

Experience as discrete

Josefa Toribio
ICREA-UB

The question of whether perception is continuous with cognition is in the limelight again. Although the answer to this question is empirical, there are important philosophical issues at stake: is observation theory-neutral? Do our beliefs, expectations, fears and emotions influence our perceptual experiences? And if they do, is this a threat to the general epistemological role of perception?

In this talk I approach the topic of the continuity of perception and cognition by focussing on a conditional argument involving the continuity thesis and the so-called “rich view” about the content of visual experience. According to the rich view, we can visually represent high-level properties such as being a pine tree, being breakable or being sad. The conditional claim I discuss is the following: if the content of visual experience is rich, then visual experience is continuous with cognition, i.e., visual experience is cognitively penetrable.

In the talk, I remain neutral on the empirical issue of whether or not visual experience or early vision processing is indeed cognitively penetrable. I argue, however, that the very same set of criteria that helps establishing the genuine sensory nature of our visual representations of (some) high-level properties makes the transition from the rich view to the continuity thesis problematic.