Title: A new take on unconscious perception: individuating "representations by the individual" in terms of its content rather than action.

Presenting Author: Miguel Ángel Sebastián

Author(s): Miguel Ángel Sebastián, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

Abstract:

There has been a recent debate on whether there is unconscious perception (Block and Phillips 2016). Participants accept Burge’s definition according to which perception is constitutively a form of sensory, objective representation *by the individual*, where representations are attributable to the individual when they play the appropriate explanatory role in relation to individual actions. The debate then turns into whether there is any empirical evidence showing that one can have this kind of representations unconsciously. In this paper, I show that this approach leads to a dead end, and offer an alternative one to conclude that there is no unconscious perception.

I argue that there is no adequate characterization of action that can guide the empirical research as the contenders intend, because there is no characterization of action that simultaneously: i) is consistent with Block’s distinction between cognitive access and consciousness—accepted in the discussion and required to call into question the evidence from blindsight——, ii) is not too demanding so that it can be accepted by all parts, and iii) does not characterize as actions what we take to be clear cases of mere movements.

Alternatively, I argue that, rather than in terms of action, we should individuate representations by the individual in terms of the correctness conditions of the state: states attributable to the individual are those whose correctness conditions concern the very same individual doing the representations as such. Finally, on the basis of the subjective character of experience, I argue that conscious states constitutively concern its subject and not merely the world or some subsystem. In representational terms this entail that the correctness conditions of those states concern the very same individual doing the representations as such. The conclusion follows: if perceptual representations have to be attributable to the individual, then there is no unconscious perception.