits of attention' (James, 1892/1961, p. 39).

²¹ The property of affording an action and especially the suggestion that this property is perceptually represented will remind some of J. J. Gibson's theory of affordances (Gibson, J. J. (1966). *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin; Gibson, James J. (1979). *An Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin). It is important to emphasize that the claims I make in this paper do not rely on, or need to endorse, any element of Gibson's theory of perception. Importantly, I am not suggesting that what we perceive are affordances. What we perceive are objects and we may (sometimes, not always) perceive them as having action-properties.

²² It is worth noting that Siegel elsewhere does talk about the perceptual representation of some properties that could be considered to be action-properties. She argues that efficacy is represented in perceptual experiences and efficacy could be considered to be an action-property (Siegel, S. (2005). 'The Phenomenology of Efficacy', *Philosophical Topics* 33, pp. 65–84). She also argues that the 'perceptual relation of perspectival connectedness' is represented perceptually (Siegel, S. (2006b). 'Subject and Object in the Contents of Visual

1 Experience', *Philosophical Review* 115, pp. 355–388), but it is much less clear that that the
2 'perceptual relation of perspectival connectedness' would count as an action-property.

3 ²³ See Nanay 'Action-oriented Perception'; Nanay, *Perception, Action and What's In*
4 *Between*; and Nanay, B. (forthcoming). 'Do We Sense Modalities With Our Sense Modalities?'
5 *Ratio*, for a characterization of properties of this kind.

6 ²⁴ A particularly intriguing question is whether the action of seeing would qualify. If it
7 does, we would need to conclude that we perceptually attribute the property of being visible
8 to every object we see. Some seem to endorse such conclusion: Susanna Siegel argues that the
9 'perceptual relation of perspectival connectedness' is represented perceptually (Siegel, 2006b)
10 and this concept of 'perceptual relation of perspectival connectedness' may be closely related
11 to the concept of visibility (thanks for Susanna Siegel for pointing this out to me – personal
12 communication Summer 2008). I will not talk about the action of seeing and the property of
13 being visible in what follows.

14 ²⁵ Brogaard, B. (2010) 'Do We Perceive Natural Kind Properties?', *Manuscript*. Available
15 at: <http://philpapers.org/rec/BRODWP>

16 ²⁶ Those who deny that the overall experience of which E1* is a part differs from the
17 overall phenomenology of which E2* is a part should read the claim I am making in this
18 paper as a conditional one: if the two experiences differ in their overall phenomenology, then
19 edibility is perceptually represented.

20 ²⁷ See Masrour, F. (forthcoming). 'Is Perceptual Phenomenology Thin?' *Philosophy and*
21 *Phenomenological Research*, for an analysis of how to draw the line between sensory and
22 non-sensory experience and Bayne, T. (2009). 'Perception and the Reach of Phenomenal
23 Content', *Philosophical Quarterly* 59, pp. 385–404, for expressing doubts about whether we
24 can use introspection to find out what is sensory and what is non-sensory experience.

25 ²⁸ See Siegel, S. (2007). 'How Can We Discover the Contents of Experience?' *Southern*
26 *Journal of Philosophy* (Supp) 45, pp. 127–142; Kriegel, U. (2007). 'The Phenomenologically
27 Manifest', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 6, pp. 115–136; and Bayne, 2009 on the
28 methodology of settling disagreements about whether an experience is sensory or not.

29 ²⁹ Nanay, B. (manuscript) 'Perceptual Phenomenology'.

30 ³⁰ Unilateral neglect is caused by brain lesions, primarily in the right parietal areas.
31 Patients showing these symptoms are unaware of the left hand side of their body and
32 environment.

33 ³¹ Humphreys, G. W-M. and Riddoch, M. J. (2001). 'Detection by Action: Neuropsychological
34 Evidence for Action-defined Templates in Search', *Nature Neuroscience* 4, pp. 84–88;
35 Riddoch, M. J., Edwards, M. G., Humphreys, G. W-M., West, R. and Heafield, T. (1998).
36 'Visual Affordances Direct Action: Neuropsychological Evidence from Manual Interference',
37 *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 15, pp. 645–693, esp. p. 678, see also Humphreys, G. W-M.
38 and Riddoch, J. (2007). 'How to Define an Object: Evidence from the Effects of Action on
39 Perception and Attention', *Mind & Language* 22, pp. 534–547.

40 ³² Siegel, 2006a, pp. 492–496.

41 ³³ I am grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this worry.

42 ³⁴ Chalmers, D. (2004). 'The Representational Character of Experience', in B. Leiter (ed.)
43 *The Future for Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 153–181.

44 ³⁵ See Speaks, J. (forthcoming). 'Attention and Intentionalism', *Philosophical Quarterly*;
45 Nickel, B. (2007). 'Against Intentionalism', *Philosophical Studies* 136, pp. 279–304, esp.
46 p. 284; Peacocke, 1992; see also Macpherson, F. (2006). 'Ambiguous Figures and the Content
47 of Experience', *Noûs* 40, pp. 82–117, Section 7.

48 ³⁶ See my argument against in Nanay, 2010.

49 ³⁷ I presented an earlier version of this paper at the APA Pacific Division Meeting in 2008.
50 I am grateful for all the feedback I received on these occasions. Special thanks to my

DO WE SEE APPLES AS EDIBLE?

19

1 commentator, Claire Batty, to an anonymous referee and to Susanna Siegel for detailed
2 comments. Somewhat confusingly, I gave a different paper (the one to be published as
3 'Action-oriented Perception') under the title of this paper a number of times (roughly,
4 between 2005 and 2007). The present paper is very different from that one (see Section I
5 above).

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