

THE LIMITATIONS OF PERCEPTUAL TRANSPARENCY

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My first aim in this paper is to show that the transparency claim cannot serve the purpose to which it is assigned; that is, the idea that perceptual experience is transparent is no help whatsoever in motivating an externalist account of phenomenal character. My second aim is to show that the internalist qualia theorist's response to the transparency idea has been unnecessarily concessive to the externalist. Surprisingly, internalists seem to allow that much of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience depends essentially (and not just causally) upon externally located properties. They argue that we can also be aware of internal, non-intentional qualia. I present an alternative response the internalist can make to the transparency claim: phenomenal character is wholly internal, and seeming to be aware of externally located properties just is being aware of internally constituted experiential features.

Keywords: perception, perceptual experience, transparency, representationalism, externalism, qualia theory.

I. INTRODUCTION

The idea that perceptual experience is transparent has been used by philosophers who hold an externalist account of the metaphysics of perceptual experience—naïve realists and externalist representationalists. In the next section, I will argue that we must distinguish between what I call *phenomenological transparency* and *metaphysical transparency*.

Perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent if and only if it is true that the properties we are aware of during a perceptual experience all *seem* to us to be externally located.

Perceptual experience is metaphysically transparent if and only if all the properties we are aware of *are in fact* externally located.

The difference between these two kinds of transparency should be perfectly obvious, and yet, as we will see, they have often been conflated. It is essential that we keep these two notions distinct since introspection could only ever reveal phenomenological transparency, and yet the externalist needs to establish *metaphysical* transparency. Even if we allow that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent, I will argue that we have no good reason for thinking that we can make the transition from phenomenological to metaphysical transparency. Consequently, the notion of transparency turns out to be a free-wheeling cog in the debate about the metaphysics of perceptual experience.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider the standard response internalist qualia theorists make when faced with the claim that perceptual experience is transparent. This will be the subject of the final section. Qualia theorists claim that introspection reveals properties which seem to be (and in fact are) properties of our own experiences. However, and this is very surprising, when we consider the qualia theorist's analysis in more detail, we find that it allows that *almost all* of the phenomenal character of our perceptual experience depends essentially (and not just causally) upon externally located properties.¹ In other words, this account seems to grant much of the externalist's analysis of the *metaphysical* nature of perceptual experience. I argue that this response is far too concessive to the externalist. I describe an alternative response the qualia theorist can make to the externalist's transparency claim. They can claim that the phenomenal character of our perceptual experiences is entirely internally constituted, and it just seems to us that the relevant phenomenal properties are externally located. Indeed, our awareness of properties which seem to be externally located is in fact an awareness of internally constituted features of our experience.²

¹ A mental state is internal if 'it does not depend—except perhaps causally—upon what goes on "outside the head" of the experiencer' (Horgan and Tienson 2002: 521). Externalists hold that our experiences depend essentially, and not just causally, on relations to objects and/ or properties in our mind-independent environment.

² Of course, the internalist owes us an explanation of what it means to be aware of internally constituted features of one's experience. One option would be to hold that there is a twoplace awareness relation to qualia. Another option would be to go adverbialist and deny that 'awareness', here, is a two-place relation. If qualia are held to be mental (and not physical) properties, then the first of these views would have much in common with the sense-data theory—perceptual experiences will have an act/object structure, even though the 'object'

II. A DISTINCTION: PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRANSPARENCY AND METAPHYSICAL TRANSPARENCY

According to the transparency claim, when we introspect our perceptual experiences, we do not seem to be aware of internal features of our experience. We seem only to be aware of externally located properties. Gilbert Harman provides us with one of the most frequently quoted examples of this idea:

When Eloise sees a tree before her, the colors she experiences are all experienced as features of the tree and its surroundings. None of them are experienced as intrinsic features of her experience. Nor does she experience any features of anything as intrinsic features of her experiences. . . Look at a tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict that you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree. . . (Harman 1990: 39)

The claim that perceptual experience is transparent should, in the first instance, be understood as a claim about the *phenomenology* of perceptual experience. Since we are to use introspection to determine whether or not our perceptual experiences exhibit transparency, the debate about whether or not our perceptual experiences are in fact transparent must begin with whether *it seems to us* that the only properties we are aware of during our perceptual experiences are externally located properties. In which case, if introspection leads us to affirm that perceptual experiences are transparent, what we are affirming is that it *seems to us* that we are only aware of externally located properties. Likewise, if introspection leads us to deny that perceptual experiences are transparent, what we are denying is that it *seems to us* that we are only aware of externally located properties.

Of course, many philosophers who appeal to the notion of transparency do so in order to make a claim about the metaphysics of perceptual experience. They want to promote the idea that perceptual experiences are *metaphysically* transparent, that the phenomenal character of the experience depends

is not externally located. Note, views upon which perceptual experiences involve a relation to a mental particular are typically thought to be internalist. As such, metaphysical transparency will be denied by proponents of these positions. This is significant because it demonstrates that the debate over whether perceptual experiences have an act/object structure does not map onto the debate over whether perceptual experiences are metaphysically transparent. Both versions of the qualia theory I have described here and the sense-data theory must deny metaphysical transparency, even though the relational version of qualia theory and the sense-data theory endorse the act/object model.

essentially on the subject standing in a two-place awareness relation to properties which *are in fact* externally located. There are two positions in the philosophy of perception which make use of transparency in this way: naïve realism, which is the view that perceptual experiences are partly constituted by external objects and properties (Brewer 2006; Campbell 2002) and externalist representationalism, which is the view that the phenomenal character of our perceptual experience is not realized by our internal constitution, but depends essentially upon the externally located properties which are represented during perceptual experience (Dretske 1995, 1996, 2000; Lycan 1996; Tye 1995, 2000, 2014).³

In this section, I will explain why the distinction between phenomenological and metaphysical transparency is important and provide some examples of cases where it is ignored. But first, a point of clarification is in order. The transparency claim is sometimes taken to be an argument for representationalism, with those who deny that perceptual experiences are transparent taking their arguments against transparency to be arguments against representationalism. Perhaps this would be appropriate if discussions about transparency were limited to discussions about phenomenological transparency; that is, if proponents of the transparency idea were only trying to establish that phenomenal character is constituted by a relation to properties which *seem* to us to be externally located. It would then be natural to interpret this in representationalist terms and say that phenomenal character is co-extensive with properties we represent objects as having, whilst remaining neutral about whether the properties, and indeed the objects, are in fact externally located. However, it is clear from the way transparency is described, and the examples used to illustrate the idea (see those quoted in this section and Section IV) that neither those philosophers who endorse it, nor those who deny it, understand the idea of transparency in the purely phenomenological sense.⁴ Participants in the debate clearly have metaphysical transparency in mind, and metaphysical transparency only supports externalist views: naïve realism and the externalist version of representationalism. Consequently, while an argument against metaphysical transparency is an argument against

³ It is best to frame the transparency debate as a debate over whether all the properties one experiences are experienced as being externally located rather than as a debate over whether we seem to be aware of properties of our experiences. This is because, for the naïve realist, externally located objects and properties partly constitute our experiences, so in being aware of externally located objects and properties we are also aware of properties of our experience. Matthew Kennedy makes this point in his 2009.

⁴ Speaks (2014) may be an exception.

externalism, it is not (necessarily) an argument against representationalism *tout court*. (Charles Siewert also makes this point in his 2003.) It is possible to be a representationalist and hold that phenomenal character and representational content are co-extensive (in other words, there is no need to posit additional non-representational/ non-intentional qualia to explain phenomenal character), while holding that phenomenal character (hence representational content) are internally realized. Internalist representationalists deny metaphysical transparency *and* the existence of non-intentional qualia. (For the contemporary origins of this view; see Horgan and Tienson 2002; Loar 2003a,b.⁵)⁶

Let us return now to the distinction between phenomenological and metaphysical transparency. One way of using an appeal to the transparency of perceptual experience to argue for an externalist account of phenomenal character is to argue that perceptual experiences are *phenomenologically* transparent, and claim that the best explanation of this is their being *metaphysically* transparent. Alternatively, one could argue that our account of the metaphysics of perceptual experience should accord with the phenomenology of perceptual experience. Many philosophers are reluctant to charge our perceptual experiences with being radically inaccurate or misleading. Both of these routes are intuitive (although I think ultimately unsuccessful) ways of trying to use phenomenological transparency to establish transparency as a metaphysical thesis about perceptual experience. I will consider this matter in more detail in the next section. For now, the important point to note is that the question of whether it *seems* to us that our perceptual experiences consist in two-place awareness relations to externally located properties is independent from the question of whether, as a matter of fact, they consist in two-place awareness relations to externally located properties. That is, the question of whether perceptual experience is *phenomenologically* transparent is distinct from the question of whether perceptual experience is *metaphysically* transparent.

⁵ Brian Loar is often listed as a proponent of the qualia view. This is a mistake if the qualia view is understood in the standard way; the view according to which qualia are non-intentional properties of experience which must be posited to fully explain the phenomenal character of perceptual experience. For Loar, qualia are intrinsically intentional and so his view is a version of internalist intentionalism. Loar does not think that we need to posit non-intentional properties to explain perceptual experience.

⁶ It is, of course, also possible to argue against the representationalist view that phenomenal character and representational content are co-extensive without depending upon the notion of transparency. See Millar (2011).

Now, it should be obvious that introspection is silent on the matter of the metaphysics of perceptual experience. And yet one occasionally comes across the assumption that the metaphysical transparency of perceptual experience is itself revealed through introspection. This manoeuvre by-passes the claim that perceptual experiences are phenomenologically transparent altogether. Consider the following:

The key transparency claims are as follows: in a case of normal perception, if we introspect:

- (1) We are not aware of features of our visual experience.
- (2) We are not aware of the visual experience itself.
- (3) We cannot attend to features of the visual experience.
- (4) The only features of which we are aware and to which we can attend are external features (colors and shapes of surfaces, for example) (Tye 2014: 40).

Michael Tye is clearly defining metaphysical transparency here, and the assumption seems to be that the truth of these claims is revealed by introspection. However, metaphysical transparency is not something that can be revealed by introspection—it must be argued for, perhaps using the phenomenological transparency of perceptual experience as a premise. Although it is quite rare to find philosophers assuming from the outset that introspection can reveal metaphysical transparency, it is common to find the two kinds of transparency being conflated:

Via introspection, you are directly aware of a range of qualities that you experience as being qualities of surfaces at varying distances away and orientations and thereby you are aware of the phenomenal character of your experience. By being aware of the external qualities, you are aware of what it is like for you. (Tye 2000: 47, my emphasis.)

The first italicized phrase makes the claim that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent. One can experience qualities *as* being qualities of surfaces regardless of whether the surfaces actually possess these properties, indeed, regardless of whether there are in fact any surfaces present. However, the final italicized phrase makes the claim that perceptual experience is metaphysically transparent. It is claimed that the phenomenal character of one's perceptual experience is constituted by properties which *are in fact* externally located: one is aware 'of the external qualities'.

Amy Kind's discussion of Tye's transparency claim inherits this confusion. She describes Tye's view in the following way:

In introspecting a visual experience of object *O*, *one is not directly aware of any qualities of the experience itself* but only of a range of qualities *experienced as being qualities of the surfaces of O* (let us call these 'surface qualities'). It is only by being *aware of these surface qualities* that one is aware that one's visual experience has the phenomenal character that it does. (Kind 2003: 231, my emphasis.)

The first italicized phrase makes the claim that perceptual experience is metaphysically transparent. The second italicized phrase can be understood as describing phenomenological transparency, since the qualities in question are experienced *as* being qualities of surfaces (whether they are in fact qualities of the surfaces is left open). The final italicized statement is ambiguous (the ambiguity turns on whether it is appropriate to call properties that *seem* to be surface properties 'surface properties'); however, it is most naturally read as describing metaphysical transparency—the phenomenal character of the experience is constituted by properties which are in fact externally located. Again, the fact (if it is one) that *it seems to us* when we introspect our perceptual experiences that all the properties which constitute the phenomenal character of our experience are externally located tells us nothing (yet) about whether all these properties *are in fact* externally located. As I have explained, the conflation between phenomenological and metaphysical transparency is present in Tye's original argument; however, it is significant that Kind (who is keen to deny the force of transparency claims) fails to notice it.

The prevalence of this conflation between phenomenological and metaphysical transparency is evidenced by the fact that a number of philosophers offer an inaccurate rendering of the Harman passage I quoted earlier. The last line of Harman's description of transparency reads: 'I predict that you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree'. Martine Nida Rümelin, Daniel Stoljar and Tye all quote Harman thus: 'I predict that you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the tree' (Nida Rümelin 2007; Stoljar 2004; Tye 2014). The removal of 'presented' changes Harman's description of phenomenological transparency into a description of

metaphysical transparency.⁷ This confusion over the two kinds of transparency is perpetuated by members of both sides of the transparency debate. Loar describes the transparency claim as the view that:

visual experience is *transparent*: when you attend to a visual experience as it is going on, you will notice its objects, i.e. *the things you see or apparently see, including their apparent properties and relations*, and you will notice your (diaphanous) visual relation *to those external objects and properties*. (Loar 2003a: 1, my emphasis.)

Much of this description fits with the idea of phenomenological transparency (note the use of ‘apparently see’ and ‘apparent properties and relations’ in the first italicized phrase), but the second italicized phrase can only be read as a description of metaphysical transparency. The term ‘apparent’ disappears and our perceptual experience becomes a relation to external objects and properties.

It is rather worrying that this conflation of metaphysical and phenomenological transparency, prevalent in the literature, has remained unnoticed.⁸ It is obvious after paying the matter a little consideration that introspection is not the sort of thing that could possibly reveal this kind of metaphysical truth about perceptual experience. It is quite clear that the transparency idea can only be deployed with the aim of establishing that perceptual experience is *phenomenologically* transparent. That is, if it is successful, the transparency claim can show that all the properties we are aware of during a perceptual experience *seem* to be externally located properties. As it stands, the idea of transparency tells us nothing about the metaphysics of perceptual experience.

⁷ Although Harman’s remarks on transparency can be interpreted as describing phenomenological (rather than metaphysical) transparency, it is clear from the fact that Harman deems it necessary to postulate ‘intentional objects’ (understood in a rather substantive sense) to explain hallucinatory cases that he does in fact regard perceptual experience as being metaphysically transparent. (It is only if perceptual experiences are metaphysically transparent that there needs to be a relatum in the hallucinatory case.)

⁸ Galen Strawson makes a distinction between ‘phenomenological transparentism’ and ‘metaphysical transparentism’, although his distinction is rather different from mine. Strawson is concerned with the idea of direct perception, and he defines metaphysical transparentism as the view that ‘the process of perception of an object does in fact metaphysically involve a passage through something—a sensation—even if we experience ourselves as directly in contact with the object’ (2015: 243). He rejects metaphysical transparentism because he feels it does not allow perception to be genuinely direct. I have defined metaphysical transparency as the idea that the phenomenal character of our perceptual experiences depends essentially upon properties which are externally located.

III. IS PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRANSPARENCY EVIDENCE OF METAPHYSICAL TRANSPARENCY?

I have argued that it is only legitimate to use introspection in the attempt to establish phenomenological transparency. Note, it is not my concern to assess whether perceptual experience is in fact phenomenologically transparent, nor indeed whether introspection can ultimately decide the issue. My point is that it is only legitimate to use introspection *with the aim* of establishing how our experiences seem to us. It cannot be used to reveal the metaphysical nature of our experiences.

In this section, I want to consider whether there are any reasons for thinking that the phenomenological transparency of perceptual experience could be used to argue that perceptual experience is metaphysically transparent. Therefore, let's assume for the sake of argument that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent. When we introspect our perceptual experiences, the properties we are aware of all seem to be externally located. Should we take this as evidence of metaphysical transparency, that all the properties we are aware of are in fact externally located? It may seem natural to think that we should, that in the absence of reasons to think otherwise, we should assume that things are as they seem.⁹ However, it seems to me that we do have a very good reason for questioning whether things are as they seem when it comes to our perceptual experiences. The existence of illusions and hallucinations provides us with a particularly compelling reason to doubt whether all our perceptual experiences involve properties which are externally located. Although hallucinations are quite rare, minor illusions are extremely common; we very often make mistakes about the colour, shape, size and location of the objects and properties in our environment. In other words, we frequently ascribe to objects properties they do not in fact possess. It seems, then, that we have good grounds for questioning our initial assumption that the fact that the phenomenal character of our experience seems to depend essentially on externally located properties is an indication that it genuinely does.

Indeed, whenever we find ourselves considering whether the way things seem to us reflects the underlying metaphysical reality, it seems reasonable to stipulate that our default position should be a sceptical one. History is replete with failed attempts to move from something's seeming to be a certain way to

⁹ This position is known as phenomenal conservatism. (See Huemer 2001; Tucker 2013.)

its actually being that way. (Some well-known examples: the Earth is flat; the sun orbits the Earth; all organisms were designed by a creator; human beings cannot be purely physical beings and so on.) If the move from phenomenological transparency to metaphysical transparency is going to be credible in the case of perceptual experience, we need to be provided with a good argument.

III.1 The argument that phenomenology reflects metaphysics

Unfortunately, even those philosophers who do not simply equate phenomenological and metaphysical transparency seem to assume that the move from the first kind of transparency to the second is such a natural one that nothing much is required in the way of actual argument. Michael Martin gives voice to one reason for moving from phenomenological transparency to metaphysical transparency: ‘surely it is preferable, if possible, to endorse a theory of perception that better fits the introspective data’ (Martin 2002: 379). Whilst undeniably tempting, this is not a particularly persuasive reason given our humbling track-record of failed attempts to determine metaphysics from how things seem to us. Of course, our metaphysical theories must be able to *explain* the phenomenology of our experiences—we certainly must not reject our experiences simply because they fit uneasily with our theories. However, our theories can explain the phenomenology of our experiences without *mirroring* or *matching* how things seem in experience. To take an obvious example, the theory that the Earth orbits the sun explains our experience as of the sun orbiting the Earth. But our theory does not, of course, match or mirror our experience—quite the contrary.

Not only is the idea that our theory should mirror the findings of introspection unconvincing; it is an idea that any disjunctivist would do well to avoid. Disjunctivism involves a rejection of the idea that subjectively indistinguishable hallucinations form a common kind with normal perceptual experiences. Since this common kind claim is motivated primarily by introspective evidence, disjunctivists must say that introspection misleads us in this instance. The idea that we should reject the findings of introspection and refuse to move from the phenomenological common kind claim (it seems to us in introspection that normal and hallucinatory experiences form a common kind) to the metaphysical common kind claim (these experiences really do form a common kind) is in tension with the idea that we should think

that perceptual experience is metaphysically transparent simply because it seems to be. Rejecting the findings of introspection in one case but not in others would be ad hoc.

III.2 The argument from the best explanation

The other reason for thinking that an appeal to phenomenological transparency might be useful for establishing metaphysical transparency is that the metaphysical transparency of perceptual experience would best explain their phenomenological transparency. Unfortunately, since the mistake of equating these notions is so pervasive, it is difficult to find examples of detailed best explanation arguments for deriving the metaphysical claim from the phenomenological claim. However, I will consider a number of reasons we might have for thinking that metaphysical transparency is the best explanation for phenomenological transparency, and argue that none of them are persuasive.

Perhaps, the most widely held idea is that if perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent and *not* metaphysically transparent, then perceptual experience is hugely erroneous. Tye says:

To suppose that the qualities of which perceivers are directly aware in undergoing ordinary, everyday visual experiences are really qualities of the experiences would be to convict such experiences of massive error. That is just not credible. It seems totally implausible to hold that visual experience is systematically misleading in this way. (2000: 46)

It is difficult to identify precisely why it should be implausible for our experiences to be systematically misleading. One possible explanation is that we have the kinds of perceptual experiences we do because such experiences benefitted our evolutionary ancestors and aided their survival. Since we are organisms which must successfully interact with the world in order to survive, our perceptual experience must be accurate in order for us to be able to do this. In other words, we should think that perceptual experience is metaphysically transparent, because, if it was misleading, we could not possibly make our way around the world so successfully.

This idea turns on an assumption that is widely made, that success depends on accuracy. While this assumption is certainly *prima facie* intuitive, a little

reflection reveals its naivety. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche launches what is now a famous attack on the idea that success requires accuracy, and his remarks seem in keeping with our scientific understanding of at least some elements of perceptual experience.¹⁰ Let me give one example. Most scientists and many philosophers believe that our colour experiences do not accurately reflect those properties of objects that are involved in our coming to have colour experiences. In other words, objects do not have ‘colours-as-we-see-them’ (see Mackie 1976 for the origins of this phrase). Certainly, objects have properties which are causally implicated in our having colour experience, but only a very few philosophers (and no scientists that I am aware of) think that objects have colour properties in the way common-sense suggests. (See Gow 2014 for an argument that even (realist) physicalism about colour properties is a version of eliminativism about colours qua colours-as-we-see-them.) If the scientists are right then our colour experiences, which are incredibly useful in enabling us easily to distinguish objects from each other, recognize objects quickly and so on, are in fact misleading. They do not reveal how objects are ‘in themselves’.

The upshot of this is that perceptual experience does not need to be accurate to be successful.¹¹ And, in fact, this point stands regardless of the actual metaphysics of colour properties. Imagine a world where no objects are coloured; everyone involved in the colour debate can agree that if the organisms living in such a world evolved to see objects as having colour properties, they would find it much easier to navigate around their world. This is enough to show that success does not depend on accuracy. It is perfectly possible for our experiences to be the result of causal interactions with our environment, and to give rise to behaviour which is successful, without those experiences having to ‘match’ the way our environment really is. Since *success* is the principle by which the process of natural selection operates, and our phenomenologically transparent perceptual experiences can be successful whether or not they are metaphysically transparent, their success cannot support a best explanation argument for metaphysical transparency.

¹⁰ See in particular part one: on the prejudices of philosophers.

¹¹ Note David Pitt’s response to the quotation from Tye: ‘On the contrary, I would argue, if visual experience were *not* systematically misleading—if it didn’t present itself as something it is not (viz., external reality)—it would be completely *useless*. Transparency is an illusion made necessary by the facts that what experience is supposed to represent is external to the mind, while experience itself is internal.’ (Pitt 2011: 154 f12)

Tye does offer a more explicit best explanation argument for the idea that perceptual experience is metaphysically transparent. However, his argument begins with the assumption that introspection reveals that we are not aware of properties of experiences:

If you are attending to how things look to you, as opposed to how they are independent of how they look, you are bringing to bear your faculty of introspection. But in so doing, you are not aware of any inner object or thing. The only objects of which you are aware are the external ones making up the scene before your eyes. (Tye 2000: 46–7)

In other words, when Tye claims that his account (which is committed to metaphysical transparency) is the best explanation of phenomenological transparency, he means it is a better explanation than those theories which *already agree* that we are not aware of properties of our experiences (he mentions the sense-data theory as an example).

(Representationalism) in its pure form, I maintain, gives us the best account of the nature of visual experience and its phenomenal character, *consistent with what introspection tells us*. (Tye 2000: 112, my emphasis.)

Tye does not argue that metaphysical transparency is a better explanation for phenomenological transparency than the qualia theorist's account, upon which we are actually aware of properties or features of our experiences. His conflation of phenomenological and metaphysical transparency means he has already assumed that introspection demonstrates the falsity of this view. Since Tye's best explanation argument clearly begs the question against the qualia theorist, it cannot establish that metaphysical transparency is the best explanation for phenomenological transparency.¹²

There may be an epistemological reason for thinking that metaphysical transparency provides the best explanation for the phenomenological transparency of perceptual experience. One of the best-known criticisms made against the sense-data theory (and other versions of indirect realism) is that it imposes a barrier between the perceiver and the world, and this results in

¹² Whether Tye is right that his view provides a better explanation of our perceptual experiences than the sense-data theory is, unfortunately, outside the scope of this paper. For present purposes, the important point to note is that Tye fails to demonstrate that metaphysical transparency is the best explanation for phenomenological transparency, since his argument assumes from the outset that the qualia theory is false.

scepticism about the very existence of the external world. It may be thought that the internalist qualia theorist's view that perceptual experience involves internally realized properties (with externally located objects and properties playing a merely causal role) invites the same objection. In which case, the externalist can claim that metaphysical transparency is the best explanation for the phenomenological transparency of our perceptual experiences—if our perceptual experiences are metaphysically transparent then scepticism does not arise.¹³

Of course, one response the qualia theorist can make is simply to deny that considerations about scepticism have any bearing on whether one theory is a better explanation for our experiences than another. Scepticism may be an unwelcome and undesirable consequence of a theory, but we cannot reject a theory solely because we find its outcome disagreeable. However, qualia theorists can also deny that their position results in scepticism. The traditional response to this kind of objection (originating with Locke (1689: IV.XI)) can be deployed just as successfully by the qualia theorist: realism about mind-independent entities is the best explanation of certain features of our perceptual experiences, such as their regularity, coherence and spontaneity. An explanation that has external entities playing a vital causal role in the production of our perceptual experiences is more plausible than any explanation offered by the sceptic. Perhaps the qualia theory has an advantage over the sense-data theory since sense-data are mental objects, and so it is more difficult to explain their relationship with us and with the external (presumably physical) world. Since scepticism is not an inevitable consequence of those theories which deny that perceptual experiences are metaphysically transparent, externalists cannot argue that metaphysical transparency is required to avoid scepticism.

I have argued that we have yet to be provided with a successful argument for the claim that metaphysical transparency is the best explanation for phenomenological transparency. What is more, there are a number of positive reasons for doubting that such an explanation will be forthcoming. Although some philosophers believe that hallucinations are metaphysically transparent, it is not clear that their being so is the *best* explanation for their phenomenological transparency (granting for the sake of argument that they are indeed phenomenologically transparent). Producing something to be the

¹³ I would like to thank an anonymous referee for this suggestion.

mind-independent relatum in hallucinatory cases is a difficult task, and one that inevitably requires embracing entities with a questionable metaphysical status. Most philosophers who claim that hallucinations are metaphysically transparent posit uninstantiated properties as the external (mind-independent) entities of which we are aware. However, uninstantiated properties are abstract entities, and it is far from obvious that an awareness relation to abstracta is the *best* explanation of hallucinations.¹⁴ If our perceptual experiences are part of the concrete, spatiotemporal world, then it could be considered problematic to have them depend upon abstracta (see Kriegel 2011 for a detailed criticism along these lines; also, see Papineau 2014). I am not suggesting that we must reject out of hand the idea that perceptual experiences involve essential relations to abstracta, my point is simply that more work must be done before metaphysical transparency can be considered the *best* explanation of the phenomenological transparency of these experiences. To begin with, we are owed an explanation of how our concrete, spatiotemporal perceptual experiences can depend for their existence upon non-physical entities. This would seem to require a rejection of the causal closure of the physical world since nonphysical entities would be affecting our perceptual system.¹⁵ Furthermore, we require an account of the awareness relation which is said to obtain between the perceiver and the abstract entity.

Charles Siewert offers a positive reason for denying the very possibility of moving from phenomenological to metaphysical transparency on an externalist representationalist's framework. Since externalist representationalists want to reduce phenomenal character to representational content, they need a way of specifying the latter that does not appeal to the former, for if it does their account will be circular. It is clear that introspection, which can only reveal how things seem phenomenologically, will not be able to provide this, and so Siewert argues that an appeal to phenomenological transparency will never deliver metaphysical transparency (2003: 30). (This is my terminology, not Siewert's.)

¹⁴ Tye and Fred Dretske both claim that hallucinations involve the awareness of uninstantiated properties (Tye 2000, 2014; Dretske 1995, 2000). Mark Johnston's account of hallucination posits uninstantiated property complexes (2004), and Adam Pautz (who actually defends internalism— see 2014) also holds a relational account of hallucination. (Pautz, 2007) Also see Bealer (1982), Bengson *et al.* (2011), Forrest (2005), McGinn (1999) and Sosa (2007) for similar views. William Lycan analyses hallucinations as relations to intentional objects which exist in other possible worlds (1996). Of course, these are also abstract entities. See Thompson (2008) and Pitt (MS) for discussion. Incidentally, the fact that so many philosophers endorse the idea that hallucinations are metaphysically transparent means that Tim Crane is mistaken when he claims that hallucinations are an easy counter-example to the externalist's view (2006).

¹⁵ I owe this point to Dan Cavedon-Taylor.

To summarize: I have argued that introspection can only tell us about the phenomenology of perceptual experience. The (alleged) fact that perceptual experiences are phenomenologically transparent is no indication that they are metaphysically transparent. Of course, this is not to say that perceptual experiences are *not* metaphysically transparent, my claim is simply that metaphysical transparency cannot be derived from phenomenological transparency—it is a mistake to think that phenomenology reflects metaphysics, and none of the reasons for thinking that metaphysical transparency provides the best explanation for phenomenological transparency are decisive. Although this conclusion is rather modest, it is significant, since the transparency argument is often held to be a particularly compelling argument for externalism. I have shown that there seem to be no good reasons for thinking we can derive metaphysical transparency from phenomenological transparency and a number of good reasons for thinking that we cannot.

IV. THE INTERNALIST RESPONSE TO TRANSPARENCY

As we have seen, even if perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent, it does not follow that it is metaphysically transparent. There is an important lesson to be learnt from this. Internalists are internalists about the metaphysics of perceptual experience—they hold that the phenomenal character of perceptual experience is internally constituted. Therefore, there is no need for the internalist to deny that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent. After all, the internalist claim that the phenomenal character of our perceptual experiences is wholly internally constituted is entirely compatible with its *seeming* to the subject that phenomenal character depends essentially on properties which are externally located.

I suspect that internalists deny phenomenological transparency because they must (as internalists) deny metaphysical transparency, and the frequently made mistake of equating phenomenological and metaphysical transparency leads them to believe that refuting the latter requires refuting the former. However, I have shown that the two kinds of transparency claim are independent from each other. Consequently, not only is it unnecessary for the internalist to deny phenomenological transparency (we have yet to be presented with a good reason for thinking that phenomenological transparency is evidence of metaphysical transparency); a refutation of phenomenological transparency

will not constitute a refutation of metaphysical transparency. That is, even if the internalist qualia theorist can conclusively demonstrate that (at least some of) our perceptual experiences are not phenomenologically transparent, it is open to the externalist to insist that the experiences in question are, nevertheless, *metaphysically* transparent. Take after-images and phosphenes for example. Qualia theorists have argued that after-image and phosphene experiences are not phenomenologically transparent. It does not seem that these experiences involve an awareness of externally located properties; in fact, it seems that we are aware of internally constituted features of our experience (Boghossian and Velleman 1997; Block 2003; Kind 2008). Now, there is no reason why the externalist cannot concede this point about the phenomenology of such experiences, yet claim that after-image and phosphene experiences are metaphysically transparent nonetheless. After all, externalists have a story to tell about why we should think that hallucinations are metaphysically transparent—they involve an awareness of uninstantiated properties. The same story can be told about after-images and phosphenes, while acknowledging that such experiences are not phenomenologically transparent.

The important point is this: it could be the case that properties which seem to be externally located are in fact internally constituted; likewise, it could be the case that properties which seem to be internally constituted are in fact externally located. In other words, neither the confirmation nor the refutation of phenomenological transparency can be used as evidence for or against metaphysical transparency. Just as externalists are mistaken if they think they can use the phenomenological transparency of perceptual experience as evidence of their view that perceptual experiences are metaphysically transparent, qualia theorists are mistaken if they think that a refutation of phenomenological transparency is a refutation of metaphysical transparency.

There is something rather odd about the internalist reaction to the transparency claim. When we examine their response in more detail, we find that they actually seem to endorse much of the externalist's *metaphysical* framework. For the purpose of the following discussion, it will be useful to adopt (and adapt) a distinction given to us by Martin (2002), between the positive and negative claims involved in transparency.¹⁵ When we restrict our analysis to phenomenological transparency, the positive claim is:

¹⁵ Siewert (2003) and Stoljar (2004) also make this kind of distinction.

(P+) The phenomenal character of perceptual experience is at least partly constituted by an awareness of properties which *seem to be* externally located.

If our concern is with metaphysical transparency, the positive claim is:

(M+) The phenomenal character of perceptual experience is at least partly constituted by an awareness of properties which *are in fact* externally located.

Understood phenomenologically, the negative claim is:

(P-) We do not *seem* to be aware of internally realised features of our perceptual experiences.

Understood metaphysically, the negative claim is:

(M-) We *are not* aware of internally realised features of our perceptual experiences.

The claim that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent involves endorsing (P+) and (P-). The claim that perceptual experience is metaphysically transparent involves endorsing (M+) and (M-).

Internalist qualia theorists deny that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent by rejecting (P-), but they typically endorse (P+). In other words, they agree that *it seems to us* that externally located properties are essentially responsible for much of the phenomenal character of our perceptual experience (so far so good), but they claim that we *also* seem to be aware of features of our experiences, or qualia. Qualia theorists claim that blurriness, phosphenes and after-images (for example) involve properties which seem to be, and are in fact, internally realized (Boghossian and Velleman 1997; Block 1996, 2003; Kind 2003, 2008).

However, when granting that perceptual experiences do possess the positive feature of phenomenological transparency, internalist qualia theorists (and internalist representationalists) often seem to be endorsing the positive feature in both its phenomenological *and its metaphysical* formulations—they endorse (P+) *and* (M+). That is, they seem to concede not only that much of the phenomenal character of our perceptual experiences *seems* to depend essentially upon externally located properties, but that much of it *actually does* depend essentially—and not just causally—upon externally located properties. Here are a few examples:

Loar states that he endorses the idea that normal visual experience is transparent (2003a: 1). Now, Loar holds that normal visual experiences can be phenomenologically the same as hallucinatory experiences, or experiences had by our ‘brain in a vat’ twin, so he could happily endorse the idea that hallucinations are *phenomenologically* transparent. The fact that he restricts his attribution of transparency to normal visual experiences suggests that he must have metaphysical transparency in mind.¹⁶Siewert says:

When something looks blue or square to me – to take Tye’s example – and I attend to how it looks to me, *I do not somehow attend just to blueness or squareness*, without attending to its looking blue or square to me. I might put this point by saying that when, for example, there is some figure that looks blue and square to me, and I attend to how it looks to me, its *looking* to me that way ‘falls within the scope of my attention’, *just as much as, and together with, the figure itself and its blueness and squareness*. *The figure, its properties, and its appearing to me, all come together as a package, as far as this act of attention is concerned*. I may only *look at* the blue square – I certainly don’t look at my visual experience of it. However, I can, while looking at the blue square, attend to its looking to me as it does. (Siewert 2003: 20, my emphasis.)

And Crane:

To be sure, *it is generally true that the things we see directly are ordinary things and their properties*: and in this sense we normally ‘see through’ experiences *to the real world objects and properties themselves*. . . .it is generally true that we are not directly aware of properties of experiences themselves. *But there also seem to be uncontroversial cases where we are*, and it is not obvious why we should argue them away. (Crane 2006: 9, my emphasis.)

Kind says:

¹⁶ My point, here, depends on the assumption that Loar’s use of the term ‘normal’ is intended to contrast experiences so defined with illusory or hallucinatory experiences. If he means something else by ‘normal’, then my criticism may not apply.

(T)he fact that we attend to worldly objects in introspectively attending to our perceptual experiences of worldly objects, even essentially so, *does not mean that this is all we do*. (Kind 2008: 295, my emphasis)

And finally, Ned Block, who is probably the most well-known opponent of the transparency claim, says:

According to the representationist, all awareness of those sensations could consist in awareness of the colored moving expanses that are represented by them. My view is that one can be aware of *something more*. (Block 2003: 13, my emphasis.)

It seems to me that what these writers should concede is that phenomenological transparency is true for some properties—it does seem that the blue, for example, is externally located and not internally realized. However, because of the wide-spread conflation of phenomenological and metaphysical transparency, we find internalist philosophers conceding the metaphysical transparency of these properties. All of these passages demonstrate a commitment to the idea that much of the phenomenal character of our experience—the fact that it involves ‘blueness’, ‘squareness’ and so on—essentially depends upon properties which are, as a matter of fact, externally located. They are agreeing with the externalist that the blueness not only *seems* to be an externally located property, but that it actually *is*.

The qualia theorists’ quarrel with the externalist metaphysical transparency claim seems to be merely a matter of scope. Qualia theorists accept the externalist analysis of almost all of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience, they just insist that there are some (a very few) properties which do not admit of externalist analysis—blurriness and after-images, for example. This is surprising; the fundamental tenet of internalism is that *all* phenomenal character is ‘in the head’, not just some rare features we might experience when we apply slight pressure to our eyes or stare for too long at bright lights.

The standard qualia theorist response seems to be far too concessive to the externalist. The externalist deploys the transparency argument to motivate the idea that the phenomenal character of our experience depends essentially on externally located properties. In other words, the properties that characterize the phenomenal character of our experience—the redness, roundness, plumpness, smoothness, ‘smallness’ and so on, are all externally located, and it is these properties which account for our perceptual experience of a red

cherry tomato.¹⁷ If internalists concede that externally located properties are essential for the phenomenal character of our perceptual experience of a red cherry tomato, and claim only that we can *also* be aware of other (internal) features, they seem to be focusing all their efforts on winning a battle when they have already let externalists win the war. Moreover, I have argued that even if the qualia theorist is right that some properties seem to be properties of our experiences, this does not establish the internalist conclusion—that these properties actually are internally realized properties of experiences.

IV.1 An alternative internalist response—first stage

Internalists about phenomenal character should deny metaphysical transparency. After all, internalism about phenomenal character just is the view that phenomenal character is constituted internally (even though there will, ordinarily, be *causal* relations to externally located objects and properties). metaphysical transparency is therefore in outright contradiction with the internalist framework.

What is more, the denial of phenomenological transparency is unnecessary. We have seen that externalists are not particularly forthcoming when it comes to arguments for deriving metaphysical from phenomenological transparency. Therefore, internalists can agree that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent but deny that this tells us anything about the metaphysics of perceptual experience. The fact is that, for the overwhelming majority of our perceptual experiences, phenomenological transparency is extremely compelling. During perceptual experience, it does *seem* that all the properties one is aware of, and which are essentially responsible for our experience having the phenomenal character it does, are externally located.¹⁸ Since internalists do not need to reject phenomenological transparency in order to reject metaphysical transparency, it is open to them to take the easier route of acknowledging this phenomenological feature of experience. Again, these remarks are not intended to be an argument for phenomenological

¹⁷ I want to stay neutral here on the further issue of whether the tomato is represented *as* a tomato. See Siegel (2010) for discussion.

¹⁸ Incidentally, it is interesting that participants in the transparency debate focus overwhelmingly on visual experiences. (I would like to thank an anonymous referee for bringing this to my attention.) The case for phenomenological transparency would seem to benefit from considering tactile experience, since these experiences certainly seem to involve externally located objects and properties. Of course, my arguments against the idea that we can derive metaphysical transparency from phenomenological transparency in the visual case apply equally to tactile experience. No matter how compelling we find the idea that our experiences are phenomenologically transparent, the claim that they are metaphysically transparent is entirely distinct.

transparency; qualia theorists may be right that some properties seem to be properties of experiences. My point is simply that nothing rides on whether perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent. Phenomenological transparency is no threat to an internalist account of the metaphysics of perceptual experience; it is perfectly compatible with the idea that phenomenal character is entirely internally constituted.

It does, however, seem incumbent upon the internalist to deny the positive transparency claim understood metaphysically (M+). Although it may seem to the subject that their perceptual experience essentially involves properties which are externally located, the internalist should hold that the perceptual experience is wholly internally constituted. Our experience is such that our microphysical duplicate twin will undergo an exactly similar experience simply in virtue of being our microphysical twin. Our perceptual experience has the phenomenal character it does because of facts about our internal constitution. Of course (barring extreme sceptical hypotheses), there will be objects and properties that are in fact externally located, and which are *causally* involved in our coming to have the perceptual experiences we have, but these objects and properties are not *constitutively* or *essentially* involved in the experience itself. If we held constant all the internal features of the subject whilst varying the externally located objects and properties, the subject's experience would remain the same.¹⁹

IV.2 An alternative internalist response—second stage

I have argued that the effort internalist qualia theorists have put in to produce properties which do not seem to be externally located has been unnecessary, so far as the debate about the metaphysics of perceptual experience is concerned. Their initial response to the transparency claim can be to point out that the question of whether the properties which characterise perceptual experience seem to be externally realized is entirely incidental to the metaphysics of perceptual experience. However, the internalist can say more than this. Instead of claiming that we can be aware of internal features of experience in some rare cases (blurriness, after-images and phosphine experience for example), the internalist can say that *all* perceptual experience is an awareness of internally constituted features of experience. In other words,

¹⁹ I should make it clear that my aim is not to defend internalism. I am merely describing the ideal internalist response to the transparency idea. Whether or not that response is feasible is a subject for another time.

seeming to be aware of externally located properties just is being aware of internally constituted features of our experience.

Internalists can argue that the externalist who thinks that her experience is constituted by her standing in a two-place awareness relation to externally located properties (which we can all agree *seems* to be the case) has simply misjudged the metaphysical reality of her situation. We do not have to introspectively search our perceptual experience with the hope of finding a feature that does not seem to be externally located, in fact (or so the internalist can claim) our experience of *every* apparently externally located property is an example of being aware of an internally constituted feature of our experience.

Of course, it seems to us that the properties we are aware of during our perceptual experiences are externally located; this is just what it means to say that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent. However, it is open to the internalist to say that this awareness of apparently externally located properties is in fact an awareness of internally constituted features of our experience. It is just that we are not aware of these internally realized features of our experiences *as being* internally realized features of our experiences. This explains why my microphysical duplicate twin will undergo precisely similar perceptual experiences to my own, simply by virtue of being my microphysical duplicate twin. To both of us it will *seem* as if the phenomenal character of our perceptual experience depends essentially on properties which are externally located, but in fact, what we are aware of are internally realized features of our experience. As I mentioned earlier (in footnote 2), whether the internalist should understand this awareness relation as a two-place awareness relation to qualia, or whether they should adopt adverbialism and deny that awareness here consists in a two-place relation is a further question.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

My claims in this paper have been rather modest. I have not tried to refute the externalist's claim that perceptual experience is metaphysically transparent. Instead, I have tried to show that introspection can only be used in the attempt to establish the phenomenological transparency of perceptual experience, and, moreover, that the question of whether perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent is incidental to questions about its metaphysics. In other words, phenomenological transparency cannot be used

as evidence of metaphysical transparency. Although it has been useful for my purpose in this paper to assume that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent, it has not been my intention to establish the truth of this claim. I only wish to point out that internalists, who have typically denied that perceptual experience is entirely phenomenologically transparent, need not defend such a position. Internalism only requires the rejection of metaphysical transparency. This fact makes the internalist's endorsement of metaphysical transparency for a large part of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience rather surprising, particularly when we consider that any degree of metaphysical transparency contradicts the fundamental tenet of internalism.

In the last part of the paper, I have suggested an alternative response to the externalist's transparency idea on behalf of the internalist. Instead of allowing that much of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience depends essentially (and not just causally) upon properties which are in fact externally located, they can say: seeming to be aware of externally located properties *just is* being aware of internally constituted features of experience.²⁰

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²⁰ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Perceptual and Non-Perceptual Phenomenology workshop at the University of Antwerp, and the Contents of Consciousness workshop at the University of Manchester. I would like to thank the participants for their input, particularly Dan Cavedon-Taylor, Bence Nanay and David Pitt who all commented on a draft of the paper. I would also like to thank Jacob Berger, Alex Grzankowski, Grace Helton, Rob Hopkins, Maarten Steenhagen, Galen Strawson, Margot Strohminger and two anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

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