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DOI 10.1007/s10670-011-9282-2

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Perceiving tropes

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Received: 27 April 2010 / Accepted: 6 May 2011
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Abstract There are two very different ways of thinking about perception. According to the first one, perception is representational: it represents the world as being a certain way. According to the second, perception is a genuine relation between the perceiver and a token object. These two views are thought to be incompatible. My aim is to work out the least problematic version of the representational view of perception that preserves the most important considerations in favor of the relational view. According to this version of representationalism, the properties represented in perception are tropes—abstract particulars that are logically incapable of being present in two distinct individuals at the same time. I call this view ‘trope representationalism’.

1 Introduction: Two Ways of Thinking About Perception

There are two very different ways of thinking about perception. The first one is this. Perceptual experiences are representations: they represent the world as being a certain way. They have content, which may or may not be different from the content of beliefs. They represent objects as having properties, sometimes veridically, sometimes not.

According to the other influential (and more and more influential) view, perception is a relation between the agent and the perceived object. Perceived objects are literally constituents of our perceptual experiences. Perceptual experiences are not representations: the perceived object is not represented by our

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perceptual experience: it is part of our perceptual experience. Following John Campbell, I will label these views the ‘representational’ and the ‘relational’ view, respectively (Campbell 2002). I use these as convenient labels, but it needs to be acknowledged that both the ‘representational’ and the ‘relational’ view come in a variety of forms (see Pautz forthcoming b and Siegel 2010, esp. Section VI for rudimentary classifications).

My aim is to outline a new version of the representational view that is capable of preserving the most important considerations in favor of the relational view. According to this version of the representational view, the properties represented in perception are tropes: abstract particulars that are logically incapable of being present in two distinct individuals at the same time. I will argue that this version of the representational view can preserve the most important considerations in favor of the relational view.

The plan of the paper is the following. I will not give any argument in favor of representationalism. I aim to show that if someone is drawn to representationalism, then my version is their best bet against the relationalist objections. First, I outline the challenge that relationalism poses to the representational view of perception (Sect. 2). Then, I present the proposal that the properties represented in perception are tropes (and not property-types) (Sect. 3) and argue that if we accept this proposal about the perceptual representation of tropes, we can give a version of the representational view that has the best chance to do justice to the most important considerations in favor of the relational view (Sect. 4).

2 Relationalist Arguments Against Representationalism

Philosophers, psychologists and cognitive scientists often talk about perceptual experiences, or perceptual states in general, as representations. Many of our mental states are representational. Most of our emotions, for example, are about something: we are afraid *of* a lion, fond *of* chocolate mousse, etc. The same goes for beliefs, desires and imaginings. It seems natural then to suppose that perceptual experiences are also representations: when I see a cat, my perceptual experience is about this cat: it refers to this cat. My perceptual experience represents this particular as having a number of properties and the content of my perceptual experience is the sum total of these properties (see Nanay 2010).

Describing perceptual experiences as representations has some important explanatory advantages (see Pautz 2010 for a summary). I will not survey these advantages here as the aim of this paper is to give the least problematic version of representationalism: the structure of my argument is to assume that representationalism is correct and attempt to meet the challenge posed by the relational view of perception.

Although considering perceptual experiences to be representations may be a natural way of describing our perceptual system and this assumption dominated both the philosophical and the psychological research on perception, some have recently questioned this entire framework. The proposal is that perceptual experiences are not representations: they are constituted, in part, by the actual perceived objects.

Perception is a genuine relation between the perceiver and the perceived object—and not between the agent and some abstract entity called ‘perceptual content’.

2.1 The Particularity of Perception

One of the arguments in favor of this ‘relational view’ is that if we assume that perception is representational, then we lose the intuitively plausible assumption that the object of our perceptual experience is always a particular token object. The charge is that the representational view is committed to saying that the content of perceptual experiences is something general. Although this claim may not be justified in the case of certain versions of the representational view (ones that hold that perceptual experiences have object-involving, or maybe gappy, content—see Sect. 4.3 below), it does pose an important question. If the content of a perceptual experience is taken to be the conditions under which this experience is correct (Peacocke 1989, 1992), then how can this content specify a token object? It specifies only the conditions a token object needs to satisfy. And then any token object that satisfies these conditions would equally qualify as the object of this perceptual experience. Suppose that I am looking at a pillow. Replacing this pillow with another, indistinguishable, pillow would not make a difference in the content of my perceptual experience. On these two occasions the content of my perceptual experience is identical (and the phenomenal character of my perceptual experience is also identical—the two pillows are indistinguishable, after all). Thus, according to the representational view, we cannot distinguish between these two experiences. But their objects are very different (see Soteriou 2000 for a good summary on the particularity of perception).

The relational view, in contrast, insists that perceptual experiences are constituted by relations to something particular. Replacing the pillow with another, indistinguishable, pillow would give rise to an entirely different (but maybe indistinguishable) perceptual experience. We have to be careful about what is meant by the identity or difference of our experiences, as one clear disagreement between the relational and the representational view is whether these two experiences are identical or different. What the debate is about is clearly not token-identity: both camps agree that the two experiences are not token-identical. But if the disagreement between the representationalists and the relationalists is about whether my experience of the first pillow and my experience of the second, indistinguishable, pillow are of the same type, then this disagreement no longer seems very clear, as there are many ways of typing experiences. Even the relationalists would agree that we can type these two experiences in such a way that the two token experiences would both belong to the same type, say, the type of experiences in general. And even the representationalists could say that there are ways of typing these two experiences so that they end up belonging to different types.

It has been suggested that the real question is whether these two experiences belong not just to the same type but whether they belong to “the same fundamental kind” (Martin 2004, p. 39, p. 43). The representational view says they do; the relational view says they don’t. Belonging to a ‘fundamental kind’ is supposed to “tell what essentially the event or episode is” (Martin 2006, p. 361). Those, like me, who are suspicious of anything ‘fundamental’ or ‘essential’, will not find these considerations

too compelling (see Byrne and Logue 2008, especially Section 7.1, for a thorough analysis of the ‘fundamental kind’ version of the relational view). Nevertheless, the argument from the particularity of perception in favor of the relational view can be rephrased without any appeal to ‘fundamental kinds’: the representationalist does not have any principled way of differentiating the two experiences of the two pillows.¹ The relationalist does.

2.2 Perception and Demonstrative Reference

Another reason for being relationalist is the following. Perceptual experiences, whatever they are, must be able to ground our demonstrative thoughts. As John Campbell put it, “a characterization of the phenomenal content of experience of objects has to show how it is that experience, so described, can be what makes it possible for us to think about those objects demonstratively” (Campbell 2002, p. 114).

Campbell argues that the relational view can fulfill this explanatory task, whereas the representational view cannot. His example is the following. Suppose that I am eavesdropping on my neighbor’s daily activities, while I have never been in his apartment. On the basis of the sound of his electric razor, I come to the conclusion that he has a mirror on the wall that divides his apartment from mine. I can have thoughts about this mirror and I can refer to it. After years of eavesdropping, I finally get to see my neighbor’s apartment and the mirror on the wall as well. As Campbell says, “the contrast between the knowledge you have now, on the basis of a look at the objects and the knowledge you had before of the existence of objects with particular functional roles, is that when you see the thing, you are confronted by the individual substance itself. On seeing it, you no longer have knowledge of the object merely as the postulated occupant of a particular functional role. Your experience of the object, when you see it, provides you with knowledge of the categorical grounds of the collections of dispositions you had earlier postulated” (Campbell 2002, pp. 114–115).

If we think of perceptual experiences the way the representationalist does, we cannot account for this difference, since, according to the representational view, perceptual experience can only specify the “existence of objects with particular functional roles” or “the postulated occupant of a particular functional role”. The representationalist cannot account for the fact that “experience of the object can confront you with the individual substance itself, the categorical basis of the dispositional relations in which the object may stand to other things” (Campbell 2002, p. 116). In short, the representational view cannot account for the genuine relation between the agent and a token object, which is supposed to serve as the ground for our demonstrative thoughts.

¹ It is important to emphasize that this objection fails to apply in the case of some versions of the representational view, including those versions that take perceptual content to be Russellian, gappy, singular, object-involving or singular-when-filled (see, e.g., Soteriou 2000; Tye 2007; Schellenberg 2010). See also Sect. 4.3 below.

2.3 Direct Realism

So it seems that there are some fairly strong considerations in favor of the relational view of perception. I argue in what follows that if the properties we represent perceptually are tropes, then we can give a version of the representational view of perception that preserves these considerations in favor of the relational view.

3 Trope Representationalism

According to the representational view of perception, perception represents objects as having properties. A natural question then to ask is what kinds of properties are being represented in perception. Shape, size and color properties are obvious candidates and it is a delicate question what other kinds of properties are also perceptually represented (some important candidates: sortal properties (Siegel 2006a), dispositional properties (Nanay forthcoming b), or the property of being edible (Nanay forthcoming a, forthcoming c and forthcoming d). A different way of raising the same question concerns the determinacy of these properties: does perception attribute determinable or determinate properties? (see Nanay 2010) But there is yet another way of raising the question about what kinds of properties are represented in perception and this is the one we are interested in here: is it property-types (or universals) or property-instances (or tropes) that we represent in perception?²

The term ‘property’ is ambiguous. It can mean universals: properties that can be present in two (or more) distinct individuals at the same time. But it can also mean tropes: abstract particulars that are logically incapable of being present in two (or more) distinct individuals at the same time (Williams 1953; Campbell 1990; Bacon 1995; Schaffer 2001).

Suppose that the color of my neighbor’s black car and my black car are indistinguishable. They still have different tropes. The blackness trope of my car is different from the blackness trope of my neighbor’s car. These two tropes are similar but numerically distinct. Thus, the blackness of my car and the blackness of my neighbor’s car are different properties.

If, in contrast, we interpret properties as universals, or, as I will refer to them, property-types, then the two cars instantiate the same property-type: blackness. Thus, depending on which notion of property we talk about, we have to give different answers to the question about whether the color-property of the two cars is the same or different. If by ‘property’ we mean ‘trope’, then my car has a different (but similar) color-property, that is, color-trope, from my neighbor’s. If, however, by ‘property’ we mean ‘property-type’, then my car has the very same property, that is, property-type, as my neighbor’s.³

² It is important that the question is about what properties we perceptually attribute to the perceived scene. This is not necessarily the same question as asking what properties we take ourselves to be perceiving.

³ An anonymous reviewer for this journal pointed out that the trope representationalist account could deliver the same results even if the perceptual content consisted of both tropes and property-types—it is

It has been argued that the disagreement between those who take properties to be tropes and those who take properties to be universals or property-types is a merely verbal one: all claims about (and even arguments for the existence of) tropes can be rephrased in terms of instantiations of property-types (Daly 1997). Conversely, as we can think of property-types as resemblance classes of tropes, all claims about property-types can be rephrased in terms of tropes. Whether or not these claims about ontological equivalence are correct (see Nanay 2009 for an argument against), it is important to note that representing something as having tropes and representing it as having property-types will still give rise to very different content (as perceptual content is taken to be the sum total of represented properties). And the aim of this paper is to argue that if it is true that our perceptual content consists of tropes but no property-types, then we can give a version of the representational view that can accommodate the most important relationalist considerations. I call this view the ‘trope representationalist view’ of perception.

It is important to dispel a couple of possible ways of misinterpreting the claim that the properties represented in perception are tropes. First, and perhaps most importantly, this paper is not about the grand debate concerning the object of perception (Clarke 1965; Strawson 1979; Noë 2004, p. 76). If I am looking at a cat, what is it that I perceive? Do I perceive the entire cat? Or those parts of the cat that are visible? Or maybe the front surface of the cat? I will not say anything about these classic questions. My question is not about what the *object of our perception* is but what sort of *properties* we perceive the object of perception as having.

It is also important to acknowledge another way of bringing in tropes in the discussion of perception, something I am not concerned with here (see, for example, Lowe 1998). If we accept a version of the causal theory of perception, then there is a causal relation between what we perceive and our experience (Grice 1961; Strawson 1974; Lewis 1980) and if we hold that the *relata* of (singular) causation are tropes (Ehring 1997), then we have a neat argument for the claim that what we perceive are tropes. Besides noting that the second premise of this argument is not that unproblematic—there are other important candidates for causal *relata*, like events (Davidson 1967), facts (Mellor 1995), states of affairs (Armstrong 1997)—, it is again important to point out that the question I am interested in here is not about the nature of the causal component of perception but about the nature of the properties our perceptual experiences attribute to the perceived scene.

Yet another way in which tropes may be thought to play a crucial role in perception is the following. Even if we do not endorse the view that tropes are the

Footnote 3 continued

not needed that all properties represented in our perceptual experiences would be tropes, only that some are. This is true and those who are drawn to such a picture of perceptual content can adjust the account I outline here accordingly. But I will not do so here. As we shall see in Sect. 4.3, an important virtue of the trope representationalist account is that it leads to a very simple conception of perceptual content: the perceptual content is just the sum total of the perceptually attributed tropes. If there were both tropes and property-types in the perceptual content, we would need to be able to have a story about the relation between these two kinds of properties within the perceptual content and this would lead to quite a complicated account of perceptual content. Again, such account would be consistent with the general framework I am proposing here, but in order to preserve the simplicity of perceptual content in my account of trope representationalism, I do not explore this option further here.

relata of (singular) causation, we may still hold that tropes play an important role in singular causation. Suppose that (Davidsonian) events are the *relata* of causation. In this case, a further question arises. What is it in virtue of which one event causes another? One possible answer to this question is that events cause other events in virtue of having tropes: the sleeping pill I took last night made me fall asleep in virtue of having a certain trope (see Nanay 2009; see also Robb 1997's similar claim in the context of mental causation). Again, if we combine this claim with the causal theory of perception, what we get is that the perceived object causes our experience in virtue of having certain tropes. This may or may not be true, but what is important for our purposes is that this is a very different claim from that one that is at stake in this paper. The claim I will argue for is that we perceive objects as having tropes. Whether they cause my experience in virtue of having tropes is a very different question.

Two further important points of clarification are in order. First, the claim that the properties represented in perception are tropes does not imply that we are consciously aware of tropes as tropes. The claim I am making is about what properties we attribute in perception and not about what properties we take ourselves to attribute in perception. Second, in order to perceive an object as having a trope, we clearly do not have to master the concept of trope: those humans and non-human animals who have not read any metaphysics papers are still capable of perceiving the world.

The claim that the properties represented in perception are tropes can mean a number of things, depending on our assumptions about the way perception represents these tropes. It may mean that we represent a specific object as having tropes. Or that we represent a spatial region as having tropes. And it may also mean that we represent tropes only (and maybe the representation of objects supervenes on our representation of tropes).⁴

These three versions will give us a different picture about what the object of our perception is: As I want to remain neutral with regards to the big debate about the object of our perception, I will also remain neutral as to whether we perceive objects as having tropes, tropes as being localized somewhere in space or just tropes themselves. It is important to note, however, that all these versions agree that everything represented in perception, that is, both what we represent and the properties we represent it as having, are particulars, so representing *x* as having a trope *F* could be considered to be a notional variant of representing the thing that has trope *F* as being *x*. For simplicity, I will say that we represent the object in front of us as having tropes.

Thus, my claim is that we perceptually represent objects as having tropes. Only tropes are part of our perceptual content, not property-types. Hence, perceptual content is very different from the content of our (non-singular) beliefs (as these, generally, represent objects as having property-types).

⁴ Kevin Mulligan, one of the most important proponents of the idea that the properties we perceive are tropes, argues that we should endorse the last version. We can perceive the scarletness of the table without perceiving the table as being scarlet: I may not recognize the scarlet thing as a table, after all (Mulligan et al. 1984, p. 307).

The idea that we perceive tropes is not new. In fact, it was one of the reasons why tropes were postulated to begin with (Campbell 1981, p. 481; see also Campbell 1990—although the core idea of tropes may go back to Husserl, see Mulligan 1995; see also Kriegel 2004 for a related but somewhat different claim).

Kevin Mulligan, who uses slightly different terminology as he talks about moments (instead of tropes), gives the following *reductio* argument for the claim that perception attributes tropes (Mulligan et al. 1984; Mulligan 1999). Suppose that the properties we represent perceptually are not tropes. This would mean that we perceptually represent instantiations of universals. But, Mulligan argues, this is extremely counterintuitive: when we are looking at a scarlet table, we do not see a particular as instantiating the universal of scarletness. We just see a particular. Taking every single perceptual episode to amount to perceiving a particular as instantiating a universal would seriously over-intellectualize perception. As Mulligan says, “whoever wishes to reject moments must of course give an account of those cases where we seem to see and hear them, cases we report, using definite descriptions such as ‘the smile that just appeared on Rupert’s face. This means that he must claim that in such circumstances we see not just independent things per se, but also things as falling under certain concepts or as exemplifying certain universals” (Mulligan et al. 1984, p. 300). But this, so the argument goes, would clearly over-intellectualize perception as it would follow from this claim that we perceptually attribute the exemplification relation all the time and it is not even clear that exemplification relation is something that *can* be perceptually attributed.

Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra raised an important objection against these claims (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002, pp. 93–95). He points out that perceiving *x* as *F* does not imply that I perceive what makes this so, that is, what makes it the case that *x* is *F* (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002, p. 94; Susanna Siegel gives a very similar argument in Siegel 2005, 2009, see also Nanay forthcoming b on this argument). We can see something as being made of ice, without seeing it as being made of H₂O molecules of certain kinetic energy. Similarly, we can see the table as being scarlet without seeing what makes it so (namely that it instantiates the scarlet property-type).⁵

So we do not seem to have any conclusive argument for the claim that perception attributes tropes. But recall the structure of my argument. I make a conditional claim. If we assume that the properties represented in perception are tropes, then we can preserve the explanatory advantages of the representational view as well as many explanatory advantages of the relational view. I do not give independent arguments in favor of the antecedent of this conditional. But this conditional claim itself may give us some reason to accept the antecedent of the conditional: that the properties represented in perception are tropes. In any case, the aim of this paper is to argue in favor of this conditional claim, without worrying too much about the truth of the antecedent.

⁵ Rodriguez-Pereyra is not aiming to defend the ontology of universals, but he notes that Mulligan’s argument also applies in the case of resemblance nominalism, Rodriguez-Pereyra’s own view.

4 The Advantages of Trope Representationalism

Trope representationalism is a version of the representational view, as our perceptual experiences would still be representations that may or may not be correct and it depends on the world in front of us whether they are correct. But it would also accommodate the main consideration behind the relational view—that there is something particular about our perception: our perceptual experience is constituted by a genuine relation between two particular token entities: the perceiver and the trope her experience represents. But let us proceed more slowly.

I am looking at a green chair. My perceptual experience represents the object in front of me as having a number of tropes: the greenness trope of the chair, its shape trope, its size trope and maybe more. It is important to clarify that it is the specific greenness trope of this specific chair that my perceptual experience represents the chair as having. If I were to look at another, numerically different but indistinguishable green chair, my perceptual experience would represent it as having a numerically different greenness trope.

If there is a match between the tropes I perceptually represent the object in front of me as having and the properties the object in front of me in fact has, then my perceptual experience is veridical. If there is a mismatch, then my perceptual experience is not veridical. Sometimes our perceptual experience represents something as having some tropes, whereas there is nothing in front of us. In this case, there is a serious mismatch between the tropes the experience represents and the actual properties out there. This is what happens when we are hallucinating.

Our perceptual experiences can be correct or incorrect: the tropes we perceive objects as having may or may not match the property-instances these objects in fact have. Thus, the proposal I am making is a version of the representational view: perceptual experiences do represent objects as having certain properties—just that these properties are tropes. As a result, the advantages of the representational view come for free.

And this version of representationalism is also in agreement with what I take to be the core claim of the relational view: that perception is a genuine relation between two particular token entities as, according to my proposal, perception is a genuine relation between the perceiver and the trope represented in her perceptual experience, both of which are particular token entities.

This perceptual relation is of course quite different from the one the relationalists talk about. They hold that “perceiving is [...] a matter of the conscious presentation of actual constituents of physical reality themselves” (Brewer 2006, p. 172; see also Campbell 2002, p. 116). As we shall see in Sect. 4.3, the talk of the constituents of an experience can be difficult to make sense of, but the main idea is that the relation that constitutes my perceptual experience is a relation between myself and the actual object, say, a token plastic cup, that I am staring at.

I agree with the relationalist that our perceptual experience is a relation between the perceiver and something particular. But I differ from the relational view in as much as my claim is that this ‘something particular’ is not the actual object that is being experienced, but the trope I experience it as having. When I am staring at the plastic cup, it is the trope I experience it as having that is the token particular that I

stand in a relation to. In short, I stand in a relation to a particular: the trope that is part of my perceptual content. It is in this very specific sense that we can say that some particular is a constituent of my perceptual experience.

To sum up, while my version of the representational view is consistent with one of the main claims of the relational view, it flatly contradicts some other relational claims. The question is whether it has some of the most important explanatory advantages as the relational view. If it does, then, given that it also has all the explanatory advantages of the representational view, we have good reason to accept it.

4.1 The Particularity of Perception

The first important explanatory advantage of the relational view was that it can explain the particularity of our perceptual experiences. As, according to the trope representationalist account, our perceptual experience always represents particulars, that is, tropes, on the face of it my proposal seems to capture the particularity of our perceptual experience. But let us return to the example of the two indistinguishable pillows.

Contrast the following two scenarios. In the first one, I am looking at a pillow, *x*, and, unbeknownst to me, it gets replaced with another, indistinguishable pillow, *y*. I do not notice that the two pillows are different: I have no idea that the first pillow, *x*, was replaced by the second pillow, *y*. In the second scenario, I am looking at pillow *x* all along—it does not get replaced with a different pillow. The relationalist points out that the representationalist needs to have a story about how to distinguish between these two experiences.

If we accept that the properties we perceptually represent are tropes, then we have an easy answer to this question. I attribute the very same tropes to the pillow in the two perceptual experiences. Importantly, I attribute the trope of being the very same particular token object as the one I saw a moment ago (as object permanence is supposed to be perceptually represented, see Spelke 1990, 1994). But the attribution of this trope is incorrect in the first case, it is correct in the second case. In the first case, after the switching of the pillows, this attributed trope (of being the very same token object as the one I was looking at a moment ago) does not match the property-instance of the pillow itself (which has the property of being a very different token object from the one I was looking at a moment ago). In the second scenario, in contrast, the attribution of this trope is veridical. Thus, if we accept trope representationalism, there is a simple and principled way of differentiating the two experiences: the experience is veridical in the second scenario and it is non-veridical in the first.⁶

⁶ To put it more precisely, it is veridical in the second scenario and not fully veridical in the first. In the first scenario, there will be tropes such that the experience attributes them to the perceived object and the object in fact has them. Shape, size and color tropes are possible examples. But this experience will not be veridical when it comes to the trope of being the very same particular token object as the one I saw a moment ago.

4.2 Perception and Demonstrative Reference

The second explanatory advantage of the relational view was that it can ground our demonstrative thoughts. Campbell's point was that perception acquaints us not just with 'the postulated occupant of a particular functional role', but with the particular object (and its substance) itself.

But if we accept trope representationalism about perceptual experiences, then perceptual experiences do not merely represent 'the postulated occupant of a particular functional role'. They represent particular tropes. So what could we say about the eavesdropping example in the framework I have suggested? When I am eavesdropping and come to the conclusion that my neighbor has a mirror on the wall that divides his apartment from mine, I attribute property-types to this object: the property-type of being a mirror, of having a certain size, etc. But when I set eyes on the mirror itself, my perceptual experience attributes particular tropes to it: the trope of being this particular mirror and the trope of having this specific size, for example. Thus, I represent the mirror very differently.

My perceptual experience does not "confront me with the individual substance itself", as Campbell suggests, but it does represent a particular trope itself, rather than a postulated occupant of a mere functional role. And the particularity of the represented trope can ground our demonstrative thoughts as much as the particularity of the perceived "individual substance" can.

4.3 Trope Representationalism Versus Relationalism

We have seen that the trope representationalist view can preserve some of the most important considerations in favor of the relational view: it can explain the particularity of perception and account for the possibility of demonstrative reference. But it is still very different from relationalism. Most importantly, according to the relational view, the perceived external object is a constituent of our perceptual experience. According to the trope representationalist position, the perceived object is not a constituent of our perceptual experience. Trope representationalism has to break with relationalism at this point.

Is it a disadvantage of my trope representationalist account that it cannot account for this intuition? One could argue that it is not. One may find it odd to talk about a mind-independent object as a constituent of our perceptual experience. I suspect that some of the reluctance towards the relational view is due to this feature of the account (Crane 2006 talks about such criticisms of the relational view). But there is nothing odd about the view that a particular trope I represent the object in front of me as having is a constituent of my perceptual experience.

Thus, if someone is moved by some of the intuitions I mentioned in Sect. 2: the particularity of perception and the possibility of singular reference and direct realism, may find trope representationalism more palatable than the relational view.

Finally, a last word about the structure of the argument I presented in this paper. I argued that if we accept representationalism, endorsing its trope representationalist version helps us to deflect the most important relationalist objections. But there are other ways of dealing with some of these relationalist objections within the

framework of representationalism than trope representationalism. More specifically, it has been argued that if we interpret perceptual content as ‘Russellian’, ‘gappy’, ‘Russellian gappy’, ‘Fregean gappy’, ‘singular’, ‘object-involving’ or ‘singular-when-filled’ (see, e.g., Soteriou 2000; Martin 2002; Loar 2003; Tye 2007; Schellenberg 2010; and see Chalmers 2004, 2006; Siegel 2006b; Bach 2007 for discussion), then we can account for the particularity of perception.

Without analyzing these (very different) proposals in any depth, I want to point out an important advantage of trope representationalism over any of them. If we accept trope representationalism, we get a very simple conception of perceptual content: the sum total of perceptually attributed tropes. The ‘Russellian’, ‘gappy’, ‘singular’, ‘object-involving’ or ‘singular-when-filled’ conceptions of perceptual content, in contrast, are much more complicated—as David Chalmers says, these accounts are thinking about perceptual content as a “structured complex” (Chalmers 2006, p. 54; Thompson 2009 describes them aptly as “structured propositions”). To put it simply, perceptual content is a ‘structured complex’ of some kind of combination of property-types and a particular object (or maybe an empty slot where the particular object could/would fit into, or maybe an existential quantifier). These accounts of perceptual content may be perfectly feasible and they may even account for some of the relationalist intuitions, but they, unlike trope representationalism, lead to an overly complicated account of perceptual content, which is the reason why many relationalists dismiss these account (see esp. Brewer forthcoming, Martin forthcoming) and why even many representationalists have expressed doubts about whether this conception of perceptual content is suitable for doing all the theoretical work the concept of perceptual content is normally expected to do (see, e.g., Chalmers 2006). My trope representationalism avoids these lines of criticism.

5 Conclusion

Finally, I need to say something to those who are skeptical of the very idea of tropes and who are inclined to resist my argument for this reason. One of the most influential objections to trope theory, or the very idea of tropes, is Chris Daly’s claim that all of the arguments for the existence of tropes can be rephrased in terms of property-types (Daly 1997).

The argument I presented in this paper could be thought to provide some reason for being less skeptical of tropes. It may be worth recapitulating the structure of my argument. I made a conditional claim. If we assume that the properties represented in perception are tropes, then we can preserve the explanatory advantages of the representational view as well as many explanatory advantages of the relational view. This conditional claim may give us some reason to accept the antecedent of the conditional: that the properties represented in perception are tropes.

It is important to note that the claim that the properties represented in perception are tropes in itself carries very little ontological weight: it does not say anything about whether there *are* tropes. Maybe there are no tropes, only universals and their instances, but we (wrongly) perceive objects as having tropes. If, however, we add a further, not particularly strong premise that perception does not systematically

misrepresent the world, then, provided that the argument I presented in this paper is correct, we have some reason to conclude that there *are* tropes and when you perceptually attribute a trope to the apple in front of you and do so correctly, there really is a trope (of the apple) in front of you.

Acknowledgments I am very grateful for excellent comments by two anonymous referees of this journal as well as Susanna Siegel and especially Kevin Mulligan.

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