WHAT CAN WE SEE? ABOUT THE ROLE OF
PHENOMENOLOGY IN DETERMINING THE CONTENTS
OF VISUAL PERCEPTION

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To my grandmother and my mother for all their love and support
Abstract: There is an ongoing debate between Conservatism (Brogaard, 2013; Dretske, 2015; Price, 2009; Prinz, 2013) and Liberalism (Bayne, 2016; Siegel, 2007, 2010; Krueger, 2018; and Zahavi, 2011) regarding the content of visual perception. Conservatism posits that our visual perception represents only low-level features such as color, shape, spatial location, and motion. In contrast, Liberalism argues that we can perceive high-level features such as natural kinds, mental states, and event-causal properties, among others.

While Conservatism supports its arguments using Twin-Earth scenarios, Liberalism appeals to phenomenal contrast arguments. This paper aims to make progress in this debate by identifying the methodological assumptions of both Conservatism and Liberalism. Biconditional Intentionalism is required to support Conservatism, while Minimal Intentionalism is required to support Liberalism. Biconditional Intentionalism claims that any difference in the experience’s phenomenal character comes with a difference in its representational content and vice versa. In contrast, Minimal Intentionalism claims that if two experiences differ in their phenomenal character, then they differ in representational content. So, it leaves open the possibility that two experiences with different representational content may have the same phenomenology. In this work, I argue that it is not possible to determine which view is correct by relying solely on phenomenology. To address this issue, we need to ask two different questions: (I) “What can we visually perceive?” and (II) “How do we identify the content of visual perception?” By answering these questions, we can expand our comprehension of the debate beyond phenomenological considerations. I suggest that insights from vision science can be a helpful way to overcome the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism regarding the contents of visual perception, as there are internal reasons to consider Minimal and Biconditional Intentionalism to be wrong. This approach has significant implications as it forces us to move beyond the phenomenological considerations that are part of the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism. By relying on vision science, we could gain a different perspective that can help us determine the contents of perception.
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Consider the following case: Oscar is at the zoo, and he sees a tiger. Does Oscar visually perceive the feature being a tiger, or does he perceive only features like colors, shapes, and motions that are presented in his surrounding environment? In general terms, can we visually perceive high-level features such as natural kinds, emotions, or artificial features, or do we perceive only low-level features such as colors, shapes, and motions? This question frames the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism about the content of visual perception.

Conservatism claims we can perceive only low-level features (Brogaard, 2013; Dretske, 2015; Price, 2009; Prinz, 2013). In contrast, Liberalism holds that we can visually perceive high-level features such as natural kinds (e.g., being a pine tree), mental state properties (being sad), global features of scenes (being a natural scene), and event-causal properties (being the cause of a window shattering) (Bayne, 2016; Siegel, 2007, 2010; Krueger, 2018; and Zahavi, 2011). Therefore, for conservatives, Oscar could perceive only colors, shapes, and motions, which are features of the tiger.

For Brogaard (2013), we could visually perceive intermediate-level properties too, such as being on the top of that, and being to my right. Nevertheless, she claims that high-level properties are not consciously visually detected: properties like being a tiger, being an elm, being a corkscrew, being sad, etc.
On the other hand, for liberals, Oscar could perceive those low-level features plus the high-level feature being a tiger.

The debate between Conservatism and Liberalism has important implications for cognitive science, epistemology, and social cognition. First, if we visually perceive high-level features, cognitive science must account for how it is possible to perceive more abstract kinds, events, or relations. For example, within cognitive science, the capacity to perceive high-level features might be explained as the result of some cognitive influence on perception or as the result of an innate capacity of human subjects (Helton, 2016). Second, because visual perception is one of the main sources of our beliefs about the external world, the debate is relevant for theories of epistemic justification. For example, some epistemologists consider some beliefs basic, in the sense that they are justified immediately by experience and not by other beliefs. Whether high-level properties are part of the content of visual perception thus affects what kind of beliefs might plausibly be basic (Silins, 2013). Third, whether we visually perceive high-level features, like mental states, is crucial to debates about our capacity for empathy and mindreading. For instance, Direct Social Perception, a theory that holds that mindreading is a perceptual process, would be supported by the claim that we perceive emotions (Krueger, 2018; Zahavi, 2011). So, the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism is important across different philosophical discussions and theories.

In this thesis, I address a puzzling datum: conservatives and liberals both think that the phenomenal character of visual experiences could support their side of the debate. I explain and diagnose the implicit methodological commitments of Conservatism and Liberalism: Conservatism is committed to Biconditional Intentionalism, and Liberalism is committed to Minimal Intentionalism. These two kinds of Intentionalism concern the relationship between the representational content and the phenomenal character of visual experiences. The problem is that those commitments lead to an impasse: phenomenological criteria cannot adjudicate between Conservatism and Liberalism. For this reason, I present a way to overcome this impasse: We can
identify the contents of visual perception by appealing to vision science (Block, 2014, 2019, 2023). I claim that empirical evidence from vision science sheds new light on the distinction between high-level and low-level features. So, vision science can overcome the impasse avoiding the need to vindicate either Conservatism or Liberalism.

In the next section of this chapter, I explain how Conservatism uses the phenomenal character of visual experiences to argue that we can perceive only low-level features. I present one Twin-Earth scenario that has been used by conservatives: Twin-tigers. In section 2 of this chapter, I explain that Liberalism uses the phenomenal character of visual experiences to argue that we can perceive high-level features. Liberalism uses phenomenal contrast arguments and their own account of Twin-tigers. In this way, the use of the phenomenal character of visual experiences puts us at an impasse: Conservatism, relying on Biconditional Intentionalism, and Liberalism, relying on Minimal Intentionalism, claim that phenomenology is on their side.

In Chapter II, I claim that the debate between Liberalism and Conservatism, in all its complexity, involves two different questions: (I) “What can we visually perceive?” and (II) “How do we identify the content of visual perception?” Considering both questions, the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism involves not only a discussion about the contents of visual perception but also a commitment with a particular method, introspection. In Chapter III, I present a problem for the phenomenological approach as a particular way of identifying the contents of visual perception. Finally, in Chapter IV, I present vision science as an empirical approach that reveals hidden assumptions in the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism. I argue that vision science shows that a distinction between visual perception and visual experience is required to give an adequate account of the evidence that could be obtained through the phenomenological method, i.e., introspection.
Conservatism and Liberalism both claim that visual experiences have representational content, as those experiences represent the perceiver's surrounding environment in a certain way. Also, conservatives and liberals both accept that there is something it is like to have a visual experience for the perceiver, i.e., visual experiences have phenomenal character. Therefore, if a subject has a visual experience, there are two components in play: representational content and phenomenal character.

There are different theories concerning how these two components are related to visual experience. Some philosophers have attempted to reduce phenomenal character to a certain kind of representational content. In contrast, others have tried to reduce representational content to a certain kind of phenomenal character (see Bayne, 2020, for discussion). Within a phenomenological framework, I claim that the best way to understand Conservatism (Brogaard, 2013; Price, 2009; and Prinz, 2013) is as implicitly appealing to Bconditional Intentionalism [BI]:

\[
\text{BI: Two visual experiences differ in phenomenal character if and only if they differ in representational content (Speaks, 2009, p. 554).}
\]

For BI, any change in what is being represented by a visual experience is accompanied by a change in what it is like to have that visual experience. Also, any change in what it is like to have that visual experience comes with a change in what is being represented. BI can account for the two main components of every visual experience: its representational content and phenomenal character. Additionally, BI can help us understand how Conservatism has employed Twin-Earth
cases to differentiate between high-level and low-level features. Twin-Earth cases are a specific type of phenomenological consideration that challenges Liberalism.²

Conservatives like Brogaard (2013), Price (2009), and Prinz (2013) have used Twin-Earth scenarios to show that we do not perceive high-level features and that only low-level features (shape, color, motion, and location) are part of the content of visual experience. One of these scenarios used against the claim that natural kinds could be part of the content of visual experience is centered on one natural kind, namely being a tiger. It aims to show that no natural kind could be part of the content of experience. Also, if analogous scenarios could be raised for artifactual properties, mental state properties, and global features of scenes, then none of them could be part of the content of perception. Therefore, conservatives argue, by universal generalization, it follows from this case that high-level features are not part of the content of visual experiences.

This is the scenario:

Twin-tigers: Oscar, who inhabits Earth, and Twin-Oscar, who inhabits Twin-Earth, are physical-functional duplicates. While there are tigers on Earth, there have never been any tigers on Twin-Earth, but there are superficially similar creatures we may call twin-tigers. This means that tigers and twin-tigers share the same appearance. At time t1, Oscar sees a tiger, and Twin-Oscar sees a twin-tiger.

Twin-tigers seeks to take advantage of the idea that different properties could have very similar appearances. For example, gold and pyrite look similar, such that they could appear

² I do not claim that Conservatism explicitly appeals to Biconditional Intentionalism; instead, my aim is to show that by appealing to BI, we can make sense of Conservatism’s use of Twin Earth scenarios. However, I am not suggesting that this is the only type of cases utilized by Conservatism. In fact, in the next chapters, I will also address other arguments proposed by Conservatism that do not rely on the phenomenal character of visual experiences.
indistinguishable to many perceivers. Conservatism appeals to scenarios such that two different properties share exactly the same appearance.

In Twin-tigers, neither Oscar nor Twin-Oscar suffers from an illusion or a hallucination. In that way, the visual experiences of both are veridical, and there is no principled reason to claim that any of them is misrepresenting their environment. The case is constructed such that tigers and twin-tigers are identical in appearance. This means that Oscar’s and Twin-Oscar’s experiences have the same phenomenal character. What it is like to have the visual experience of Oscar at t1 is the same as what it is like to have the visual experience of Twin-Oscar at t1. If BI is correct, the fact that Oscar’s and Twin-Oscar’s visual experiences share the same phenomenal character implies that they share the same representational content.

Also, if physicalfunctional duplicates share all their mental states, then Oscar and Twin-Oscar share the same visual state. Does the shared representational content of Oscar and Twin Oscar’s visual experiences include the high-level property of being a tiger? If their experiences have the same representational content, then they cannot include the feature being a tiger (or the feature being a twin-tiger). This is because we have stipulated that their experiences are veridical, but only one of them sees a tiger, while the other sees a twin-tiger. Given that their veridical visual experiences have identical phenomenal characters and if BI is right, the high-level properties cannot be part of the representational contents of their visual experiences. For Conservatism, what is common between Oscar's and Twin-Oscar's experiences is that they perceive the same colors, shapes, motions, and spatial locations.

If other scenarios like Twin-tigers against other high-level features (mental state properties, global features of scenes, or event-causal properties) are possible, then the argument generalizes. If that generalization works, then this is a powerful argument for Conservatism's fundamental claim that only low-level features are part of the visual experiences, and they are identifiable through what it
is like to have those experiences. High-level features are not part of the representational content of visual experiences, and they are not identifiable through what it is like to have those experiences.

In this way, Conservatism can establish a fundamental difference between low-level features, which are perceived because they are part of the content of visual experiences, and high-level features, which are not perceptually represented by the visual experience.

In this section, I have claimed that, by appealing to BI, Conservatism aims to undermine Liberalism. Given BI, cases like Twin-tigers show that only low-level features are part of the visual content and that high-level features could not be part of that content. In the next section, I present a different account of the relation between the representational content of perception and its phenomenal character. With that account, Liberalism can reply to Conservatism.
In this section, I present a phenomenal contrast argument. This shows that phenomenological considerations could also favor Liberalism. Also, I show how Liberalism can account for Twin-Earth scenarios. For that enterprise, the liberal view requires a different form of Intentionalism, so I introduce that principle: Minimal Intentionalism. Finally, I present how Liberalism’s and Conservatism’s phenomenological criteria put us at an impasse: Phenomenology alone will not allow us to decide between Conservatism and Liberalism.

The last section's Twin-Earth scenarios seem to give us good reason to be conservative about the contents of perception. Twin-Earth scenarios for different high-level features, paired with Biconditional Intentionalism, show that high-level features are not part of the content of visual perception. However, other phenomenological considerations (different scenarios or principles) can be used in favor of Liberalism. For example, phenomenal contrast arguments are meant to show that the best explanation of the phenomenal difference between naive and expert mental states is the perception of high-level features.

Let us start with the following case (Siegel, 2007; 2010):

Mandolin: At time t1, Emma could not distinguish between a mandolin and a lute. After beginning a job with a luthier, Emma learned to repair, examine, and build various stringed instruments, including mandolins and lutes. At time t2, for Emma, mandolins take a distinctive appearance. Now, she can immediately and effortlessly distinguish between mandolins and lutes.
In this case, there is a difference between Emma's visual experiences at t1 and t2. While at t1, when Emma saw a mandolin, she could not categorize it as a mandolin; at t2, she could see a mandolin as a mandolin. So, we can offer the following argument in favor of Liberalism (Helton, 2016):

P1) There is a phenomenal difference between Emma’s mental state when seeing a mandolin at time t1 and when seeing a mandolin at time t2.

P2) The phenomenal difference is due to the fact that in her naive state at t1, she doesn't represent the mandolin as a mandolin, but in her expert state at t2, she does.

P3) The mandolin representation (if any) in Emma’s expert state is a visual experience.

Therefore,

C) In her expert state, she visually perceives the mandolin as a mandolin.

If the argument is correct, then the fact that there is a difference between a naïve mental state and an expert mental state explains why high-level features are represented in the visual experience. Therefore, this phenomenological contrast argument favors Liberalism: We perceive more than low-level features, in this case, artifactual features.

In general, phenomenal contrast arguments show that the difference in content could be explained by the felt difference between specific carefully chosen pair of phenomenally contrastive mental states, such that one of these mental states visually represents a high-level feature and the other does not. In this way, phenomenal contrast arguments are compatible with Biconditional Intentionalism (the claim that two visual experiences differ in phenomenal character if and only if they differ in representational content). For Liberals, some phenomenal contrasts are the best way to explain the visual representation of high-level properties.3

3 Liberals do not need to be committed to the claim that the perception of high-level features explains all phenomenal contrasts.
However, while cases like Mandolin are compatible with BI, we saw in the previous section that a commitment to BI coupled with reflection on Twin-Earth cases leads to Conservatism. So, liberals must offer some other principle that links phenomenal character and representational content. I argue that liberals could rely on the following:

This is Minimal Intentionalism [MI]:

MI: If two experiences differ in phenomenal character, then they differ in representational content (Speaks, 2009, p. 554).

One crucial difference between BI and MI is that MI is compatible with cases in which two experiences have the same phenomenal character and different representational content. So, for MI, two experiences with different representational content could have the same phenomenology. MI only rules out cases where two experiences have the same representational content and different phenomenal character.

MI allows Liberalism to accept that Oscar and Twin-Oscar are physical/functional duplicates while it allows Liberalism to deny that the representational content of every visual experience must be fixed by what goes on physically (or functionally) within the boundaries of that subject's body. Liberalism could claim that while the representational content of visual perception is “wide” or dependent on the subject's environment or history, the phenomenal character of visual experience is “narrow,” that is, independent of the subject's environment or history (Ashby, 2020, pp. 701-702). The wideness of the representational content of perception allows it to vary independently of variations in phenomenal character. So, two physical/functional duplicates could share the same phenomenal character but still be in different visual states because they could differ in the representational content of their visual experiences.

The fact that Oscar and Twin-Oscar have visual experiences with the same phenomenal character is compatible with their visual experiences differing in their representational content. So, although
Oscar and Twin-Oscar share some of the representational content of their experiences (colors, shapes, motions, and locations), they do not share the same overall representational content: Oscar veridically has a visual experience with the representational content that there is a tiger, and Twin-Oscar veridically has a visual experience with the representational content that there is a twin-tiger.

For a liberal, the phenomenal character of an experience could supervene on the physical/functional constitution of the subject, but the representational content of their experience does not need to supervene on the subject's physical/functional constitution. Which high-level features are represented (if any) could be explained by different causal relations between the physical/functional states of the subject and the features that are commonly responsible for the phenomenal character of the visual experiences of the subject. In this way, liberals can claim that Oscar's and Twin Oscar's visual experiences do not share the same representational content, although they share the same phenomenal character. So, Liberalism could also be supported by appealing to phenomenology and its relation to representational content.

It is essential to ask why Biconditional and Minimal Intentionalism are necessary when we can explain the difference between Conservatism and Liberalism by appealing to the wideness of representational content of visual experiences and the narrowness of the phenomenal character. When discussing Twin-tigers, physicalism and functionalism are typically taken as true because Twin-tigers presuppose that Oscar and Twin-Oscar are physical and functional duplicates. Nonetheless, this assumption is not necessary to determine the relationship between representational content and phenomenal character of visual experiences. To illustrate this further, let’s consider the following scenario:

Twin-tigers 2: Oscar inhabits Earth, and Twin-Oscar inhabits Twin-Earth. While there are tigers on Earth, there have never been tigers on Twin-Earth, but there are superficially similar creatures we may call twin-tigers. This means that tigers and twin-tigers share the
same appearance in the following ways: If Oscar were to be on Twin-Earth, twin-tigers would look like regular tigers to him. Also, if Twin-Oscar were to be on Earth, tigers would look like regular twin-tigers to him. At t1, Oscar sees a tiger, and Twin-Oscar sees a twin-tiger.

This case is significant because it doesn't specify what's necessary when there's a physical or functional similarity between two different subjects. It allows for the differentiation between representational content and phenomenal character to be independent from functionalism and physicalism. For instance, it's compatible with cases where common representational content or phenomenal character of visual experiences is independent of physical or functional similarity. Moreover, it can show that the assertion that the representational content of visual experience is “wide” (dependent on the subject's environment or history) is an ambiguous claim: This means that not every variation in the representational content of visual experiences needs to depend on the environment external to the perceiver's body. For instance, some physical (or functional) difference in the visual systems of Oscar and Twin-Oscar could impact the representational content of their experiences. Thus, it's possible for the visual experiences of Oscar and Twin-Oscar to be the same if they both see the same tiger (or the same twin-tiger). Alternatively, their visual experiences could have different representational content if they both see the same tiger (or the same twin-tiger). That's why discussing Minimal Intentionalism and Biconditional Intentionalism could be more helpful for the discussion.

Biconditional Intentionalism and Minimal Intentionalism are two theses that discuss the relationship between phenomenal character and representational content straightforwardly. These theses can potentially avoid the problems and commitments of physicalism and functionalism. In Twin-tigers 2, Biconditional Intentionalism argues that the variation in the representational content of Oscar's and Twin-Oscar's visual experience requires a variation in the phenomenal character of those experiences. The solution for Biconditional Intentionalism is to suggest that anything that
cannot be tracked through the phenomenology of the visual experience cannot be part of the representational content of the visual experience. This is why high-level properties are not perceived, they can only be represented in other ways. If there is no change in phenomenology, then the representational content of vision must be the same. For Minimal Intentionalism, as long as experiences have different phenomenal character, they cannot have the same representational content. Minimal Intentionalism suggests that the variation in the representational content of Oscar’s and Twin-Oscar’s visual experience does not require a variation in the phenomenal character of those experiences.\(^4\)

In this chapter, I have shown that Conservatism and Liberalism have different views on the content of visual perception because they have different views regarding the relationship between the representational content of visual experiences and their phenomenal character. If we rely on Biconditional Intentionalism (BI), then we would lean towards Conservatism. But if we rely on Minimal Intentionalism (MI), then we would favor Liberalism. Both sides claim that their view is supported by phenomenology. However, unless we have independent reasons to prefer MI or BI, we are at an impasse. In the next chapter, I propose a way to overcome the impasse.

\(^4\) Twin-tigers 2 could allow for distinctions in terms of different visual systems, such that it is possible to have different representational contents of the same thing with variations (or similarities) of phenomenal character. It is also possible to frame it in cases of same representational content of different things with variations (or similarities) of phenomenal character. Another possibility that Twin-tigers 2 allows is that there could be mental variations (or similarities) that are independent of any sort of physical things: for example, a Berkeleian mind could be accounted for as having visual experiences with representational content and phenomenal character too.
CHAPTER II

METHODOISM AND PARTICULARISM ABOUT THE CONTENTS OF VISUAL PERCEPTION

As we have mentioned the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism regarding visual perception concerns the distinction between low-level and high-level features. The question is whether we can perceive more features beyond the traditional percepts: low-level features such as shape, color, location, and motion. The debate, in all its complexity, involves two different questions:

(I) What can we visually perceive?

(II) How do we identify the content of visual perception?5

5 This methodological framework has been inspired by Chisholm’s *The Problem of the Criterion*. For him, there are two main questions in Epistemology: (A) "What do we know?" and (B) "How do we know?". Particularists start by assuming an answer to (A) and then use that answer to answer (B). Methodists start by assuming an answer to (B) and then use that answer to answer to (A). Neither Particularism nor Methodism must be committed to a particular answer to (A) or a particular answer to (B). In that way, the framework is methodological. The framework I am offering about the content of visual perception debate is not perfectly analogous to Chisholm’s framework because questions (B) "How do we know?" and (ii) "How do we identify the content of perception?" are not symmetrical.
Considering both questions, we could have two different approaches. The first approach is to assume an answer to question (I) and then offer an answer to question (II). For this approach, it is essential to offer a list of undoubtedly perceived features and, after that, to offer a suitable criterion that explains why the list offered in the first step is adequate. This first approach is Particularism about the admissible contents of visual experience, or just “Particularism”. The second approach gives an answer to question (II) by committing itself to a specific criterion, and after that, it offers an answer to question (I) by offering a list of features that adjusts itself to that criterion. This approach is Methodism about the admissible contents of visual experience or just “Methodism”.

Conservatism as committed to Biconditional Intentionalism gives us a particular list of percepts and offer a criterion that shows how only the members of that list could be the contents of perception. The list of percepts that conservatives have offered mainly consists of shape, color, motion, and location. Therefore, Conservatism as committed to Biconditional Intentionalism could be understood as a form of Particularism. First, conservatives assume an answer to question (I) “What can we visually perceive?”, namely colors, shapes, and motions; and after that, they offer an answer to question (II) “How do we identify the contents of visual perception?”, namely by appealing to the phenomenal character of the experiences of different subjects and their introspective reports.

Unlike conservatives, liberals like Bayne (2016), Siegel (2007, 2010), and Krueger (2018) are not committed to a particular list of features we perceive. But this does not mean that they are committed to a different methodological criterion; they are still committed to a phenomenological criterion. So, liberals do not have any trouble expanding the list if that change respects that criterion. They assume an answer to the question (II) “How do we identify the content of visual perception?” and after answering it, they offer an answer to question (I) “What can we perceive?” For them, this could include natural kinds, mental states, global features of scenes, etc. As I have tried to show in this work, the problem is that phenomenological criteria (Biconditional Intentionalism and Minimal
Intentionalism) seem inconclusive with respect to what exactly could count as the content of visual perception.

If other scenarios like Twin-tigers against other kinds of high-level features (mental state properties, global features of scenes, or event-causal properties) are possible, then Conservatism, together with Bconditional Intentionalism, can show that only low-level features are part of the perceptual content. If Bconditional Intentionalism is true, we have good reasons to believe that Conservatism is true and that there is a fundamental difference between low-level features and high-level features: While low-level features are part of the content of visual experiences, and they are related to what it is like to have those experiences, high-level features could not be part of the content of visual experiences, and they are not related to what it is like to have those experiences. Conservatism could claim that every mental state representing high-level features is a non-perceptual mental state.

While we could understand Conservatism as a form of Particularism, because it primarily commits itself with a list and then it offers a suitable criterion, Liberalism could be understood as a form of Methodism. Liberalism requires a stronger commitment to its phenomenological criterion, namely Minimal Intentionalism. In this way, Liberalism requires (a) to offer some reasons in favor of Minimal Intentionalism and against Bconditional Intentionalism, and (b) it needs to argue that introspection is the only reliable way of determining the contents of visual experience. The problem with (a) is that we don’t have a prima facie way of determining whether Minimal Intentionalism or Bconditional Intentionalism is true. Beyond that I will show in the following section that we have reasons to doubt that any of them is true. I will present a problem (Inverted Spectrum) as a problem for Minimal Intentionalism, and therefore, for Bconditional Intentionalism too.

In relation to (b), some conservatives have questioned whether introspection is the only reliable way to determine the content of visual experiences. Beyond that, I claim that the phenomenological
evidence that could be obtained through introspection (and their correspondent introspective reports) shows that we need other methodological tools to identify the contents of visual perception.

In what follows, it is important to address the role phenomenological evidence could play in the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism, and we need to distinguish between the phenomenological content of visual experiences and the different methodologies that can be used to determine that content. If introspection is just one methodological tool for determining the contents of visual perception through perceptual introspective reports, then we could appeal to other answers to question (II) “How do we identify the content of visual perception?” But before giving a different answer in Chapter IV, we need to address the reasons why introspection fails to be a good answer.

Phenomenological evidence has been incorporated in the debate between liberals and conservatives by relying on introspection as a methodological tool. Liberals and conservatives have discussed phenomenology based on their different intuitions on cases like Twin-tigers and Mandolin. This raises a question over how it is even possible for conservatists and liberals to disagree about the same cases, namely the same evidence. In the previous chapter, I show that the disagreement is possible if there are different philosophical principles playing analogous roles as sources of their intuitions: Conservatism can use Biconditional Intentionalism and Liberalism can use Minimal Intentionalism. In this chapter, I present some reasons why phenomenological evidence obtained through introspection could not play a substantial role in the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism.

Spaulding’s (2015b) discussion about phenomenological evidence in the debates about social cognition can clarify the status of phenomenological evidence in our current debate between liberals and conservatives. For Spaulding, there are three characteristic features of evidence that can play a substantial methodological or epistemic role in testing theories: relevance, novelty, and
reliability. Evidence is relevant if it can confirm or disconfirm some of the hypotheses debated. For example, in the case of the debates about social cognition any theory must be at least compatible with our phenomenological experience of social interactions, and phenomenology must make predictions that would test (i.e., confirm or disconfirm) the relevant hypotheses. Novelty requires the evidence provides information beyond what is presupposed and built into the theories debated. Finally, reliability requires evidence to be consistent, accurate and unbiased (2015b, p. 3).

I claim that the evidence obtained through the phenomenological and introspective reports of different subjects in cases like Twin-tigers and Mandolin could not be relevant or reliable in the debate between liberals and conservatives. First, in the debate between Liberalism and Conservatism, it is presupposed that the explanandum is the content of visual experiences. Minimal Intentionalism and Biconditional Intentionalism are both committed to the idea that phenomenological evidence is a good guide to determine the contents of visual perception. Both theories use phenomenology to determine the proper representational content of our visual experiences. Thus, cases like Twin-tigers and Mandolin are meant to claim that either Conservatism or Liberalism are right. Nevertheless, Conservatism and Liberalism, by using different philosophical principles, namely Biconditional Intentionalism and Minimal Intentionalism, have different ways to interpret that same evidence. For Twin-tigers, Twin-tigers 2 and Mandolin to be relevant in the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism, the phenomenal character of those cases must confirm or disconfirm any of those theories. But we could say that the phenomenal character of visual experiences in Twin-tigers and Mandolin, used as phenomenological evidence, could not be relevant between Conservatism and Liberalism, because both theories have different ways of accounting for them.

This takes us to the other condition: reliability. Phenomenological evidence in the debate between Liberalism and Conservatism is not reliable because it could not be unbiased, consistent, or accurate. Evidence is unbiased if it is objective. Evidence is interpersonally consistent if two people
report similar phenomenological experiences in the same environment. And finally, evidence is accurate if it provides a factually correct description of the nature of the visual experience.

Conservatism and Liberalism about the content of visual perception use two different accounts of the relationship between the representational content of visual experiences and their phenomenal character. If we rely on BI, then appealing to phenomenology favors the conservative side of the debate. But if we rely on MI, then appealing to phenomenology favors the liberal side of the debate. Conservatives and liberals claim that phenomenology shows that they are right about the contents of visual perception. The different ideal subjects, the ideal conservative and the ideal liberal, would report inconsistent answers about the same piece of evidence. For example, if Oscar were a conservative he would be able to claim that, given Biconditional Intentionalism, he only visually perceives the colors, shapes, and motions of tigers. By the other hand, if Twin-Oscar were a liberal he would be able to claim that, given Minimal Intentionalism, he does perceive the feature being a twin-tiger. So, even given the same phenomenology, what ultimately decides the introspective reports of Oscar and Twin-Oscar is their background philosophical intuitions.

Biconditional Intentionalism and Minimal Intentionalism are both philosophical principles that rely on phenomenology. In this way, both philosophical principles could not be confirmed or disconfirmed using Twin-Earth like scenarios or phenomenal contrast arguments because they are made to address those cases specifically. In this way, the phenomenological evidence is biased. To decide between Biconditional and Minimal Intentionalism we require different evidence.

Can the evidence obtained through the introspective reports of different subjects in cases like Twin-tigers and Mandolin could be at least accurate? A positive answer would amount to claiming that introspection and the correspondent introspective reports are able to provide a correct description

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6 Intrapersonal consistency is such that the same person over time reports similar phenomenological experiences in the same environment. Although, there is an important distinction between interpersonal and intrapersonal consistency I won’t focus on this distinction because the inconsistency we could track between Conservatism and Liberalism is interpersonal.
of the nature of visual experience. Several authors defend different forms of Intentionalism by appealing to introspection and the thesis of the transparency of experience. For Introspection to be a valuable methodological tool in the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism, visual experiences must be transparent. Speaks (2015) formulates the following principle about introspectable differences between experiences:

Transparency: If there is an introspectable difference between two visual phenomenal properties of subjects, then there is a difference in the objects and properties those two subjects represent as in their environment (2015, p.29).

Moore is one inspiration for this principle. He states, “when we introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous” (Moore, 1903). This is also present in Tye’s defense of Intentionalism and the relation between visual content and visual phenomenology: “When we introspect our experiences and feelings, we become aware of what it is like for us to undergo them. But we are not directly aware of those experiences and feelings; nor are we directly aware of qualities of experience” (Tye, 2002) and “When one tries to focus on [an experience of blue] in introspection one cannot help but see right through it so that what one actually ends up attending is the real colour blue” (Tye, 1992).

In relation to Mandolin, Transparency would allow liberals to state that since there is a visual phenomenal difference between Emma’s naïve mental state and Emma’s expert state, then it must be the case that two different properties are represented as in Emma’s environment. Nevertheless, this doesn’t need to commit us with the idea that introspective reports are able to provide an insight into the nature of visual experiences. That would be the case only if we do not have competing ways of accounting for the phenomenology of their visual experiences.

Liberalism and Conservatism, as supported by Minimal and Biconditional Intentionalism, require the Transparency principle to be true. But the case of blurry vision makes Transparency
problematic. Crane (2006) claims that while it is common to describe the visual experience by appealing to the objects and properties that appear in the surrounding environment, the case of blurry vision is one in which the visual experience appears as having a property that is not instantiated by any of the objects represented in the visual experience. If this is the case, then this is a problem for both Minimal Intentionalism and Biconditional Intentionalism, and, therefore, to Liberalism and Conservatism as they have been presented. Between Conservatism and Liberalism, which one is in a better position, in case any form of Intentionalism is wrong?

If Conservatism is understood as a form of Particularism and they assume an answer to question (I) “What can we visually perceive?”, namely colors, shapes, and motions; and after that, they offer an answer to question (II) “How do we identify the contents of visual perception?”, namely by appealing to the phenomenal character of the experiences of different subjects and their introspective reports, then they are in a better position to change their answer to question (II). As a matter of fact, many conservatives have appealed to other considerations not completely based on phenomenological considerations.

So, while liberals would like to claim that the best explanation for Emma’s case is that there is some visual representational difference between her visual experiences, Conservatism could appeal to different explanations. First, a conservative could argue that we can explain the phenomenal difference between Emma's naive mental state and expert mental state as a shift in the distribution of her attention and not as a change in her visual phenomenology. This could mean that Emma's expert state is due to her effortlessly and automatically attending to different low-level features in her visual experience, but this difference does not necessarily require the perception of high-level features. So, conservatives could claim that while there is a phenomenal difference between both visual experiences, that difference doesn’t require the perception of high-level features. In this way, there is a phenomenological visual change that is not about the change in the objects represented as in the environment or their properties (Prinz, 2013). Second, conservatives could argue that
liberals cannot select the appropriate phenomenal contrast without using a description that already assumes that high-level features are part of the content of visual experience. So, the phenomenal contrast arguments presuppose what it should prove (Helton, 2016). These objections to phenomenal contrast arguments are plausible, and they show that other phenomenological and non-phenomenological considerations are possible.

In this way, we have shown that introspective reports are not accurate, they are not consistent, and they are not unbiased. While introspection is one method used in this debate, basically a way to answer question (II) “How do we identify the contents of visual experience?”, this doesn’t mean that is the only method available. Maybe, if we change our answer to (II), we could have better ways to answer question (I) “What can we visually experience?”.

In this Chapter, I show that phenomenological considerations rely on introspection. The main idea is to consider how the visual experience is felt from the perspective of the perceiver in Twin-tigers and Mandolin. Nevertheless, unless we have independent reasons to prefer BI over MI (or vice versa), we are at an impasse. In the following chapter, I will show that instead of having reasons in favor of Minimal Intentionalism or Biconditional Intentionalism we have further reasons to doubt that they could secure the content of visual perception by appealing to phenomenal differences. Inverted Spectrum is a scenario that allow us to question the relevance of introspection as a way to determine the content of perception.
Conservatism and Liberalism give an account of the representational content of experiences and their phenomenal character. There is a challenging scenario for both: Inverted Spectrum. I will present that scenario and its effects on Conservatism, as committed to Biconditional Intentionalism, and Liberalism, as committed to Minimal Intentionalism.

For Liberalism and Conservatism, visual experiences represent the surrounding environment of the perceiver as being a certain way. Also, for the perceiver, there is something it is like to have a visual experience. So, if a subject has a visual experience of a red object, then that experience has two components: the representational content that there is a red object and the way the red object experience feels to the perceiver, that is, the phenomenal character.
We have shown in the previous section that Liberalism, combined with Minimal Intentionalism, can account for Twin-Earth scenarios and phenomenal contrast arguments. Conservatism, combined with Biconditional Intentionalism, can account for Twin-Earth scenarios and phenomenal contrast arguments too. Nevertheless, there is a scenario that is problematic for Minimal Intentionalism. In that way, this scenario could be taken as a reason to abandon the phenomenological criteria in any of its forms. Inverted spectrum without misrepresentation is a case in which two or more subjects seem to have a visual experience with the same representational content but with different phenomenology, even though none of their experiences are misrepresenting the world:

Inverted Spectrum: Invert and Norma have veridical experiences of color, but green things seem to Norma just like red things seem to Invert, green things seem to Invert just like red things seem to Norma, and green things do not seem like red things to Norma. So, regarding colors, the grass looks to Norma just like ripe tomatoes look to Invert, and the grass looks to Invert just like ripe tomatoes look to Norma. The case presupposes that both veridically represent that grass is green and that ripe tomatoes are red.

Inverted Spectrum seems to be a case where two experiences that differ in their phenomenal character have the same representational content — for example, that those ripe tomatoes are red. If this is true, then there must be at least some component of visual experiences that cannot be accounted for in terms of representational content, and Minimal Intentionalism must be false. This is definitely a problem for Liberalism and their prospects of accounting for cases like Mandolin and Twin-tigers. Beyond that, it is also a problem for Conservatism because if Minimal Intentionalism is false, then Biconditional Intentionalism must be false too. Biconditional Intentionalism is the conjunction of two conditional statements, one of which is Minimal Intentionalism. If we want to defend Liberalism and Conservatism, we need to give an account in
favor of Minimal Intentionalism. Also, as should be clear this case is dealing with a low-level feature, which make the case even more problematic for Minimal or Biconditional Intentionalism.

Sydney Shoemaker (1992, 1994, 2000a, 2000b, 2003) conceded that Inverted Spectrum is possible, but he denied that the veridical color experiences of Invert and Norma share the same overall representational content. For him, there is just some content of the visual experience that is determined by the phenomenology of the experience: the phenomenal content. Chalmers defines phenomenal content in this way: A representational content C of a perceptual experience E is a phenomenal content if and only if necessarily, any experience with the phenomenal character of E has representational content C (2006, p. 50). In this way, it is possible to distinguish, at least conceptually, between two different kinds of representational content on visual experiences, one that is not related with the phenomenology of the visual experiences, and other that it is. In this way, for Biconditional Intentionalism all representational contents of visual experiences are phenomenal content, but for Minimal Intentionalism only certain representational contents of visual experiences are phenomenal content. It is regularly assumed that colors, shapes, and motions (our list of low-level features!) are phenomenal content.

Since Invert’s and Norma’s experiences that ripe tomatoes are red share the same color property but differ in their phenomenology, the color property could not be part of the phenomenal content. According to Shoemaker, the represented properties that are determined by the phenomenology of the experience are appearance properties. These properties are part of the phenomenal content of visual experiences.

Appearance properties are relational and dispositional properties that objects have, which vary along with the phenomenology of the experience and are represented by the subjects depending on the physical constitution of those subjects or depending on their environment. For example, when Invert veridically experiences that ripe tomatoes are red, he is not only representing the color
property redness but also some relational property that ripe tomatoes have to produce experiences with a specific quale (we can call it "quale G") to subjects with his physical constitution. Moreover, when Norma veridically represents that ripe tomatoes are red, she represents the relational property those things have to produce experiences with a different quale (we can call it "quale R") to subjects with her physical constitution. Thus, Invert and Norma are aware of different appearance properties. One possible objection against Shoemaker’s account is that it is ad hoc. Even if it is, I want to show that this strategy fails for other considerations more related to Shoemaker’s explicit theoretical commitments.

Shoemaker can give an account of the phenomenological difference between the veridical experiences of inverted subjects in terms of representational content by adding an extra layer of properties as contents of the visual experience. Nevertheless, in his eagerness to save Minimal Intentionalism, Shoemaker must accept that visual experiences have multiple contents. Those different contents have different kinds of features, such that some will be phenomenal contents and others won’t. Beyond that, this case shows that while appearance properties are the phenomenal content of experience, appearance properties are not colors! So, to the conservative's concern that high-level properties are not part of the perceptual content of experience, we will need to add the concern that a low-level property like color is not part of the perceptual content of the visual experience either! We are in trouble if we identify low-level features (what is perceived) with the phenomenal content (the representational content that is necessarily related to the phenomenal character of the experience). This is problematic for Conservatism and Liberalism, because we will need to claim that colors are high-level properties and not low-level properties. In some way, Shoemaker’s account invites a major revision of some of the theoretical commitments Conservatism and Liberalism share.⁷

⁷ There are other famous critiques against Shoemaker’s representationalism. For example, Egan (2006) claims that appearance properties do not provide reliable evidence of what colors objects have. Also, Tye
Liberals and conservatives have two options: they could change the list of features that are part of the perceptual visual experience (admitting that other representational content beyond phenomenal content could be part of the visual experience), or they could change the criteria. As I have claimed previously, Conservatism is primarily committed to the list of low-level features in which color is included. Conservatism needs to change the criteria; it needs to abandon the phenomenological criteria, namely its appeal to Introspection as determining the contents of visual experience. Liberalism's solution to the problem of Inverted Spectrum should be that visual experiences could represent various kinds of content, not just phenomenal content. Nevertheless, if Liberalism is indeed a form of Methodism, namely it is primarily committed with an answer to question (II) “How do we identify the contents of visual perception?”, then its commitment with the phenomenological criterion is fundamental. This is problematic for Liberalism because several Inverted Spectrum scenarios are compatible with the phenomenological criterion. For example, there are Inverted Earth scenarios that involve low-level features such as shape, size, distance, left-right orientation, rigidity, and shadows (Ashby, 2020).

The considerable risk for Liberalism is to end up with a whole new set of percepts that will be appearance properties (relational properties that things possess concerning particular individuals). In this way, Liberalism runs the risk of being taken too far, making distinctions that would take us far away from the primary list we started with, and claiming that colors, shapes, and motions are not low-level features, but high-level features instead.

I propose that we should pursue other options and question the phenomenological criterion, namely introspection. Conservatism needs to change it if it wants to preserve the list of low-level features as the admissible content of experience, because Liberalism runs the risk of taking the criteria way

(2000) claims that Shoemaker’s representationalism draws a veil of appearance over colors, which means that color are only perceived indirectly. These critiques are related to the one raised here, but they do not address the debate between Liberalism and Conservatism.
too far: expanding the list of percepts by including not only high-level features but also a new abundant list of lower-level features which would completely modify our comprehension of visual perception. Although this is not a sufficient reason to reject Liberalism, it does warrant attention to alternative methods of determining the contents of perception.

In this section, I presented the Inverted Spectrum scenario, a case where experiences with the same representational content have different phenomenology, raising a challenge for both Liberalism and Conservatism. While Liberalism could try to solve this by introducing appearance properties as part of the phenomenal content and recognizing that the content of visual experiences is multiple, Conservatism, understood as a form of Particularism, can abandon the phenomenological criterion. In the next section, I will show how we could abandon the phenomenological criterion.
In this section, I claim that vision science is compatible with phenomenological evidence but at the same time it is a different way to identify the content of visual perception that doesn’t rely on introspection. I argue for an empirical approach based on Block's (2014, 2019, 2023) understanding of the distinction between perception and cognition. In this way, the objective methods of vision science could be more fundamental than introspection to explain the disagreement between Liberalism and Conservatism. While phenomenology is not fundamental in this approach, it still fulfills a calibration role that is ancillary to vision science.

Block (2014, 2019, 2023) argues that we should be more concerned with empirical evidence from vision science than with evidence from introspection. Nevertheless, his definition of perception as constitutively iconic, nonconceptual, and nonpropositional rules out conceptual features from the representational content of perception by decree. I do not defend his definition of perception, but I follow his non-phenomenological approach. I propose that we need to clearly distinguish between visual perception and visual experience to overcome the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism. For that goal, I offer the following argument:
i) There are two representational mental states involved in visual experiences: perceptions and thoughts.

ii) If natural kinds, mental state properties, and global features of scenes are visually experienced, they could be represented in thoughts or perceptually represented.

iii) Vision science can account for perceptual representations and for cognitive representations involved in visual experiences that are not perceptual representations.

Therefore,

iv) We can turn to empirical evidence from vision science to distinguish between non-perceptual representations (for example, perceptual judgments) and the contents of visual perception.

Importantly, committing oneself to the idea that the objective methods of vision science can help us determining the content of vision is not devoid of theoretical a priori commitments. For example, Block acknowledges that in his account the differentiation between perception and cognition could only be established through armchair criteria. The categories of perception and cognition aid in identifying scientific indicators that can help isolate the constituent characteristics of perception and cognition. It’s important to note this bootstrapping problem is an issue not only for vision science but also for phenomenological approaches. Using a phenomenological armchair criterion to distinguish between vision and other representational mental states has the same problem. This is because the phenomenological evidence obtained through introspection may be used to isolate the constituent characteristics of vision and other mental states.

In the previous section, I have offered a reason to distrust phenomenology as a guide to what counts as part of the content of visual experience. Depending on our theoretical commitments, namely

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8 About (i) and (ii), it is not true that perception and thought could be distinguished by claiming that perceptions are fast, automatic, and non-inferential, whereas thoughts are slow, effortful, and inferential. Against that idea, I claim in the following lines that thoughts can be fast, automatic, and non-inferential, too.
Biconditional Intentionalism or Minimal Intentionalism, Conservatism or Liberalism could be true. Also, not giving phenomenology such a decisive role is independently motivated and not just a response to the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism. Consider the following quotation in which Block criticizes Shoemaker's phenomenological approach to perception. In a sense, this critique of Shoemaker's perspective can be applied to anyone who places excessive emphasis on phenomenology and the subjective reports that can be derived from it:

“In my view, Shoemaker gives too much centrality to conscious perception… But we talk about color perception in bees without having any idea whether their color perception even has phenomenal character. It is just not part of our concept of color perception that the categories of perception have to be conscious… There is categorization in unconscious perception too. If Shoemaker had taken the science of perception into account instead of just intuitions about phenomenology, the resultant theory might have been improved” (2019, p. 485).

In this quotation, Block mentions bees, but he also uses two other cases to show that perception can be unconscious: one involving babies and the other involving wasps (2023). Bees, wasps, and babies have developed visual systems, but it is far from clear that they are conscious. Beyond that, some evidence could show that, for example, wasps do not have consciousness. The evidence is that there is no sign that wasps have a cognitive or affective life. Furthermore, if wasps are not conscious, then it seems possible that they lack phenomenology (Block, 2013). However, if we cannot appeal to phenomenology to determine the contents of perception, what can we appeal to?

For Bayne (2016, 2018), Block (2014, 2019, 2023), and Spaulding (2015), vision science is another way to identify the contents of visual perception. They can appeal to empirical evidence of which areas of the brain are involved or how fast the involved processes occur. The big difference between the indicators that phenomenology uses and the ones that vision science can use is that the latter
allows us to know the functions of the brain and its correlations. Meanwhile, phenomenology's indicators can only characterize what we are conscious-of and what could be phenomenologically experienced. This is a significant limitation for phenomenology, even if we could expand the spectrum of what is reportable by appealing to Minimal Intentionalism. Minimal Intentionalism allows Liberalism to show that we could perceive high-level properties because they are compatible with cases in which two experiences with the same phenomenology represent different properties, and they explain phenomenological differences in vision in terms of different representational contents. Minimal Intentionalism can do this only by claiming that there is some representational content that could change without any change in the phenomenal character of visual experiences. More importantly, these changes have to be transparent to the perceiver: She needs to be able to track phenomenal differences in her visual experiences in the sense that any introspectable difference between two visual phenomenal properties is related with a difference in the objects and properties that are represented as in her environment.

To consider vision science’s way of demarcating what counts as perceptual as an alternative to phenomenology, we should stress that thoughts (as perceptions) could also be fast, automatic, and unmediated by conscious inference. If cognitive processes could be fast, automatic and unmediated by conscious inference, then introspection is unable to give us a sharp distinction between perception and thought. In this way, we can claim that certain high-level features can be part of the representational content of thoughts that occur almost simultaneously with visual perceptions. For example, in Mandolin, the difference between Emma's naive state and her expert state could be due to a difference in her post-perceptual thoughts and not a difference in the representational content of her visual perception. As previously mentioned, we could claim that Emma's expert state could be explained by her effortlessly and automatically attending to different low-level features. In the same way, an explanation of Twin-tigers could appeal to a similar difference in post-perceptual thoughts. If Oscar or Twin-Oscar were asked about their visual experience, Oscar could truthfully
claim that he visually experiences a tiger. In contrast, Twin-Oscar could truthfully claim that he visually experiences a twin-tiger. In both cases, the report is about the content of a perceptual judgment rather than the content of visual perception itself.\(^9\)

In this way, certain perceptions and perceptual judgments could be part of visual experiences simultaneously. Distinguishing between visual perception and thought is more complex than looking at factors like speed or automaticity in visual experiences. Both visual perception and thought can be fast, automatic, and could involve unconscious inference. This view allows for different mental states to be unified across visual experiences which means that perceptions and thoughts can feel unified for the perceiver. In principle, a perceiver could be unable to distinguish between one and the other by using introspection. Therefore, a low-level visual perception of the tiger's shape and color could feel unified with the thought, “That is a tiger,” even if these are, in fact, two different representational mental states.

Beyond that, and more strongly, some thoughts do not necessarily require conscious inference. Some thoughts are unconscious inferential processes. We should not limit inferential processes to conscious deliberative acts. An inference could be a sub-personal computation, a psychological processing employing Bayesian statistical principles, or a psychological processing involving extra-sensory information. None of these notions of inference needs to be committed to a conscious, deliberate psychological process (Spaulding, 2015). Relatedly, Block (2014) claims that inferences are computations whose successful operations depend on facts about the world. And we know that even insects are capable of inferential processing despite their seeming lack of phenomenal consciousness. This suggests that insects could make perceptual judgments even if we cannot determine whether they have consciousness or phenomenology.

\(^9\) This is a distinction that is also present in Block (2023) when he distinguishes between immediate direct perceptual judgment and the immediate product of sensory transduction.
In this way, we can let the empirical methods of vision science guide our comprehension of the content of visual perception. This is a different way to identify the content of visual perception than appealing to Biconditional Intentionalism or Minimal Intentionalism as Conservatism and Liberalism do. Block (2023), for example, appeals to processing speed, brain regions, rivalry, and adaptation. By counting on vision science, we could use empirical objective evidence that does not rely solely on introspection or verbal reports. We can appeal to the brain areas that are involved in the process. For example, if early visual areas in the brain (V1, V2 and V3) are involved in inferential information processing, the content of those processes can be considered as percepts (Block, 2014, p. 570).

Also, vision science uses information related to the speed of perceptual processes. This aligns with our previous assertion that thinking processes are fast too. In vision science, perception, and cognition are differentiated in terms of milliseconds, which goes beyond what can be consciously detected by a perceiver to be part of their visual experience. For instance, object detection requires at least 150 ms, whereas detection of low-level features and certain high-level features, such as global features of scenes, only requires 20 ms (Bayne, 2016, p. 110). Finally, evidence suggests that emotions and faces can be considered percepts despite being considered high-level features by liberals and conservatives (Block, 2014). If these discoveries in vision science are correct, we perceive high-level features, and this is not determined by appealing solely to phenomenological considerations.

Vision science is a different approach from the phenomenological criterion, namely introspection, and the evidence obtained through vision science does not completely align with the distinction between low-level and high-level features. I claim that the alleged fundamental distinction between

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10 Adaptation is a perceptual phenomenon in which an adaptor stimulus leads to a perceptual bias opposite to the adaptor. For example, observing an angry face (the adaptor) could make a neutral face, observed immediately after observing the angry one, look fearful.
high and low-level features is the product of the use of phenomenological criterion. That is why certain results of vision science appear problematic for conservatives and liberals. Vision science will inevitably bring new distinctions. We could go along with these newer distinctions or accommodate our evidence to our previous intuitions.\(^{11}\)

The relationship between phenomenology and vision science is such that the categories used by both do not necessarily match. When it comes to [colors, motions, locations] and [natural kinds, emotions, causal properties, etc.], vision science has alternative methods to categorize these features that do not need to be based solely on phenomenology. This is good for vision science. For instance, even though faces and emotions are not low-level properties, they can still be considered percepts. This should not be viewed as support for Liberalism as presented in this paper. If the reason to believe that Liberalism is true is Minimal Intentionalism, then Liberalism lacks the evidential support. Nevertheless, I leave open the possibility that other ways to appeal for Liberalism or Conservatism could be available. What we should notice is that phenomenology alone cannot determine what counts as the content of vision.

However, phenomenology plays an important role in calibrating our empirical evidence. In cases where empirical evidence clashes with phenomenology, we must scrutinize whether our categories of perception and cognition are well-calibrated. It seems natural that our criteria for the content of vision should begin with the perception of colors, shapes, motions, and locations. But we shouldn’t treat this list dogmatically. If the list is indeed the product of the phenomenological criterion (introspection) and we have reasons to believe that the criteria is not a good way to answer the question (II) “How do we identify the content of visual perception?”, then we should use the list as a useful tool, but not as the only possible answer to the question (I) “What can we visually

\(^{11}\) Of course we can still critically evaluate the presuppositions, methods, and conclusions of vision science. We don’t have to simply accept it uncritically.
perceive?”. I believe that neither Particularism nor Methodism should be taken dogmatically, and this means that neither Conservatism nor Liberalism should be subscribed uncritically.

In this section, I have shown how insights from vision science could be a helpful way to overcome the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism regarding the contents of visual perception. This approach has significant implications as it forces us to move beyond the phenomenological considerations that are part of the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism. By relying on vision science, we could gain a different perspective that can help us understand what the contents of perception are.
I have argued that the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism could be better understood as a debate between two different intentionalist claims: Biconditional Intentionalism and Minimal Intentionalism. I suggest that Conservatism is committed to Biconditional Intentionalism, while Liberalism is committed to Minimal Intentionalism. Understanding these commitments could help us comprehend the roles of Twin-Earth scenarios and phenomenal contrast arguments in the debate between Conservatism and Liberalism.

Additionally, I have shown that the debate involves two different questions: (I) “What can we visually perceive?” and (II) “How do we identify the content of visual perception?”. Conservatives assume that we can visually perceive colors, shapes, and motions, and then they offer an answer to the second question by appealing to the phenomenal character of experiences of different subjects and their introspective reports. On the other hand, liberals are not committed to a specific list of features we perceive. Liberals and conservatives have two options: they could change the list of features that are part of the perceptual visual experience (admitting that other representational content beyond phenomenal content could be part of the visual experience), or they could change the criteria.
Only Conservatism, as a form of Particularism, is able to change the phenomenological criteria, namely its appeal to Introspection as determining the contents of visual experience. If Liberalism is indeed a form of Methodism, namely it is primarily committed with an answer to question (II) “How do we identify the contents of visual perception?”, then its commitment with the phenomenological criterion is fundamental and it could not abandon it.

I have also presented one problem for any form of Intentionalism, the Inverted Spectrum scenario. This scenario gives us more reasons to doubt the phenomenological criterion formulated in favor of Conservatism and Liberalism. Thus, I claim that we should acknowledge the limitations of phenomenology and redefine its role. By doing so, we can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of visual perception and its complexities. Therefore, we should focus on vision science and the way that approach could bring a better understanding of the contents of visual perception because it allows us to distinguish between visual representation and other forms of equally fast and automatic non-perceptual representation.
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