

# The Phenomenal Content of Perception

Conference organized by Charlotte Gauvry (University of Liège, Marie Curie COFUND)  
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## Presentation

Representationalism is the mainstream position in contemporary theory of perception and consciousness. Following the “Brentano thesis,” representationalism holds that intentionality is the distinctive mark of mental life. Additionally, representationalists often adopt the so-called “content view”, that is the semantic hypothesis that all mental states have accuracy conditions fixed by their *representational or propositional contents* (see Harman 1990, Tye 1995, Dretske 1995, Byrne 2001, etc.).

The goal of the conference is to listen to some dissenting voices which have emerged in the last decade (see Travis, 2004, Brewer 2006). The discussion will center on the relevance (or irrelevance) of the semantic approach to mental states and the idea of a propositional content of perception.

More precisely, the conference will focus on a hypothesis put forward by Tim Crane over the last twenty years, especially in his 2012 paper “The Given.” Although endorsing the intentionalist thesis according to which a mental state is necessarily *about a represented* object, Crane denies that this being “represented” should be analysed in strictly semantic terms. Instead, he proposes an alternative reading of “content” taking into account its *phenomenal* dimension. The idea is that the mental state of perception is not exhausted by its *propositional content*. Still more, the phenomenal content is predominant, inasmuch as a propositional content is supposed to be no more than the description of a phenomenal content.

Special attention will thus be paid to the phenomenal dimension of perceptual experience. May this experiential dimension be described — in opposition to the dubious and over-discussed qualia approach — in terms of “content” (and hence accuracy-conditions) without subscribing to representationalism? The relevance of what Crane calls his “third way” will be discussed from that angle, the question being whether it does not insidiously inherit some basic assumptions from the semantic approach.

In short, the conference will address the following questions:

- Is the phenomenal content approach a better alternative to the propositional content approach? Or do both approaches complement each other?
- Isn't the notion of “phenomenal content” self-contradictory, or at least misleading, as far as it still seems loaded with semantic, representationalist prejudices?
- Supposing that the notion of “phenomenal content” is too much problematic, how to describe the phenomenal dimension of perceptual experience if not in terms of “content”?
- Conversely, is it even possible to develop a consistent theory of mind which takes into account the complexity of (especially perceptual) mental states with no appeal to “contents”?

## **Confirmed Speakers**

Christophe AL-SALEH, Université de Picardie Jules Verne: “Is there Phenomenal Reasons?”

Jocelyn BENOIST, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

Robert BRISART, Facultés Universitaires Saint Louis, Université du Luxembourg

Tim CRANE, University of Cambridge

Arnaud DEWALQUE, Université de Liège: “The Phenomenal Structure of Perceptual Experiences”

Jérôme DOKIC, EHESS, Institut Jean Nicod

Charlotte GAUVRY, Université de Liège, Marie Curie Cofund: “An Alternative to Semantics?”

Andrea GIANANTI, Université de Fribourg, King’s College

Denis SERON, Université de Liège, FNRS: “Defining Intentionality”

Charles TRAVIS, King’s College, Universidade do Porto: “Deliverances (Indirection)”