Beyond Phenomenal Naiveté

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On a natural description of what a mundane visual experience is like for its subject—of its phenomenal character, of how it is phenomenally—such an experience is phenomenally a direct or immediate awareness of entities in the scene before the subject’s eyes. For example, according to Strawson (1979, p. 97), “mature sensible experience (in general) presents itself as [...] an immediate consciousness of the existence of things outside of us”; according to Sturgeon (2000, p. 9), “Visual phenomenology makes it for a subject as if a scene is simply presented. Veridical perception, illusion and hallucination seem to place objects and their features directly before the mind”. According to many,¹ that experience is an immediate consciousness² of things outside of us is part of a naive view of experience: I therefore call the doctrine that an experience is, phenomenally, an immediate awareness of entities external to the subject Phenomenal Naiveté.

Unfortunately, Phenomenal Naiveté is incompatible with a natural suggestion as to the connection between the phenomenal character of a visual experience and the experience’s nature—namely, that while armchair philosophical reasoning or experimental psychology might play a crucial role, it cannot be the sole basis for our understanding of the nature of experience.


² I follow Snowdon (1992) in rejecting the view that the notion of immediacy gets no toehold in common sense; thus it is open for philosophical interpretation. My preferred interpretation is in line with a tradition including Jackson 1977, ch. 1, and Foster 1985, p. 159: from the perspective of this tradition (and, perhaps, against Snowdon), the distinction between mediacy and immediacy is highly generally applicable, having to do with constitution or lack thereof. A bit more specifically, for an experience to be a certain way (such as of o) mediately is for its being that way to be constituted by its being some other way in a contextually salient class of ways; for its being that way immediately is for its being that way not to be so constituted.
role in producing a theory of the nature of visual experience, this role would be limited to filling in the contours drawn by the phenomenal character of experience. On this suggestion, while the phenomenal character of an experience might leave crucial gaps as to its nature, there is no way that phenomenal character could mislead; if an experience has a certain feature phenomenally—if that feature is among its phenomenal characters—it has that feature in fact.

The conflict arises because a hallucinatory visual experience in which one is entirely unaware of the scene before one’s eyes would not in fact be an immediate awareness of external entities, though Phenomenal Naiveté might still be true of it: after all, Phenomenal Naiveté is very attractive as applied to ordinary veridical experience, and surely for any possible veridical experience, there is a possible hallucinatory experience which is phenomenally exactly the same way. But a hallucinatory experience of which Phenomenal Naiveté were true would be a certain way phenomenally which it is not in fact. Phenomenal character could mislead after all.

One might react to this paradoxical reasoning by accepting that an experience could be phenomenally $F$ but not $F$: that a hallucinatory experience could mislead not just about the world but about itself (cf. Martin 2004; Crane 2006). The aim of the present essay is, however, to explore the approach of preserving the view that phenomenal character cannot mislead by rejecting Phenomenal Naiveté, and offering, in its place, an alternative description of the phenomenal character of visual experience. On this alternative description, the phenomenal character of a veridical experience is a property that not just a veridical experience but also a hallucinatory experience could have: the phenomenal character of a hallucinatory experience does not mislead about its nature in the way described (it might mislead in some other way).

On the alternative description I offer, seeing the world is, phenomenally, like seeing a picture. In this, I take a cue from Cutting (2003, p. 216), who asks: “Is perceiving a picture like perceiving the world?” His answer: “Yes—and for some pictures to a large extent. This is one reason nonprofessional, candid photographs work so well; the cinema can act as such a culturally important surrogate for the everyday world; and precious little experience, if any, is needed to appreciate the content of pictures or film”. Cutting’s suggestion could be implemented in either of two ways. First, both an experience of a picture of a tree and an experience of the tree might be, phenomenally, immediately of the tree. Second, both an experience of a picture of a tree and an experience of the tree might be, phenomenally, mediate of the tree. I will take the latter approach. More specifically, I follow Wollheim (1980, 2003) in his suggestion that when one sees a painting of a tree, the phenomenal character of the experience is that one sees the tree and its features in the marked surface and its features: much as when one sees a whale in a cloud. The theory that emerges is in effect a phenomenally-based representative theory of the nature of perceptual experience, on which internal entities are objects of an immediate relation of experiencing, and these entities perceptually represent external entities to subjects. Thus, I disagree with Phenomenal Naiveté. But since I acknowledge its allure, it is fortunate that if my description of the phenomenal character of experience is correct, this allure can be explained away.

In the first section of this essay, I propose a minimal strategy for resolving the paradoxical reasoning while avoid-

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$^3$ Though there is no room to defend the point here, I find the possibility of phenomenal error most repugnant: concurring are Byrne (1997, pp. 104–5); Neander (1998, sec. 5); Siewert (in preparation); and—as Siewert somewhat astounding points out—Brentano (1874/1973, p. 20) himself, who claims, concerning conscious mental states, that “as they appear, so they are in reality”.

$^4$ Walton (1984) suggests a view of photographs on which in experience of a photograph of a tree, one, phenomenally, sees the tree but not the photograph.
ing the conclusion that phenomenal character can mislead. That strategy involves endorsing a highly abstract description of perceptual phenomenal character. In the second section, I fill in the details of that highly abstract description, completing the case for my alternative description of visual phenomenal character. The third section replies to a pair of objections against the minimal strategy. In the concluding, fourth section, I extract from these replies a diagnosis of the allure of Phenomenal Naiveté.

1. A Minimal Strategy for Resolving the Paradox

I begin with a bit of ground-clearing. First, to focus the discussion, the ontological category of the objects of experience under discussion will be restricted to property-instances or “tropes”: particular occurrences of properties, like this instance of redness, that instance of circularity, or Socrates’s snubnosedness. I don’t intend to imply that no other sort of entity is ever an object of experience (or to take any stand on the sorts of property, instances of which can be experienced).

Second, I will distinguish internal from external property-instances: a property-instance is internal (to a subject) iff it is instanced in the subject’s body (or mind, or soul); external otherwise. (Fine details concerning the boundaries of the subject, and whether relational properties are internal or external, won’t matter for the discussion).

Third, I will distinguish an immediate experience of an instance from an ostensible experience of an instance. An experience is ostensively of an instance of Fness iff it represents an instance of Fness; I follow standard practice in the literature (Harman, 1990) by taking representation of an instance of Fness to be compatible with the absence of any instance of Fness which is experienced. A hallucinatory experience could thus be ostensively of an instance of the property of being an elephant, since this amounts to the experience’s representing an instance of that property, which is compatible with the absence of any instance of that property (and thus the absence of any elephant) which is experienced. By contrast, as I understand the notion of immediacy, to immediately experience an instance of Fness is to be “given” or “acquainted with” such an instance, where givenness or acquaintance is a relation between a subject and an object, such that if one is given an instance of Fness it follows that there is some instance of Fness with which one is acquainted. A hallucinatory experience could thus not be immediately of an instance of the property of being an elephant, since this would require that there is some instance of this property (and thus some elephant) which is experienced, and the subject of a hallucinatory experience of an elephant experiences no elephant.

If the paradoxical reasoning is not to be resolved by accepting that a hallucinatory experience could have a misleading phenomenal character, Phenomenal Naiveté must be rejected. Since Phenomenal Naiveté is so plausible, one would minimize the amount of explaining away to be done by getting as close as possible to Phenomenal Naiveté without succumbing to paradox. How close is this? Phenomenal Naiveté entails both of the following claims:

1. An ordinary visual experience is, phenomenally, at least ostensibly of a property-instance which is external;
2. An ordinary visual experience is, phenomenally, of a property-instance which is immediately experienced.

(It may be of pedagogical value in understanding these claims to highlight the difference between being phenomenally of an F and being ostensibly of an F. Since e can be of an F either by being immediately of an F or ostensibly of an
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F, being phenomenally of an F is compatible with being immediately of an F (and therefore not ostensibly of an F.) Similarly, if there is (as is plausible) such a thing as unconscious representation, an experience can represent an F (and therefore be ostensibly of an F) without being phenomenally of an F (though it might have to be phenomenally some other way if it is to count as an experience at all). It is thus not redundant to say that e is phenomenally at least ostensibly of an F; another way of putting the claim is to say that among the phenomenal characters of F is at least the property of representing an F, and perhaps even the property of acquainting the subject with an F.)

One way to reject Phenomenal Naiveté would be to reject (1). (One could make this more specific by saying either that for any experienced property-instance, it is, phenomenally, internal; or that for any experienced property-instance, it is neither, phenomenally, internal, nor, phenomenally, external; or some combination of these.) But in taking this approach, one would incur an obligation to explain away the considerable plausibility of (1). (One who endorsed a classical sense-datum theory of the nature of perceptual experience on which internal entities are objects of acquaintance would need to take this approach.) Alternatively, one could reject (2)—e.g., by claiming that any phenomenal character of an experience is intrinsic, or at least not a relation to any individual. But, similarly, in taking this approach, one would incur an obligation to explain away the considerable plausibility of (2). One would need to take this approach if one endorsed a purely intentional theory of the nature of perceptual experience (Anscombe, 1965; Harman, 1990), on which for s to experience o is for there to be an intrinsic psychological correctness or satisfaction condition inhering in s’s experience together with a non-psychological relation of satisfaction or match holding between the condition and the object.

These explanatory obligations could be avoided were one to endorse both (1) and (2). And this can be done while avoiding paradox. One need merely reject the following:

Conjunctive Assumption

In any normal experience, some single experienced property-instance is both, phenomenally, external and, phenomenally, immediately experienced (perhaps this is true of many experienced property-instances).

One must rather accept of those experienced property-instances which are, phenomenally, external, that they are not, phenomenally, experienced immediately; and of those property-instances which are, phenomenally, experienced immediately, that they are not, phenomenally, external. Of course in accepting all this, one must accept that in any ordinary visual experience, more than one property-instance is experienced. But that this is so is obvious.

With this option in hand, the threat that the phenomenal character of an experience might mislead about its nature can be dissolved. The original difficulty, recall, was that a veridical experience conforms to Phenomenal Naiveté: is, phenomenally, an immediate experience of external entities. But since any way a veridical experience could be phenomenally, a hallucinatory experience could be phenomenally, it follows that a hallucinatory experience could be, phenomenally, an immediate experience of external entities. Since no hallucinatory experience is in fact an immediate experience of external entities, an experience could be phenomenally a way it is not: phenomenal character could mislead.

However, if it is never the case that, phenomenally, e is an immediate experience of external entities, the argument does not get off the ground. And accepting either (1) or (2)
cannot by itself bring the threat of phenomenal error: a hallucinatory experience could be ostensibly of an external property-instance, so that if, as per (1), it were this way phenomenally, this would not a fortiori mislead; and a hallucinatory experience could be immediately of a property-instance (if it were internal), so that if, as per (2), it were this way phenomenally, this would not a fortiori mislead, either. Nor can accepting (1) and (2) conjointly bring this threat, in the absence of the Conjunctive Assumption.

I therefore endorse the following set of attitudes as a minimal strategy for resolving the paradox:

(a) reject the possibility that phenomenal character might mislead;
(b) endorse (1);
(c) endorse (2); and
(d) reject the Conjunctive Assumption.

This set of attitudes seems to get one as close as possible to Phenomenal Naiveté while avoiding paradox.

Once this strategy has been brought out into the open, a number of tasks still require completion. First, an argument from transparency, running as follows, is in need of reply: perceptual experience has a phenomenal character of “transparency”; but this claim together with (2) entails the Conjunctive Assumption, rendering the minimal strategy unavailable. Second, an argument from presentation, running as follows, is in need of reply: perceptual experience has a phenomenal character of “presentation”; but this claim together with (1) entails the Conjunctive Assumption, once again rendering the minimal strategy unavailable. (Of course both these arguments at this point are little more than schemata, evocatively described: clarification will follow when appropriate.) And third, the allure of the Conjunctive Assumption is in need of diagnosis.

2. Fleshing out the Minimal Strategy

It will help in carrying out these tasks to put some flesh on the abstract bones of the minimal strategy. In this section, I will enflesh the minimal strategy by, first, displaying certain properties which, I will argue, witness (1) and (2), and, second, being more specific about the relation in which the experiences of these properties stand to one another, phenomenally.

2.1 Distal and Proximal Qualities

In this subsection, I will first ostend the properties I claim to witness (1) and (2), then argue, concerning the ostended properties, that they in fact do this. I will then assess the status of the properties that witness (2) as phenomenally, external, phenomenally, internal, or neither, pressing for the last of these.

2.1.1 Ostensible Experience of Proximal Qualities

I begin with a distinction between two sorts of properties that, phenomenally, one at least ostensibly experiences in any ordinary visual experience, which I will call the distal and the proximal qualities (I don’t mean to suggest by this terminology that there is anything especially “proximal” about these qualities; rather, I take up this terminology from Rock 1983; see also Todorovic 2002). The distinction can be drawn while leaving it open whether either the distal or the proximal qualities are, either in fact or phenomenally, immediate or mediate objects of experience; and for that matter whether either the distal or the proximal qualities are, either in fact or phenomenally, internal or external, let alone which specific theoretical properties they are to be identified with, if any. (I discuss some of the options that have been proposed on this issue below.) I argue as follows that, in any normal experience, phenomenally, both proximal and distal
qualities are at least ostensibly experienced: (i) color experiences have phenomenal characters that are not identical to any property of at least ostensibly experiencing any color or illumination property-instance; shape experiences have phenomenal characters that are not identical to any property of at least ostensibly experiencing any shape or orientation property-instance; (ii) these phenomenal characters are best taken to be properties of at least ostensibly experiencing instances of certain properties; therefore (iii) in ordinary color experiences, phenomenally, one at least ostensibly experiences instances of properties distinct from any color or illumination property, while in ordinary shape experiences, phenomenally, one at least ostensibly experiences instances of properties distinct from any shape or orientation property. These properties are proximal qualities; colors, illumination properties, shapes, and orientation properties are distal qualities. I will now argue in detail for (i), and then for (ii).

2.1.1.1 For (i)

Familiarly, visual experience is both color and shape constant. Take a white card seen under diffuse white light and bring it under diffuse blue light: it will not come to look blue but will rather continue to look white (though illuminated by blue light). Or take a penny seen head-on, and tilt it: it will not come to look elliptical but will continue to look circular (though tilted).

So consider an experience WW of a white card under white light and an experience WB of a white card under blue light. In the former experience, one experiences an instance of surface whiteness and an instance of illumination whiteness; in the latter, one experiences an instance of surface whiteness and an instance of illumination blueness. Moreover, this is how things are phenomenally in these experiences.

And consider an experience HP of a penny seen head-on and an experience TP of a penny seen tilted. In the former, one experiences an instance of the surface shape circularity and an instance of the orientation property head-on-ness; in the latter, one experiences an instance of the surface shape circularity and an instance of the orientation property tiltedness. Similarly, this is how things are phenomenally in these experiences.

But now consider two more experiences: BW, of a blue card under white light; and HE, of an elliptical object (like a Standard Oil sign) presented head-on. In BW, one experiences an instance of the color blueness and an instance of illumination whiteness; while in HE, one experiences an instance of the surface shape ellipticality and an instance of the orientation property head-on-ness. And this is how things are phenomenally in these experiences.

It is obvious upon reflection that BW and WB have a certain phenomenal character in common, which neither has in common with WW. Call this K. I will argue that what this amounts to is more specifically that there is a certain property B such that in BW, phenomenally, one at least ostensibly experiences B, and such that in WB, phenomenally, one at least ostensibly experiences B. And TP and HE have a certain phenomenal character L in common, which neither has in common with HP. And I will argue that what this amounts to is more specifically that in TP, phenomenally, there is a certain property E which one at least ostensibly experiences, and in HE, phenomenally, one at least ostensibly experiences this same property.

First, note that, considering K, this phenomenal character cannot be identified with (a) the property of at least ostensibly experiencing an instance of surface whiteness, (b) the property of at least ostensibly experiencing an instance of surface blueness, (c) the property of at least ostensibly ex-
periencing an instance of illumination blueness, or (d) the property of at least ostensibly experiencing an instance of illumination whiteness. After all, BW phenomenally has (a) and (d) but neither of the others, while WB phenomenally has (b) and (c) but neither of the others. (For that matter, WW phenomenally has (b) and (d) but neither of the others.) An analogous argument can be given that L is neither the property of at least ostensibly experiencing circularity, nor the property of at least ostensibly experiencing ellipticality, nor the property of at least ostensibly experiencing tiltedness, nor the property of at least ostensibly experiencing head-on-ness.

So if K is a property of the form ‘at least ostensibly experiencing an instance of Fness’, Fness in this case would seem to be neither a surface color nor an illumination property. And if L is a property of the form ‘at least ostensibly experiencing an instance of Fness’, Fness in this case would seem to be neither a shape nor an orientation property.

2.1.1.2 For (ii)
Are K and L properties of this form? The alternative would seem to be that they are rather “intrinsic qualities” of their respective experiences. One way to make this proposal a bit more specific would be to appeal to the evocative terminology of the “adverbial theorists” (Ducasse, 1942; Chisholm, 1957) and hold that in each of BW and WB, the card, or one of its property-instances, is “experienced bluely”, as it were; while in each of TP and HE, the seen object, or one of its property-instances, is “experienced elliptically”, as it were. On this proposal, K would be the referent of the adverb ‘bluely’, and L would be the referent of the adverb ‘elliptically’.

One could object to this proposal on the Moorean ground (Moore, 1903) that experience is entirely lacking in intrinsic qualitative phenomenal characters. But I’m not sure that this is in general correct, so my objection will concern features local to the cases under consideration. I find that when I reflect on K, I notice a certain property B which I find to very closely resemble the surface color blueness; while when I reflect on L, I notice a certain property E which I find to very closely resemble the shape property of being an ellipse. On the proposal, it is very hard to see what either of these properties could be taken to be of, other than the experiences themselves. But experiences, considered as unrepeatable, particular occurrences, are particular events in the mental life of a subject. And I find it very hard to see how an event could have either B or E: only a thing somehow extended in some sort of space could have these properties; but it does not make sense to speak of events as extended in space, except perhaps derivatively, by having spatially extended participants (cf. Shoemaker 1994, p. 231). Nor is it plausible that this is how things are phenomenally: my experience does not present itself to me as having the sort of incoherence necessary to subserve this proposal. So I conclude that neither B nor E is itself phenomenally or ostensibly a property of the experience, but must rather be (phenomenally, ostensibly) a property experienced in the experience. But if this is right, then K and L are both properties of the form ‘at least ostensibly

5 It’s actually doubtful that experiences are events, at least in the sense of ‘event’ in use in semantic theory (Parsons, 1990; Varzi, 2002). Rather, experiences seem to be activities. Events and activities are quite similar, both being “temporal” as opposed to “substantive” particulars in Price’s sense (Price, 1950), and the argumentation in the body text doesn’t turn on this distinction: activities can’t have properties like B or E, either (nor can repeatables, like properties). But a central linguistic test for distinguishing event-talk from activity-talk (Parsons, 1990, pp. 20–1; Varzi, 2002) suggests that experience-talk is activity-talk (and in turn that experiences are activities). While it makes sense to ask how long an experience of seeing a red thing lasted, it makes no sense to ask how long it took, since there is no sense in which an experience could culminate: experiences, like other activities, and unlike events (such as a baking of a cake), have no “telos” or goal. Henceforth I’ll elide this fine distinction, using the more familiar “event” terminology.
bly experiencing an instance of \textit{F}ness’. (For what it’s worth, this strikes me as the \textit{prima facie} natural description.)

And if this is right, it follows that there is some property \textit{B} which closely resembles the surface color blueness, which is neither a surface color nor an illumination property, and is such that in \textit{WB} and \textit{BW}, phenomenally, that property is at least ostensibly experienced. I call this property \textit{proximal blueness}. And it follows that there is some property \textit{E} which closely resembles the surface property of ellipticality, which is neither a shape property nor an orientation property, and is such that in \textit{TP} and \textit{HE}, phenomenally, that property is at least ostensibly experienced. I call this property \textit{proximal ellipticality}. Proximal blueness is a determinate of the more determinable property \textit{proximal color}. (I spare the reader the details of picking out this property by way of repeated reflections on such properties as \textit{proximal red}, which would be introduced by a trio of experiences just like \textit{BW}, \textit{WB}, and \textit{WW}, except that instead of a blue card and blue light, a red card and red light are involved.) And proximal ellipticality is a determinate of the more determinable \textit{proximal shape}. Most sweepingly the \textit{proximal qualities} include at least every proximal color and proximal shape. By contrast, the \textit{distal qualities} include at least surface colors, illumination properties, shapes, and orientations.\footnote{Moreover, for what it’s worth, the distinction between proximal and distal qualities as phenomenal objects of at least ostensible experience is a presupposition of much empirical work in perceptual psychology, an overview of which is to be found in Todorovic 2002. This seems to me to be good \textit{prima facie} evidence for endorsing the presupposition.}

Since in all relevant respects, \textit{BW}, \textit{WB}, \textit{TP}, and \textit{HE} are entirely ordinary, I conclude that in any ordinary experience, phenomenally, both distal and proximal qualities are at least ostensibly experienced.

2.1.2 Distal and Proximal Qualities and the Minimal Strategy

The discussion of the present subsection is, recall, intended to flesh out the minimal strategy. The minimal strategy endorses (1), that an ordinary visual experience is, phenomenally, of a property-instance which is external; and since it endorses (2), that an ordinary visual experience is, phenomenally, of a property-instance which is immediately experienced, it must also accept that an ordinary experience is of a property-instance which is not, phenomenally, external—either by being, phenomenally, internal, or by being neither, phenomenally, external, nor, phenomenally, internal.

The distinction between distal and proximal qualities provides the necessary witness properties. Distal qualities, I think it must be agreed, are, phenomenally, external. And I will now defend the following claim:

\begin{itemize}
  \item (3) Proximal qualities are neither, phenomenally, external, nor, phenomenally, internal.
\end{itemize}

I will provide a phenomenological argument and a historical argument for (3).\footnote{It may be that Moore agrees with (3). One way to explain why Moore is agnostic as to whether the sense-datum is part of the surface of his hand (Moore, 1925) is that he does not take a position whether proximal qualities are internal or external, and takes sense-data to be the bearers of proximal qualities, as in Moore 1957.}

2.1.2.1 Higher-Order Properties of Proximal Qualities

The phenomenological argument runs as follows. Instances of proximal qualities are not, phenomenally, at least ostensibly experienced as having higher-order properties which would settle their status as internal or external. (That is the \textit{key factual premiss} of the argument.) Now, I cannot see in what else an instance of \textit{F}’s being, phenomenally, internal
cells, or representations in the brain. No apparent higher-order spatial properties of proximal ellipticality will suffice to rule out internal properties as candidates for its identity.\footnote{A largely analogous story goes for proximal blueness. This quality looks to stand in certain similarity and exclusion relations to other proximal colors or “regions of the proximal color solid”, where this solid is isomorphic to the surface color solid. But various internal qualities, such as the various sorts of excitation of the opponency systems, also fall into solids isomorphic to the surface color solid. A possible source of disanalogy between the color and shape cases is that colors look to have a certain “ineffable qualitative aspect” not captured in structural relations in the color solid, while shapes seem to be characterizable in purely quantitative terms. Still, this ineffable aspect doesn’t seem to settle their status as internal or external either.}

Distal ellipticality, experienced in case \( HE \), and distal circularity, experienced in cases \( TP \) and \( HP \), look to have the higher-order property of being instantiated in the seen object. So if, in case \( TP \), proximal ellipticality looked to have the higher order property of being instantiated in the tilted penny, that would settle its status as external. But, or so it seems to me, proximal ellipticality does not look to be instantiated in the penny: experience leaves me with no firm sense of whether it is instantiated in the penny. Rather, it leaves me deeply uncertain as to what object it is instantiated in. Similarly, distal ellipticality and distal circularity look, perhaps, to continue to be instantiated despite my closing my eyes or tipping the penny head on or edge-on. But, or so it seems to me, proximal ellipticality does not look to have either of these higher-order properties.

I do not wish to deny, of course, that proximal qualities covary with distal qualities: change the surface color while holding the illumination constant, or change the illumination while holding the surface color constant, and the proximal color changes; tilt the penny of constant shape and the proximal shape changes; bring it closer and the proximal size changes. But when one watches a movie, the experienced qualities of the light projected on the screen covary with the experienced qualities of the actors in the movie; and

(external) could possibly consist aside from that instance’s being, phenomenally, at least ostensibly experienced as having some higher-order property which would settle its status as internal (external); and I do not see how an instance of \( F \)’s being phenomenally, internal (external) could be a primitive fact. So, if the key factual premiss is correct, (3) follows.

Now for defense of the key factual premiss. For an experience \( e \) of a proximal quality \( P \), enumerate the higher-order properties that, phenomenally, \( P \) has or ostensibly has in \( e \), and note that none of these higher-order properties determines a property which has it as internal or external. Then, for purposes of contrast, pick an experience \( e' \) of a suitably related distal quality \( D \), enumerate the higher-order properties that, phenomenally, \( D \) has or ostensibly has in \( e \) which determine \( D \) as external; and note that, phenomenally, \( P \) has none of those properties. To avoid an off-putting awkwardness of exposition, sometimes rather than saying “phenomenally, in \( e \), \( D \) at least ostensibly has the higher-order property \( F \)”, I will sometimes say “in \( e \), \( D \) looks to have \( F \)”.

Consider, for instance, proximal ellipticality. Standardly, this quality looks to have certain \textit{spatial} properties: it looks to be a shape property; it looks to have (or perhaps to confer upon its possessors) two axes of symmetry; to be convex (or perhaps to confer convexity upon its bearers); it looks to involve no straight edges or corners; and, it looks a certain way which upon (extensive) \textit{a priori} reflection, amounts to being definable in Cartesian coordinates as the curve traced out by, so to speak, a taut string attached to a pair of foci. These properties are all spatial properties and can therefore be defined in terms of a suitable distance function. The mathematical notion of a distance function is highly abstract and has natural applications to relationships between entities other than their distances in physical, external space; for instance, it might apply to a relationship between retinal
this does not mean that the actors in the movie look to have the qualities of the projected light.

2.1.2.2 The Paper Trail

The historical argument for (3) runs, in outline, like this. The historical record of discussion by philosophers and psychologists of the location of proximal qualities manifests considerable confusion as to their location, by contrast with discussion of distal qualities, where (almost) all agree they are external; this indicates that pretheoretically we have no clue about the location of proximal qualities but have a strong pretheoretic opinion that distal qualities are external; the best explanation of this contrast in our pretheoretic opinions is that distal qualities look external while proximal qualities neither look external nor look internal.

Now to fill in the outline. Among philosophers, who typically discuss proximal qualities when inquiring after their nature, there is considerable disagreement as to their status. According to some (Russell, 1912, ch. I; Peacocke, 1983; Lormand, 1994), proximal colors and shapes are internal properties, such as qualities of the optical system or brain. For instance, experiences of proximal blueness are correlated with tokenings of such internal properties as the property (of retinal nerve cells) of receiving a beam of light with a waveform in a certain class; as the property (of retinal nerve cells) of sending off a signal down the optic nerve of a certain sort (namely, that characteristic of receipt of waveforms in that class); and as the property (of representations in the brain) of being tokened in a certain way (namely, the way characteristic of representations influenced by elliptical stimulation of retinal cells.

Others disagree with this identification of proximal qualities with internal properties, taking proximal qualities to be external. For instance, Noë (2006, fn. 7) suggests that proximal colors are surface colors, so that in WB one—inconsistently—experiences both surface whiteness and surface blueness. (Hume might agree: see Hume 1739/1978, pp. 210–1). Shoemaker (1994) suggests that proximal colors are dispositional properties of surfaces, such as the disposition to cause in one an experience with a certain quality. A number of philosophers (Harman, 1990, p. 250; Hill, 1991, pp. 97–9; Lycan, 1996, secs. 11–12; Tye, 2000, pp. 77–9; Byrne, 2001, sec. 5) have suggested that proximal ellipticality is the property (of external objects) of projecting an elliptical shape onto a certain frontal plane (that parallel to the plane of the viewer’s retina). An anonymous referee has suggested that proximal qualities might be disjunctions of conjunctions of distal qualities. (Egan [forthcoming] argues that proximal qualities are not properties at all, but rather property-like entities which he calls “centering features”.)

Among psychologists, who discuss proximal qualities but rarely if ever in the context of this metaphysical project, there is considerable confusion as to their status. For instance, Rock (1983, pp. 253, 256–7) first claims that “extensity” or proximal size is an “aspect of an object’s size”—evidently, an external property—then claims that it is an “elliptical retinal image”—evidently, an internal property—then admits that “it is difficult to describe the nature of this aspect of shape perception”. But he manifests no corresponding uncertainty about distal shapes. Among more metaphysically attuned psychologists, a studied lack of commitment is found as to the status of proximal qualities:
for instance, in a recent survey of the psychological literature on perceptual experience of distal and proximal qualities, Todorovic (2002, p. 41) detects a settled view in the psychological community that distal qualities are external, but no settled view about proximal qualities.

By contrast, while the occasional projectivist/idealist philosopher maintains that distal qualities are internal, the vast majority of philosophers who believe in the distal qualities and take an opinion on their location take them to be external: among contemporary theorists of color, Perkins (1983) and Boghossian and Velleman (1989, 1991) are to my knowledge alone in endorsing projectivism; one has to go back to early 20th Century phenomenalism to find significant advocacy of the view that distal shapes are internal. As for psychologists, I know of no disagreement as to the location of the distal qualities.

Surely a major source of this asymmetry is that we have a strong pretheoretic intuition that distal qualities are external, while we lack any pretheoretic intuition of significant strength about the location of proximal qualities. The clash with intuition of projectivism is acknowledged as a cost of the view on both sides, and few have flocked to Berkeley’s notorious claim that idealism is the naive view. Indeed, I know of no one who endorses projectivism or any of its variants on any but theoretical grounds.9

What could the source of this asymmetry be? The vast majority of the information about distal and proximal qualities available to the naive comes from perceptual experience. So such an asymmetry could not be sustained without a comparable asymmetry in how distal and proximal qualities look, with the former looking external and the latter neither looking external nor looking internal. One might object that the naive could remain neutral on the status of proximal qualities even in the presence of perceptual information about them if they had ignored proximal qualities. But the philosophers and psychologists who have discussed proximal qualities have not ignored them, and still seem strongly to face a deficit of naive intuition as to their status. So this line of objection seems to be blocked. I conclude that (3) is established: proximal qualities neither look external nor look internal.

2.1.3 Summary—And a Concluding Point

I have attempted, in this subsection, to establish the following points:

- Distal qualities witness the quantifier in (1);
- Proximal qualities witness the quantifier in (2);
- Proximal qualities are neither, phenomenally, internal, nor, phenomenally, external.

These points leave open the question of whether distal qualities are (a) phenomenally, experienced mediately; or rather (b) neither, phenomenally, experienced mediately nor, phenomenally, experienced immediately. In the next subsection I will argue for (a).

Before doing so, I want to point out that while in any normal experience both proximal and distal qualities are, phenomenally, at least ostensibly experienced, the same is not so clearly correct of experiences that might be regarded as abnormal. Consider experience of a “red, round” afterimage. Sometimes one mistakes the afterimage for a distally

9 Somewhat ironically in light of their commitment to the phenomenal externality of all ostensible objects of experience (to be discussed below), Harman (1990, p. 250: “I do not mean to suggest that the way the tree is visually presented as being from here is something that is easily expressed in words”) and Tye (2000, p. 78: “For a person to undergo an experience that represents one thing as larger relative to his viewing point than another [...] the person does not need to have any cognitive grasp of subtended angles”; cf. p. 79), both seem to agree that we have no pretheoretic clue as to the natures of proximal sizes.
red and round smudge on the wall, or a distally red and round will-o’-the-wisp. If this is a perceptual mistake, it seems fair that one, phenomenally, at least ostensibly experiences instances of distal redness and circularity (and also proximal redness and circularity). However, one does not always make a perceptual mistake of this sort. Sometimes, the afterimage seems to be a mere “hole in the visual field”, rather than looking to be anything external. In this case, plausibly, phenomenally, one fails to even ostensibly experience any instance of a distal shape or color. Rather, phenomenally, one at least ostensibly experiences only instances of proximal redness and proximal roundness.\footnote{If one sometimes experiences instances of proximal qualities but not instances of distal qualities, this has two significant philosophical consequences.}

First, it undermines the claim that every visual experience has some representational content (Chalmers, 2005). The simplest case of this is a visual experience in which one closes one’s eyes in a darkened room. Here there is no doubt that one’s experience is, phenomenally, at least ostensibly of a field of a color-like “blackness” quality. The obvious representationalist treatment of this case is to say that in this case, one visually represents that a certain (distally positioned?) field is (distal?) black; on the view I am pressing, one immediately, nonrepresentationally experiences an internal field suffused with proximal blackness. One sees no properties in it, and therefore representationally visually experiences nothing. (A similar treatment lends itself to the cases discussed at Tye 2000, pp. 86–8.)

Second, the availability of the treatment undermines a certain argument that vision represents our causal interactions with seen objects. Siegel (forthcoming) describes a case in which a doll begins to act like an afterimage, remaining in a fixed position in the visual field. She claims that there would be a phenomenal difference between a “slice” of this experience and a “slice” of a normal experience of the same doll in the same position in the visual field with the same surrounding. In her view, (i) the phenomenal difference is a difference in the representational contents of the two slices, and (ii) the subjects of the two slices would visually represent the same distal shapes, orientations, colors, and illuminations. Siegel suggests that the difference in content is that in the normal case, one visually represents certain facts about causal interaction between one and the doll. However, my treatment suggests an alternative to (ii): in the normal case, one sees distal qualities in the proximal qualities, while in the afterimage case one does not, so that the difference in content is a difference in which distal shapes, orientations, colors, and illuminations are represented.

\subsection*{2.2 Seeing In} In this subsection, I will assess how, in an experience like \textit{WB}, the experience of distal whiteness and the experience of proximal blueness are, phenomenally, related (or in an experience like \textit{TP} how the experience of distal circularity and the experience of proximal ellipticality are, phenomenally, related).

My principal goal is to argue that when a proximal quality and a distal quality are “experienced together” in this way, phenomenally, the experience \textit{d} of the distal quality has the experience \textit{p} of the proximal quality as a (proper) part, in a sense to be clarified. Parthood is, as I will argue, a sort of mediation. So I am arguing that at least some visual experience is, phenomenally, mediate.

I will clarify what I mean by the claim that \textit{p} is part of \textit{d} by considering an objection. \textit{d} and \textit{p} are both events, and a natural first impression would be that when event \textit{e} is part of event \textit{e'}, \textit{e} would be either a spatial or a temporal part of \textit{e'} (e.g., the War in the Pacific was a spatial part, while the period of United States involvement was a temporal part, of World War II; if a stoplight is in a state of oscillating among green, yellow, and red for a certain period, its being red for a certain period is part of this state). But it does not seem that \textit{d} must have \textit{p} as temporal part; and in any sense that could be given to calling \textit{p} a spatial part of \textit{d}, nor does it seem that \textit{p} is a spatial part of \textit{d}. In reply: the first impression is wrong, since an event can have a proper part which exactly overlaps it in space and in time. In the roasting of a goat on a spit, the rotating of the goat and the heating of the goat are both events, and each is a proper part of the roasting, though each exactly overlaps the roasting in space and time (Lewis, 1986a). Here the rotating is a part in the sense of a constituent of the roasting. The constituent-of relation is highly determinable; the spatial-part-of and temporal-part-of relations...
are among its determinates. My thesis will be that, phenomenally, \( p \) is a part of \( d \) in the sense that \( p \) bears some determine of the constituent-of relationship to \( d \); more generally:

\[ (4) \text{ For a proximal quality and a distal quality to be “experienced together” (in the sense under consideration) is for the experience of the proximal quality to be, phenomenally, a part (in the sense described) of the experience of the distal quality.} \]

In a moment, I provide a suggestive consideration on behalf of (4); I then provide an argument for it.

But first I pause to consider the fact, of central significance for avoiding the paradox, that (4) seems to be compatible with the phenomenal accuracy of a representative theory of perception—namely, with the claim that an experienced distal quality is always, phenomenally, represented to the subject by the proximal quality in which it is experienced, where representation is compatible with the nonexistence of the represented entity. I find it obscure how to go about assessing on the basis of phenomenological study whether in light of (4), an experienced distal quality is always, phenomenally, \emph{represented} as opposed to being, phenomenally, \emph{given} (if mediatelty) or of a phenomenal character indeterminate as between these two. In light of this, I answer the question by noting that the second of these would be just as bad as Phenomenal Naiveté from the standpoint of generating phenomenal characters which mislead about hallucinatory experiences; given the undesirability of admitting this, I conclude that either the first or the third must hold.

\subsection*{2.2.1 The Suggestive Consideration}

Consider some paradigm cases of partial constitution: kidney-timeslice \( k \) partly constitutes organism-timeslice \( o \); pitch \( p \) partly constitutes a baseball game \( g \); John’s earning \( \$50,000 \) \( e \) partly constitutes John’s state \( j \) of being a judge (Szabó, 2003); the heating \( h \) of the goat partly constitutes its roasting \( r \). Two features are common to these cases: (i) co-presence and (ii) asymmetric existential dependence. I don’t claim that if (i) and (ii) are met by a certain pair, one member of the pair constitutes the other: the reader will doubtless have little difficulty constructing perverse counterexamples to the thesis. But that (i) and (ii) are met strongly suggests that one member constitutes the other: indeed, that this is so constitutes a \emph{prima facie} compelling explanation why (i) and (ii) are met. I will argue that both these features are met by \( p \) and \( d \)(in the right direction). I won’t survey every possible explanation to rule out the perverse ones—this is one of the reasons I put this case forth as merely suggestive—but I hope that these considerations will increase the reader’s confidence level in (4).

To see what I mean by ‘co-presence’, consider the following test. Ask: could I direct my attention over the portion of reality containing \( a \) in some way without thereby also directing my attention over the portion of reality containing \( b \)? Now ask the same the other way around. If the answer to either question was ‘no’, then \( a \) and \( b \) are co-present in the intended sense. (I recognize that the notion of a “portion of reality” is imprecise; this is another of the reasons I put this case forth as merely suggestive). For instance, one cannot direct one’s attention over the portion of reality containing \( k \) without directing one’s attention over the portion of reality containing \( o \)(after all, wherever \( k \) is, \( o \) is, if not the other way

\footnote{The suggestive consideration follows these modally flavored remarks by Moore (1957, p. 134): “It seems to me quite plain that I cannot ‘see’ in the common sense any physical object whatever without its ‘looking’ somehow to me, and, therefore, without my directly seeing some entity which has R to the object I am said to see”.

around); one cannot direct one’s attention over the portion of reality containing $c$ without directing one’s attention over the portion of reality containing $j$ (after all, $e$ is an aspect of the career $j$); and so forth. By contrast, Rove and Noquist are not in this sense co-present: if Rove is in Texas and Noquist is in Washington, one can direct attention over Texas (the portion of reality containing Rove) without directing it over Washington (the portion of reality containing Noquist), and vice versa. For some pairs of co-present entities, neither constitutes the other. Perhaps a ghost-timeslice is in the process of passing through a machine-timeslice; if so, then the test for co-presence is met, but neither constitutes the other.

To see what I mean by ‘asymmetric existential dependence’, consider the following test. Ask: suppose that all the entities of the same kind as $a$ located in the portion of reality containing $b$ were to cease to exist without being replaced by other entities of that kind. Would $b$ thereby cease to exist? Now ask the question the other way around. If the answers to these questions are different, then the one which would thereby disappear is asymmetrically existentially dependent upon the other. (I recognize that the notion of a “kind of entity” is imprecise; this is a third reason why I put this case forth as merely suggestive.) For instance, if all the organs located in the portion of reality containing $o$ were to cease to exist without being replaced by other entities of that kind, $o$ would cease to exist. But it does not seem that if all the organisms located in the portion of reality containing $k$ were to cease to exist, $k$ would cease to exist: the organs making up $o$ might become scattered, thereby resulting in the annihilation of $o$, whilst $k$ remained attached to an artificial support mechanism. Or, if John’s earning of $50,000$ were to cease to exist without being replaced by any other events of compensation, perhaps John’s career of being a judge would be at an end: plausibly, being a judge is a job; being a volunteer arbitrator would be an altogether different sort of thing. But it does not seem that if John’s career as a judge (or any other job) were to end, John’s earnings would thereby cease to exist: John might win the lottery and quit his job. By contrast, neither of the co-present ghost-timeslice and machine-timeslice seem to be asymmetrically existentially dependent on the other.

Now, consider the experience $WB$. Here, the experience of proximal blueness and the experience of distal whiteness seem to pass the test for co-presence. By contrast, if one sees two objects, one a few inches to the left of the other, one’s experiences of the color of one and the color of the other seem to fail this test: the portions of visual field containing those experiences no more overlap than do Washington and Texas.

But consider an experience of a red, round tomato. Here the experience of the color and the shape of the tomato seem to pass the test for co-presence: the portion of the visual field containing the former overlaps that containing the latter exactly. Still, these experiences do not pass the test for asymmetric existential dependence (in either direction): delete all experience of color (perhaps because the lights have turned down so low that no colors are visible) and the shape might still be experienced; delete all experience of shape (perhaps because the tomato is being observed from so close up that it fills the visual field) and the color might still be experienced.

But it seems that, in $WB$, the experience of proximal blueness and the experience of distal whiteness are co-present: the portion of the visual field containing the former overlaps that containing the latter exactly. And the latter experience seems to be asymmetrically existentially dependent on the former. Delete all experience of distal qualities, and the
and the former experience might still occur. After all, as I argued in the “concluding point” of the previous subsection, experience of proximal qualities without experience of distal qualities seems, if far from the norm, then at least relatively mundane. By contrast, I cannot imagine how experience as it actually is of distal qualities could possibly occur without experience of proximal qualities: would there be merely a “glow” of color without any actually experienced quality from which it glows? Contemplating the possibility reduces one to inarticulacy.

So when one experiences a proximal and a distal quality “together”, the two are co-present; and the experience of the latter is asymmetrically existentially dependent on the experience of the former. So the prima facie test for constitution indicates that the experience of the distal quality is partly constituted by the experience of the proximal quality. Finally, since the argument given here appealed only to aspects of experience revealed to phenomenal study, I conclude that (4) is correct.

2.2.2 The Argument

I will argue that first, to experience a distal quality “together with” a proximal quality is, phenomenally, to experience the distal quality in the proximal quality (cf. Noë 2006, fn. 7); and second, that to experience \( a \) in \( b \) is for one’s experience of \( b \) to be, phenomenally, part of one’s experience of \( a \).

Two sorts of considerations support the first claim. First, consider an experience PTP in which one sees a painting of a tilted penny. In such an experience, as Wollheim (1980, 2003) points out, one, phenomenally, at least ostensibly experiences both the elliptical shape on the canvas and the circular shape of the depicted penny, the latter in the former. I claim that the relation between one’s experience of the elliptical shape and one’s experience of the circular shape in experience PTP is, phenomenally, the same as the relation between one’s experience of proximal ellipticality and one’s experience of distal circularity in experience TP: phenomenally, one experiences distal circularity in proximal ellipticality.

Consider how these relations strike you: does first-personal reflection on experience enable you to detect any differences between these two relations? Of course there are phenomenal differences between the experiences taken as a whole: TP involves a much stronger impression of three-dimensionality; PTP involves a “paradoxical” combination of experienced flatness and three-dimensionality. But just focusing on the relation between the subexperiences of the properties in PTP and the relation between those in TP, I find no phenomenal difference. But if not, then one experiences distal qualities in proximal qualities.

Second, note that experiencing-in is transitive. Suppose that one sees a photograph of the Mona Lisa: then one sees the Mona Lisa in the photograph, and sees Lisa in the Mona Lisa; but one also sees Lisa in the photograph; and this seems to generalize.

Now consider experience PTP. One experiences proximal ellipticality, distal ellipticality, and distal circularity. One experiences the first “together with” the second; the second “together with” the third; and—I daresay—the first “together with” the third. Moreover, the case seems to generalize: in the Mona Lisa case, one experiences Lisa’s shape, the shape of the outline of Lisa on the Mona Lisa, the shape of that outline on the photo, and some proximal shape all “together” (in the relevant sense).

It would be nice if this interaction between seeing-in and experiencing a distal quality together with a proximal quality could be explained in more primitive terms. The simplest explanation is that the relation between an experience of a
proximal quality and an experience of a distal quality seen “together with” it is just the same as the relation between an experience of a shape on a painting and an experience of a shape when the latter shape is seen in the former shape: one experiences distal qualities in proximal qualities.

Now, concerning the second claim: phenomenally, experiencing-in is a kind of experiential mediation. When one experiences a in b, one’s experience of a is, phenomenally, mediated by one’s experience of b. When one sees a whale or its shape in a cloud, the whale (its shape) is not, phenomenally, immediately presented to one. Rather, phenomenally, it is experienced by experiencing the cloud. And, when e occurs by e’ occurring, e is mediated by e’ (according to Jackson’s classic analysis of mediation in Jackson 1977, ch. 1).

Now, there seem to be two ways in which e can occur by e’ occurring. Either e’ causes e, or e’ constitutes e. But, phenomenally, when one experiences a in b, one’s experience of b is not, phenomenally, a cause of one’s experience of a. After all, one’s experience of a and one’s experience of b are, phenomenally, simultaneous. And if e causes e’, the two events are not simultaneous. So, to experience a in b is for one’s experience of b to, phenomenally, partly constitute one’s experience of a, as per (4).

As a bonus, note that if this last claim is correct, the transitivity of experiencing-in can be explained. If seeing a in b is just having one’s experience of b (phenomenally, and thus given our presuppositions, in fact) as part of one’s experience of a, such an explanation falls directly out of the transitivity of parthood: one’s experience of Lisa has (in fact and phenomenally) one’s experience of the Mona Lisa as a part, which has one’s experience of the photo (in fact and phenomenally) as a part; so one’s experience of Lisa has one’s experience of the photo as a part. So, “de-analyzing”, one sees Lisa in the photo.12

2.3 Summary

The position on the phenomenal character of visual experience taken by the advocate of the minimal strategy is that an ordinary visual experience is, phenomenally, of a property-instance which is external, and, phenomenally, of a property-instance which is immediately experienced; where no property-instance meets both the former and the latter conditions.

In the previous section, I defended this minimal strategy as the best reply to the paradox. In this section, I have suggested that the minimal strategy should be enhanced in the following four ways. First, the properties whose instances are, phenomenally, external are such distal qualities as distal circularity, distal ellipticality, flatness, tiltedness, distal blueness, distal whiteness, blue illumination, and white illumination. Second, the properties whose instances are, phenomenally, immediately experienced are such proximal qualities as proximal circularity, proximal ellipticality, proximal blueness, and proximal whiteness. Third, these proximal qualities are neither, phenomenally, internal nor, phenomenally, external. Fourth, when a distal quality is “experienced together” with a proximal quality, the experience of the distal quality is, phenomenally, mediated by the experience of the proximal quality; more specifically, the latter experience is, phenomenally, part of the former; more specifically still, the distal quality is seen in the proximal quality.

12 Note also that, according to Wollheim (2003, p. 3), “when I look at the Manet, my perception is twofold in that I simultaneously am visually aware of the marked surface and experience [...] a clump of trees. These are two aspects of a single experience. They are not two experiences: they are not two simultaneous experiences, [...] nor are they two alternating experiences”. It seems wrong to say that when one sees a in b, the experience of a and the experience of b are not two experiences—one is of a and the other is not, after all. Still, if one endorses Lewis’s view that a thing is “partly identical” with its parts (Lewis, 1991, sec. 3.6), then Wollheim’s claim is partly true.
3 Criticisms of the Minimal Strategy

In this section, I will discuss two objections to the minimal strategy for resolving the paradox: one from an alleged phenomenal character of “transparency”, and one from an alleged phenomenal character of “presentation”. My discussion of these issues will presuppose the fleshed-out version of the minimal strategy, developed in the previous section.

3.1 Transparency

First, the argument from transparency. Recall that the argument runs: perceptual experience has a phenomenal character of “transparency”; but this claim together with (2) entails the Conjunctive Assumption, rendering the minimal strategy unavailable. The key point in need of explication is the claim that experience has a phenomenal character of “transparency”, a claim much discussed in the recent literature. The claim is metaphorical, of course: in the literal sense, it is material objects that are transparent, and experiences are not material objects. The metaphor has been cashed out in the recent literature in a number of different ways, only one of which threatens the minimal strategy.

The threatening claim can be extracted from Harman’s allegation that “when you see a tree, [...] the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree” (Harman, 1990, p. 251), which he presents as the result of phenomenological study. Evidently, then, Harman endorses the claim that when one sees a tree, phenomenally, the only features there to turn one’s attention to will be features of the tree. Given that, phenomenally, the tree is external, this amounts to the claim that when one sees a tree, phenomenally, the only features the experience is of are external. It is clear from the context that the claim is intended to apply to all normal experiences; so Harman seems to intend the following:

(5) For any quality-instance and any normal experience, if, phenomenally, the latter is at least ostensibly of the former, then, phenomenally, the former is external.

(5) is popular (Byrne, 2002; Dretske, 1995; Hilbert and Kalderon, 2000; Levine, 2003; Loar, 2003a,b; Lycan, 2001; Martin, 2002; Shoemaker, 1991, 1994, 2001; Thau, 2002; Tye, 1992, 1995, 2000) and conflicts with the minimal strategy: after all, the Conjunctive Assumption follows from (5) together with (2). But I will provide a pair of explanations of the allure of (5) that do not assume its truth. If these explanations are successful, the minimal strategy emerges unscathed.

First, perhaps (5) derives its popularity from a tendency to be confused with one of the following claims sometimes appearing in the literature under the rubric of “transparency”: that one cannot become introspectively aware of intrinsic qualities of experience; or, for that matter, that every phenomenal character is not, or not phenomenally, or phenomenally not, an intrinsic quality of experience (Moore, 1903; Harman, 1990, p. 251; Shoemaker, 1990, pp. 100–1, 1991, p. 132; Tye, 1995, p. 30, 2000, pp. 45–6); that one can never turn one’s attention away from distal qualities, or qualities which look external (Martin, 2002, p. 380; Siewert, 2004, p. 35); or that one can only learn which phenomenal character a visual experience has by determining which qualities one at least ostensibly experiences in that experience (Byrne, 2001, sec. 3). But the minimal strategy isn’t committed to rejecting any of these claims.

Second, perhaps (5) derives its popularity from the fact
that, when assessing whether it is true, its advocates have only considered distal qualities (which do look external). After all, with noteworthy consistency, advocates of (5) take themselves to have established the claim merely after examining distal qualities. For instance, Harman (1990, p. 251) discusses the “colors” one experiences; Shoemaker discusses “the blue” and “the red” (1990, pp. 100–1) and the “colors, tastes” (1991, p. 132) one experiences; Tye discusses the “blueness and squareness” (1995, p. 30) and the “blueness” and “roundness” (2000, pp. 45–6) one experiences; Lycan (2001, p. 20) discusses the “yellowness” one experiences. I know of no explicit attempt to assess whether proximal qualities in particular look external. Advocates of (5) have of course discussed experience of proximal qualities: e.g., Harman’s and Tye’s discussions of proximal shape mentioned in section 2.1.2.2. Still, without exception, the claim defended about experience of proximal qualities is that such experience is compatible with the claim that every experienced or ostensibly experienced quality is external, because nothing in the phenomenal character of those experiences rules out theoretically identifying proximal sizes with these or those external properties. But this is compatible with (3).

Proximal qualities seem to have been ignored. But if some aspect of phenomenal character has been ignored, then the subject’s thoughts about that aspect will treat it as if it does not exist, and its presence will not be reflected in the subject’s theoretical work.

One might protest: surely the advocates of (5) were not so careless as to ignore proximal qualities. But I will now give two reasons not to be surprised if proximal qualities had been ignored.

The first is that we seem to have a general tendency to ignore proximal qualities, and that turning attention to them requires a special effort of will; by contrast, our natural direction of focus is on distal qualities. (This point seems to be strongly suggested by the fact that producing realistic paintings is difficult or impossible for the untrained subject.) I won’t speculate on what causes our natural focus to point in this direction: this seems to be an empirical matter for psychologists of perception to discover. Perhaps the answer is as straightforward as the one Broad (1923, pp. 95–6) gives, namely, that we ignore proximal qualities because we don’t care about them—because only distal qualities, as Broad puts it, “cut any ice”.\(^{13}\)

The second is based in a peculiar aspect of the discussion of color or shape experience: (a) we tend to gravitate toward considering a particular sort of scenario when thinking about color or shape experience; and (b) in this sort of scenario, proximal and distal qualities are very difficult to discriminate. But turning one’s attention from a to b requires discriminating a from b, so that if one’s attention were already on distal qualities, it would be very difficult for one to turn one’s attention to proximal qualities. I will now argue for (a) and (b).

First, concerning (a). Consider the request to consider an experience of a red thing—a request undoubtedly familiar to

\(^{13}\) For a vivid example of how our interests can influence what captures attention and what is ignored, note that when watching television or movies, one’s attention is drawn to distal qualities seen in the representing image and away from the qualities of the TV screen in which those distal qualities are seen. Once I watched an old, decaying videotape of Johnny Guitar. At the beginning of the movie, I was very annoyed that the image jumped with a loud squawk every few seconds. Eventually, I became wrapped up in the action. As the credits began to roll, I snapped to noticing the incredibly annoying effect once again. Had I come to ignore the annoying effect as I became wrapped up in the exciting narrative? Incredulous, I rewound the tape to determine whether the annoying effect had temporarily vanished because the middle of the tape was in better condition than the ends. Astonishingly, the annoying effect had never vanished—my powers of ignoring had suppressed it from my attention!

Similarly, wrapped up in the condition of distal qualities, we simply pay no attention to proximal qualities. Although they are, phenomenally, at least ostensibly experienced, from the standpoint of the subject’s thought about the experience, they may as well not be there.
one with even a passing familiarity in the literature under discussion. The request may seem to be underdetermined: what color is the illumination? One naturally fills in the request by assuming it to be white.

Now, concerning (b). When a distal color is seen under white light, that color is difficult to distinguish from the proximal color in which it is seen: for instance, in experience BW, proximal blueness is difficult to distinguish from distal blueness. After all, there is some higher-order property that captures much of how proximal blue looks to one, which also captures much of how surface blue looks to one. In particular, as argued above, proximal blue looks to stand in the same relations of similarity and exclusion to other proximal colors as surface blue looks to stand in to other surface colors; both also look “cool” and less than maximally “saturated”. And, if there is an “ineffable qualitative” aspect to colors not exhausted in these quantifiable and synesthetic higher-order properties, both proximal and surface blue look to one to have this aspect.

By which features is one to distinguish the proximal from the distal color in case BW? The distal color appears to one as being on the surface of an object, while, as argued above, the proximal color appears to one neither as on the surface of an object nor as not on the surface of an object. But this won’t enable one to tel surface and proximal color apart (one can’t be confident that the proximal color isn’t on the surface of an object); and there is no other difference in how they appear to one. So, it seems, one won’t be able to discriminate them at all; as I was attempting to show.14

14 The resemblance of a proximal quality to the distal quality seen in it under certain environmental conditions seems to generalize to certain flat surface shapes such as ellipticality, circularity, and squaresness: proximal ellipticality resembles surface ellipticality when the latter is seen head-on. This effect does not manifest for 3-D shapes not intimately tied to flat surface shapes. What is the canonical viewing condition for a Henry Moore sculpture, or an Eames chair? But note that in the thought experiments of the advocates of (5), the shape qualities described are 2-D: squareness and roundness.

15 This must be taken to exclude picture experiences, since when one sees x in a picture, one, phenomenally, at least ostensibly experiences x, but, phenomenally, the experience of x is mediated.

3.2 Presentation

I will now consider the objection from presentation. Recall that the argument runs: perceptual experience has a phenomenal character of “presentation”; but this claim together with (1) entails the Conjunctive Assumption, rendering the minimal strategy unavailable. The key point in need of explication is the claim that experience has a phenomenal character of “presentation”, a claim garnering less self-conscious treatment in the recent literature than the claim that experience is transparent, but which still has a grip over philosophical discussion of perceptual experience stretching back centuries (Hellie, 2001, pp. 14–16). The persistence of this tendency strongly suggests that it has a basis in the phenomenal character. Once again the metaphor must be cashed out; and once again a number of ways of cashing it out fail to threaten the minimal strategy.

The terminology of ‘present’ strongly suggests immediacy: if a person is present at a meeting, the person is directly in the meeting room, rather than off in a cafe; so a thought that is very likely conveyed by the metaphor is that if one’s experience of x takes the form of presentation of x to one, one immediately experiences x. So the following principle seems very plausible:

(6) For any quality-instance and any normal experience, if, phenomenally, the latter is at least ostensibly of the former, then, phenomenally, the former is an object of immediate experience.
(6) is popular—endorsed by Sturgeon (2000) and Martin (2002), among others, and discussed sympathetically by Crane (2006)—if contested, and conflicts with the minimal strategy: after all, the Conjunctive Assumption follows from (6) together with (1). But I will provide two explanations of the allure of (6) which do not assume its truth. If these explanations succeed, the minimal strategy emerges unscathed.

First, perhaps (6) derives its popularity from the association of presentation with passivity: if an alpaca coat is presented (given as a present) to Richard, Richard passively receives the coat, rather than actively acquiring it. Consider along similar lines the thought that perception involves “givenness”, or, in Kantian terminology, “receptivity”. (Searle [1983, p. 46] seems to be endorsing this idea in his claim that a visual experience has an “involuntariness which is not shared by a belief”.)

If perception involved a phenomenal character of passive consciousness—if, for any quality-instance and any normal experience, if, phenomenally, the latter is at least ostensibly of the former, then, phenomenally, the former is an object of passive consciousness—this would also distinguish perception from thought and explain their phenomenal differences. Intuitively, perceiving x is a kind of consciousness of x that is not an action, while thinking about x is a type of action. After all, we take credit or blame for our thoughts: one who thinks vile thoughts is liable to keep this fact to himself, while internally excoriating himself for this; one who thinks clever thoughts is liable to share them with friends so as to bask in their acclaim. By contrast, the victim of an unpleasant experience is to be pitied (as such) and the beneficiary of a pleasant experience perhaps envied (as such), but neither is to be praised or blamed (as such). What are praiseworthy and blameworthy are actions; events that merely happen to one are neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy. It is difficult to see what the source of these distinctive reactive attitudes would be aside from the phenomenal contrast I describe. So, plausibly, perception does involve a phenomenal character of “presentation” in the sense of passivity, but this is not at odds with the minimal strategy.

Second, one of my central claims about proximal qualities (defended in the previous subsection) and one of my central claims about experiential mediation—namely, (4)—together yield an explanation of the allure of (6). Suppose that one is assessing (6). One might go about doing this as follows:

(a) Focus on some experience, and try to determine by introspective reflection whether, in that experience, something is an immediate object of experience. One of my central claims about experiential mediation is that any normal visual experience, phenomenally, has an immediate experience of something as a part. Since this is so, the result of one’s introspection would be positive: one would determine that, in that experience, something is indeed an immediate object of experience.

(b) Still focused on that experience, try to determine by introspective reflection whether anything is a mediate object of experience. A natural way to do this would be to find a mediating entity. But if one does not know what to look for, one is unlikely to do so: after all, in accord with one of my central claims about proximal qualities, we are very likely to ignore them. Failing to notice any mediating entity, the result of introspection would be negative: one would determine that, in that experience, nothing is a mediate object of

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16 For instance, Noë (2006) claims that phenomenally, proximal qualities are present, while distal qualities are, phenomenally, at best “present as absent”. While I’m not certain I understand Noë’s claim here, I strongly suspect he intends that while distal qualities are objects of perceptual experience, they are not presented in experience. If this is what Noë intends, it strikes me as correct.
experience.

Putting these two results together (and recognizing that they were arrived at via introspective reflection), one would conclude that (6) is the case.

4 The Allure of the Conjunctive Assumption

At this point, it is but a small step to an explanation of the allure of the Conjunctive Assumption. Having convinced oneself of (6), one might then go on to consider by introspective reflection whether the immediately experienced entities are internal or external. Fishing around for an entity to assess this question about, one would likely ignore any instances of proximal qualities, and instead attend only to instances of distal qualities. These of course look external, so one would conclude that they are external. Recognizing that this conclusion was reached via introspective reflection, one would conclude that, in any experience, a single experienced property-instance is both, phenomenally, external and, phenomenally, immediately experienced. But this is just the Conjunctive Assumption.

Notice that if I am correct about the reasoning that leads to the allure of (5), (6), and the Conjunctive Assumption, this reasoning rests on ignoring a certain fact which serves to undermine these theses: namely, that every experience is, phenomenally, in part of instances of proximal qualities. For this reason, the fact that these doctrines are alluring provides no evidence for them. We are guilty of a sort of projective error: we project the feature of being immediately experienced, which is in fact a feature of proximal qualities, out onto mediately experienced distal qualities.¹⁷

¹⁷Unlike more familiar projective error theories of color (Boghossian and Velleman, 1989), my view is not that we are inclined to misascribe internal features to external objects. First, we misascribe the nature of our perceptual condition with respect to proximal features to distal features; and second, the error is cognitive, in how we think about experience, rather than in experience itself.

To put my projective error theory in some sort of historical perspective, note that on one way of reading Hume’s early presentation of an “argument from illusion” in ‘Skepticism Concerning the Senses’ (Hume, 1739/1978, pp. 210–1), he intends to show that once we turn our attention to proximal qualities, we will inevitably be led to overturn our pretheoretic conception of experience. The discussion of this essay can be taken in this spirit. Our pretheoretic view of the phenomenal character of experience is given by Phenomenal Naiveté. But Phenomenal Naiveté derives its allure from our tendency to ignore proximal qualities. Once we turn our attention to proximal qualities, the allure of Phenomenal Naiveté evaporates.

I don’t agree with Hume’s claim that only “a very little reflection and philosophy is sufficient” to overturn our pretheoretic view (the preceding discussion consists of, I dare-say, quite a substantial helping of philosophy); and while Hume was concerned to correct what he took to be an error in our pretheoretic conception of the nature of experience, my aim is to correct an error in our pretheoretic conception of the phenomenal character of experience. But squint enough, and Hume and I are in agreement.¹⁸

¹⁸Thanks to many, including David Bourget, Alex Byrne, Dave Chalmers, Tim Crane, Emily Esch, Tamar Szabó Gendler, Delia Graff, David Jehle, Monica Jitareanu, Colin King, Phil Kremer, Michael Lachelt, Martin Lin, Alva Noë, Chris Peacocke, Karl Schafer, Sydney Shoemaker, Zoltán Gendler Szabó, Dejan Todorovic, Michael Tye, Bob Van Gulick, Brian Weatherson, Josh Weisberg, an audience at Cornell University, the members of the Summer 2005 Berlin Impromptu Mind Reading Group, and my Fall 2005 seminar on perception. A higher level of thanks to Susanna Siegel and one of the anonymous referees for this journal. A still higher level of thanks to Jessica Wilson, with whom I have discussed practically every idea in this paper, and the other anonymous referee for this journal, without whose supererogatorily sympathetic (and doubtless time-consuming) reports, I would not have written the paper I wanted to.
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