

Visual Experience of Natural Kind Properties: Is There Any Fact of the Matter?

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Pretty much everyone agrees that we can visually experience something's color, shape, size, and location properties. For example, in having a visual experience of a banana, I might experience its yellowness, its crescent-shapedness, its being about six inches long and about a foot to my right. But are there any *other* properties we can visually experience? For example, can I visually experience the banana's property of *being a banana*?

This question is an instance of a more general one, namely: can we visually experience *natural kind* properties?² This question is the focus of this paper. In section 1, I will explain how this question figures in a larger debate. In section 2, I will evaluate two arguments for an affirmative answer to this question, and conclude that neither one is decisive. In section 3, I will evaluate two arguments for a negative answer, and conclude that neither one is decisive. In section 4, I will explore the idea that there is simply no fact of the matter—that it is *indeterminate* whether we visually experience natural kind properties.

1. The debate

The issue this paper is concerned with is often framed in terms of a distinction between “low-level” and “high-level” properties. This distinction is just a shorthand way of referring to the difference between properties pretty much everyone agrees we can visually experience, on the one hand, and properties that not everyone agrees we can visually experience, on the other.³ Low-level properties are the ones pretty much everyone agrees we can visually experience. These include:

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² Because of space limitations, I will restrict this discussion to visual experience.

³ What visually experiencing a property consists in is a matter of some controversy. For example, *Intentionalists* hold that visually experiencing a property involves *representing* it (e.g., representing that there is something yellow and crescent-shaped before one). By contrast, *Naïve Realists* hold that visually experiencing a property in the case of veridical experience involves *seeing* an instance of it, while in the case of hallucination and illusion, it consists in something else. The ensuing discussion will remain neutral on this issue.

- color,
- location,
- shape,
- distance,
- size, and
- motion properties.

By contrast, high-level properties are those that everyone agrees can figure in visually-based *belief*, but it's controversial whether we can literally visually experience them. These properties include:

- natural kind properties (e.g., being a banana),
- artifactual kind properties (e.g., being a table),
- semantic properties (e.g., experiencing a bit of text, say, 'las bananas son amarillas', as *meaning* that bananas are yellow),
- causal properties
- dispositional properties (e.g., being edible),
- others' mental states (e.g., being sad), and
- evaluative properties, such as
 - moral properties (e.g., being morally wrong, being kind), or
 - aesthetic properties (e.g., being graceful).⁴

To deny that we can experience high-level properties is to hold that awareness of them is entirely "post-perceptual"—e.g., we can *believe* that something is a banana, or that a dancer is graceful (even on the basis of visual experience), but we cannot literally *visually experience* the property of being a banana or the property of being graceful.⁵

In this paper, I'm restricting the focus to *natural kind* properties. I suspect that the proposal I'll suggest might apply to at least some of the other sorts of properties on the list, but I don't have the space to vindicate that suspicion here. So the focus of this paper will be the following thesis:

⁴ For arguments to the effect that these kinds of properties can be visually experienced, see, e.g., Siegel 2006 (natural kind, artifactual kind, and semantic properties), Siegel 2009 (causal properties), Nanay forthcoming-a and Nanay forthcoming-b (dispositional properties), McDowell 1982 (others' mental states), and Cullison 2010 (moral properties). Of course, the lists of high- and low-level properties are not exhaustive; I have restricted them to the sorts of properties that have figured most prominently in the debate.

⁵ One might think that these debates can be solved by appeal to the correct theory of intentionality—if that theory says that a certain high-level property is part of the content of experience, then that's the end of the matter. However, this strategy is impractical in light of the fact that there's no consensus about what the correct theory of intentionality is. But more importantly, it's arguable that this strategy couldn't work even in principle: given that the contents of experiences are the *explananda* of theories of intentionality, we need to have *already figured out* what the contents of experiences are in order to determine which theory of intentionality is correct (Siegel 2006: 486).

(K) We can visually experience natural kind properties.

By ‘natural kind properties’, I take it that parties to this debate mean something narrower than the properties things have “naturally”, i.e., independently of human intervention or categorization. For on this understanding of the term, most of the property-types on the low-level list would count as types of natural kind properties, and so (K) would be obviously true. The task of giving an account of what exactly makes a property a *natural kind* is beyond the scope of this paper. Of course, (K) is meaningful only if the notion of a natural kind property is—which I will assume for the sake of argument. However, we can crudely identify the target class of properties by way of paradigm instances: e.g., the property of being a banana, the property of being gold, and the property of being water. In the hope that we have a clear enough grip on the target class of properties to proceed, let us begin by considering some arguments in favor of (K).

2. Arguments for (K)

There are at least two broad strategies for constructing a case for (K), corresponding to two primary aims of a theory of perceptual experience. First, one could establish that (K) is required to adequately account for the *epistemological role* of perceptual experience. Second, one could establish that (K) is required to adequately account for the *phenomenal character* of experience. Let’s take each strategy in turn.

The epistemological route doesn’t look promising—which might explain why no one takes it (at least to my knowledge). But it is worth briefly sketching how such an argument would go and why it isn’t promising. One epistemological role perceptual experiences are supposed to play is that of *justifying beliefs* about one’s environment. Accordingly, a proponent of (K) might suggest that a visual experience could justify, say, my belief that there’s a banana before me only if it involves my visually experiencing the banana’s property of being a banana. However, there’s an equally plausible alternative account of what justifies my belief. One might claim that I literally experience low-level properties only (yellowness, crescent-shapedness, etc.), I have the justified background belief that things with these lower-level properties are bananas, and that *these two states together* justify the belief that there’s a banana before me. My hunch is that for any epistemological role of experience you can come up with, we could give equally plausible accounts of it in terms of experience of natural kind properties, on the one hand, and in terms of experience of low-level properties plus justified background beliefs “connecting” low-level properties with natural kind properties, on the other.⁶

⁶ This objection doesn’t apply to analogous arguments concerning some of the other types of high-level properties—in particular, those that don’t have a systematic connection with low-level properties (e.g., semantic properties). So for all I’ve said, the epistemological role route might work in those cases.

So let us turn to the more promising phenomenal character strategy. This strategy is pursued by Susanna Siegel, who offers what she calls a “phenomenal contrast” argument for (K). She begins by outlining the following case:

Suppose you have never seen a pine tree before, and are hired to cut down all the pine trees in a grove containing trees of many different sorts. Someone points out to you which trees are pine trees. Some weeks pass, and your disposition to distinguish the pine trees from the others improves. Eventually, you can spot the pine trees immediately...Gaining this recognitional disposition is reflected in a phenomenological difference between the [overall mental state] you had before and after the recognitional disposition was fully developed (Siegel 2006: 491).⁷

One’s *overall* mental state includes not just one’s visual experience, but also one’s experiences in the other sense modalities, one’s emotions, one’s desires, one’s sensory imaginings, and so on. Intuitively, the overall mental state one is in when looking at a pine tree *before* acquiring the ability to recognize pine trees will be phenomenally different from the overall mental state one is in when looking at a pine tree *after* acquiring this ability. This intuition can be supported by reflecting on similar examples from one’s own past experiences—e.g., the overall mental state I was in when looking down the street I live on just after I moved in “felt” different from the overall mental state I’m in when looking down the street now (an example borrowed from Siewert 1998: 257-8).

From this starting point, Siegel constructs an argument for (K). Let E1 be an experience of a pine tree you have before you develop a disposition to recognize pine trees, and E2 be an experience of a pine tree you have afterward. Her argument, adapted to the terminology I’ve been using, runs as follows:

0. The overall mental state of which E1 is a part differs in phenomenal character from the overall mental state of which E2 is a part.
1. If the overall mental state of which E1 is a part differs in phenomenal character from the overall mental state of which E2 is a part, then there is a phenomenological difference between the visual experiences E1 and E2.
2. There is a phenomenological difference between the visual experiences E1 and E2 (0 and 1).
3. If there is a phenomenological difference between the visual experiences E1 and E2, then there is a difference in the properties experienced in the course of having E1 and E2.
4. There is a difference in the properties experienced in the course of having E1 and E2 (2 and 3).
5. If there is a difference in the properties experienced in the course of having E1 and E2, it is that in E2 you experience the property of being a pine tree but in E1 you don’t.

⁷ I’ve inserted ‘overall mental state’ where Siegel had ‘visual experiences’, since the starting point of her argument isn’t supposed to entail that the phenomenological difference is between *the experiences* (see Siegel 2006: 491).

6. In E2 you experience the property of being a pine tree but in E1 you don't (4 and 5). (Siegel 2006: 491)⁸

I will grant premises 0, 1, and 5 for the sake of argument. I'm skeptical of premise 3, however. As Richard Price has suggested (2009: 516), one who has the capacity to recognize pine trees is presumably more attentive to the distinctive features of pine trees than one was before acquiring this capacity. So when one activates a capacity to recognize pine trees, one attends to an object in a way that will make the features distinctive of pine trees salient (if they're present). Price's idea is that the phenomenological difference between E1 and E2 doesn't derive from a difference between the *properties experienced*, but rather from a difference in *how you distribute your perceptual attention* over pine trees before and after acquiring the recognitional capacity.

What might Siegel say in reply? She doesn't consider this particular objection to premise 3.⁹ But one way she could go is to insist that *the phenomenal character of an experience supervenes on the properties one experiences in the course of having it*. The scenario described in the objection is incompatible with this claim: you visually experience the same low-level properties in the course of having E1 and E2, but E1 and E2 differ with respect to phenomenal character nonetheless. However, although Siegel notes that premise 3 follows from this claim, she does not marshal the latter in support of the former. Indeed, she notes that the supervenience claim is controversial (2006: 497). I don't have the space to delve into considerations for and against this claim here. It must suffice to say that the claim is too controversial to undermine the *prima facie* plausibility of Price's objection to premise 3. And given the *prima facie* plausibility of this objection, the phenomenal contrast argument is on shaky ground at best.

3. Arguments against (K)

Let us now turn to arguments one could give against (K). One argument that isn't explicitly stated in the literature, but which I suspect underlies a lot of philosophers' initial resistance to (K), appeals to intuitions concerning whether certain experiences count as illusory. I'll call this argument *the illusion objection*, and it can be summarized as follows:¹⁰

⁸ Timothy Bayne (2009) offers another contrast argument—an argument from *associative agnosia*, a psychological condition involving impaired ability to recognize certain kinds of objects. Like Siegel's argument, it's based on a comparison of "before" and "after" phenomenology, but the relevant contrast is before and after agnosia affliction, rather than before and after acquisition of a recognitional disposition. I take it that Bayne's argument is essentially Siegel's with the contrast "reversed" (loss of a recognitional capacity as opposed to acquisition of one), and that my objection to the latter can be adapted to apply to the former.

⁹ The only objection to premise 3 she considers is that the phenomenal contrast can be explained in terms of a "non-representational feeling of familiarity", and her reply is that there's no reason to think there is any such thing (2006: 497-8).

¹⁰ Sentiments in the vicinity of this objection can be found in Byrne 2009: 449.

1. If one can visually experience the property of being a banana, then a visual experience of a yellow, crescent-shaped *plastic* thing as being yellow, crescent-shaped, and a *banana* is *illusory*.
2. There's nothing illusory about an experience of a thing that gets all its low-level properties right.
3. Hence, one cannot experience the property of being a banana after all.

An experience is illusory if the subject experiences something as having a property it doesn't really have. So if we can experience the property of being a banana, presumably we can have illusory experiences in which things have all the properties they look to have except the property of being a banana (e.g., experiences of plastic things designed to look exactly like bananas). But enter premise 2, which entails that such an experience wouldn't be illusory—if one has an experience in which a yellow, crescent-shaped thing looks yellow and crescent-shaped (and has all the other low-level properties it looks to have), that's sufficient for its being veridical. The intuitive idea is that *the experience* isn't in error—the error seems to rest in the beliefs one is likely to form on the basis of this misleading experience. Since the claim that we can visually experience the property of being a banana entails that such an experience would be illusory, so much the worse for that claim.¹¹

However, this objection isn't decisive. First, it's far from obvious that the debate about (K) should be settled by appeal to intuitions about which experiences are illusory. For we may ask: where do these intuitions come from? Are they the product of philosophical training? If so, perhaps these intuitions simply show that we're in the grip of a theory that we could be persuaded to abandon on other grounds. Second, this intuition about how to categorize the experience at issue isn't universal. For example, Siegel suggests that our verdicts about which experiences are illusory should be determined by whether we think (K) is true, not the other way around (2006: 483).

Another objection to (K) involves a "Twin Earth" scenario (Price 2009: 516-8). Oscar, here on Earth, acquires the capacity to recognize tomatoes. Twin Oscar, on Twin Earth, acquires the capacity to recognize twin tomatoes—a kind of fruit that has the appearance of a tomato, but a different chemical composition. Arguably, the experiences Oscar and Twin Oscar have of the fruits of their home worlds before they acquire the relevant capacities are phenomenally the same, and the experiences they have of these fruits afterwards are phenomenally the same too¹². So, assuming that each individual's "before" and "after" experiences exhibit a phenomenal contrast, the fact that each acquired the relevant capacity made exactly the same contribution to the phenomenal character of their experiences. According to Price, it would be arbitrary to claim that this difference consists in experiencing the property of being a tomato, rather than the property of being a twin tomato (or vice versa). Hence, whatever this phenomenal difference consists in, it doesn't consist in whether or not the subject experiences a natural kind property (such as being a tomato or being a twin tomato).

However, this objection isn't decisive either. For it is open to a proponent of (K) to give a *different* explanation of the phenomenal contrast in each case: in Oscar's case,

¹¹ Note that this argument can be adapted for other types of high-level properties.

¹² This claim is controversial, but I'll grant it for the sake of argument.

the phenomenal contrast between his before and after experiences is explained in terms of experiencing the property of *being a tomato*, and in Twin Oscar's case, the phenomenal contrast between his before and after experiences is explained in terms of experiencing the property of *being a twin tomato*.¹³ Of course, this move requires denying that the properties one experiences supervenes on the phenomenal character of one's experience (i.e., that there's no change in which properties one experiences without a change in the phenomenal character of one's experience). But this claim is rather controversial anyway.

In summary, the illusion objection relies on a dubious intuition, and Price's Twin Earth objection can be avoided if the properties one experiences don't supervene on the phenomenal character of one's experience. So it appears that the arguments against (K) at least as problematic as the arguments for it.¹⁴

4. Is there any fact of the matter?

We've got a *prima facie* compelling argument for (K)—Siegel's phenomenal contrast argument—but further reflection reveals that one of its premises is on shaky ground. We've got some arguments against (K)—the illusion objection, and the Twin Earth objection—but they're far from decisive. Of course, there are more arguments pertaining to (K) than the ones I considered, and there is a lot more to be said about the criticisms of the arguments I did consider than I had space to explore. So I haven't said anywhere near enough to convince you that there is an apparently irresolvable impasse with respect to (K). But I hope to have said enough to make you worried that there *might* be.

The objections to the arguments I've raised depend upon the resolution of certain debates in philosophy of perception (e.g., whether the phenomenal character of an experience supervenes on the properties experienced by the subject, and vice versa). It could turn out that these debates are resolved in a way that leaves the phenomenal contrast argument for (K) intact while undermining the Twin Earth argument against it, or vice versa. But it could also turn out that the debates are resolved in a way that undermines *both* arguments. Let's suppose that the debates are settled in a way that undermines the arguments on both sides of (K). How could we proceed?

The first thing to do would be to see whether vision science yields an answer, as opposed to trying to settle the debate over (K) solely by philosophical argument.¹⁵ I don't have the space to explore this possibility here. But it could turn out that the empirical data don't determine whether (K) is true—what would we do *then*?

One might think that we would have no choice but to go back to the philosophical drawing board and just *try harder* to resolve the apparently irresolvable impasse. However, there is another way forward. We could conclude that there is *no*

¹³ As Siegel anticipates (2006: 501)

¹⁴ Bayne criticizes three other arguments against the claim that we can experience high-level properties, which would constitute arguments against the narrower thesis (K) (2009: 397-403). Unfortunately, I don't have the space to discuss them here; suffice it to say that I agree that none of them are decisive.

¹⁵ Thanks to Ophelia Deroy for suggesting something along the lines of this option.

fact of the matter about whether (K) is true. To be clear: this is an option of *last resort*, one to be taken only if the arguments on both sides turn out to be inconclusive after extensive investigation. Note that the mere fact of philosophical *disagreement* isn't sufficient to warrant this option: if you take yourself to have a compelling argument for the claim that *p*, the fact that other people think that not-*p* isn't sufficient reason for you to throw up your hands and declare that there's no fact of the matter.¹⁶ Rather, this sort of option should be considered only if you find yourself unmoved by arguments for and against the claim under debate.¹⁷

Why should an apparently irresolvable impasse with respect to (K) lead one to conclude that there is no fact of the matter as to its truth? A strong (albeit defeasible) reason is that there being no fact of the matter provides an explanation of the apparently irresolvable impasse. That is, perhaps *the reason why* we find ourselves with initially compelling but ultimately inconclusive arguments for and against (K) is that there's no fact of the matter about whether it's true. For example, one might find it natural to attribute the phenomenal contrast before and after one acquires a recognitional capacity to the *experiences* either because it's *true* that we can visually experience natural kind properties, *or* because it's *not determinately false* that we can visually experience them. Similarly, one might find it natural to deny that an experience of something that gets all its lower-level properties right could be illusory either because it's *false* that we can visually experience natural kind properties, *or* because it's *not determinately true* that we can visually experience them. Of course, not everyone is attracted to these claims. One might find it natural to go the opposite way on one or both of them. Or one might feel conflicted, and thus be reluctant to come down on either side. However, if its being indeterminate that *p* makes it permissible to either judge that *p*, judge that not-*p*, or withhold judgment with respect to the claim that *p* (cf. Wright 2003)—which seems plausible—this is precisely what we would expect.

So, provided that there is an apparently irresolvable impasse with respect to (K) (which I don't pretend to have established in this paper), we've got good reason to think there is no fact of the matter as to whether (K) is true. But what exactly does it *mean* to say that there is no fact of the matter here? In the remainder of the paper, I will sketch an answer to this question.

Carving up our mental lives into experiences, beliefs, imaginings, desires, and so forth is often illuminating. For example, there is no doubt a difference between my *visual experience* of the banana on my desk and my *belief* that the banana on my desk is yellow. I could have come to believe that the banana on my desk is yellow without having had a visual experience of it (e.g., if I've been out of my office all day and I come to believe this based on testimony). This apparatus of psychological states "...is a theoretical tool useful in various ways, but we should not get too hung up on the

¹⁶ Thanks to Philip Goff for pressing me to clarify this point.

¹⁷ Another possibility is that there is a fact of the matter as to whether (K) is true, but it is *epistemically inaccessible* to us. However, it's not clear what reason we could have for thinking that there is an epistemically inaccessible fact of the matter, other than (i) an apparently irresolvable impasse with respect to (K), combined with (ii) an objection to the possibility of there being no fact of the matter. So consider my elaboration of the possibility that there is no fact of the matter as an indirect response to the claim that there is an epistemically inaccessible fact of the matter.

assumption that all questions that can be posed using the apparatus are ones that deserve answers” (to borrow the words of Benj Hellie talking about a different apparatus—see his forthcoming: 65).

Perhaps this is true of the question concerning whether we can visually experience natural kind properties. It doesn’t follow from the fact that we carve up our mental lives in these ways that the resulting boundaries are *perfectly precise*—e.g., that we can draw a sharp line between the properties I visually experience, on the one hand, and the properties I can’t visually experience but can believe things to have on the basis of my experience, on the other. This need not amount to the claim that there are *really aren’t any* experiences, beliefs, imaginings, desires, etc.¹⁸ There’s a middle ground between claiming that the boundaries between mental states are perfectly sharp and claiming that mental states don’t really exist—we might claim that the boundaries between mental states are *fuzzy*. Of course, this claim stands in need of elaboration—it’s not clear what’s meant by saying that mental states have *boundaries, a fortiori*, it’s not clear what’s meant by the claim that they have *fuzzy* ones.

One way of cashing out this metaphor is in terms of *semantic* indeterminacy. Take a case in which a subject is having an experience as of a yellow, crescent-shaped thing, and whose capacity to recognize bananas is triggered. On this option, to say that there is no fact of the matter as to whether the subject experiences the property of being a banana is to say the following:

there is a mental state such that

- (i) it is determinately the case that the subject is in it, and
- (ii) it is determinately the case that it’s about a banana, but
- (iii) it is indeterminate whether the word ‘experience’ applies to this state.

At this point, it’s natural to wonder whether there are any mental states that satisfy (i) and (ii), but to which the word ‘experience’ determinately applies. Insofar as the arguments for and against (K) are restricted to *actual human* experiences, an apparently irresolvable impasse with respect to these arguments warrants only the conclusion that there are no *actual human* mental states that satisfy (i) and (ii) but not (iii). But for all this proposal is committed to, there could be *non-human* mental states, or *non-actual* human mental states, that satisfy (i) and (ii) to which ‘experience’ determinately applies.¹⁹

The other way of cashing out the metaphor of “fuzzy” boundaries between mental states is in terms of *metaphysical* indeterminacy. Again, consider a case in which a subject is having an experience as of a yellow, crescent-shaped thing, and whose

¹⁸ Perhaps because we impose these concepts on our mental lives even though they don’t pick out natural kinds (as suggested in Churchland 1981).

¹⁹ Cashing out the metaphor in terms of semantic indeterminacy is a viable option only if experiences don’t have a *distinctive* metaphysical structure, i.e., a structure that only experiences have (as “relational” or Naïve Realist theories claim of veridical experiences). For if it’s determinately the case that the subject is in a mental state that has this structure, then it’s determinately the case that ‘experience’ applies to it—if only experiences have this structure, a state’s having it is sufficient for the applicability of ‘experience’. So if (i) is satisfied, then (iii) isn’t.

capacity to recognize bananas is triggered. On this option, to say that there is no fact of the matter as to whether the subject experiences the property of being a banana is to say the following:

there is a visual experiential state such that *either*

- (i) it's determinately the case that the subject is in it, but it is indeterminate whether it's about a banana, *or*
- (ii) it's determinately the case that it's about a banana, but it's indeterminate whether the subject is in it.²⁰

Compare the claim that Joe is such that it's metaphysically indeterminate whether he instantiates the property of being bald (see Cameron 2010). On this claim, the indeterminacy isn't ultimately due to a lack of specificity in the meaning of the predicate 'is bald' (i.e., that the meaning of the term doesn't settle the question of whether it applies to Joe). Rather, it is ultimately due to the *world* (in particular, Joe's head) being such that it just doesn't settle whether Joe satisfies the predicate. (Plausibly, there is semantic indeterminacy in this case too, but the idea is that it *arises* from metaphysical indeterminacy.) In the case under discussion, we could say that the world doesn't settle whether the subject satisfies the predicate 'is visually experiencing the property of being a banana'—not because our usage of the phrase doesn't settle whether it applies to the subject, but rather because it is either metaphysically indeterminate whether the relevant visual experience is about a banana, or whether the subject is in such a state.

One might wonder whether there are any subjects such that it's metaphysically determinate that they experience the property of being a banana. For the same reasons given above in discussing the analogous question for the semantic indeterminacy option, the most we're entitled to conclude is that there are no *actual human* subjects who are such that it's metaphysically determinate that they experience this property. For all this proposal is committed to, there may be *non-human* subjects, or *non-actual human* subjects, who are such that it's metaphysically determinate that they experience this property.

The notion of metaphysical indeterminacy is more controversial than that of semantic indeterminacy. I don't have the space to delve into objections to the former here.²¹ However, I hope to have shown that, provided that there satisfactory responses to general objections to the notion of metaphysical indeterminacy, it can be employed in this context to make sense of the claim that there's no fact of the matter as to whether (K) is true.

Finally, a brief note about perceptual justification is in order. Suppose that it's determinately the case that I'm justified in believing that there's a banana before me on the basis of my perceptual experience. How can the idea that there's no fact of the

²⁰ Which of (i) or (ii) one chooses will depend on one's metaphysics of experience—for reasons I don't have the space to outline here, Naïve Realists are committed to (ii), whereas Intentionalism goes better with (i). In principle, there is a third possibility, namely, that it's indeterminate whether the subject is in the state *and* whether it's about a banana. Since I don't see any reason for preferring this claim over (i) or (ii), I'm setting it aside.

²¹ For discussions and responses, see (e.g.) Williams 2008 and Barnes 2010.

matter about whether I'm currently experiencing the property of being a banana (on either way of cashing it out) accommodate this fact? In short, the idea is that although it's determinately the case that I'm justified in believing that there's a banana before me, it's not determinately the case that I'm justified in believing this on the basis of my experience *alone*. It is indeterminate whether my justification *also* depends on background beliefs linking certain low-level properties with the property of being a banana. So indeterminacy with respect to experience of natural-kind properties is perfectly compatible with determinately justified beliefs about which natural-kind properties are instantiated by things in one's environment.

To summarize: *if* there is an apparently irresolvable impasse with respect to (K), it could be handily explained by the claim that there's no fact of the matter as to whether (K) is true. The claim that there is no fact of the matter can be elaborated in terms of semantic or metaphysical indeterminacy. Alas, the question of which is the better way of elaborating it will have to be left to another paper.

5. Conclusion

We began with the question of whether thesis (K) is true, i.e., whether we can visually experience natural kind properties. I outlined and criticized some arguments for and against (K), and concluded that none of them appears to be decisive. Of course, there's a lot more to be said about these arguments, and there are other arguments pertaining to (K) I didn't have the space to address. Establishing that we have an apparently irresolvable impasse between arguments for and against (K) on our hands would require a much more thorough investigation of those arguments than I've been able to undertake here. However, what I have been able to say indicates that such an impasse is a worrying epistemic possibility.

The main aim of this paper has been to put forward a proposal about what to do if this epistemic possibility is actual. Rather than trying harder to resolve the impasse, we might do better to *embrace* it—that is, to conclude that there's simply no fact of the matter as to whether (K) is true. To that end, I sketched two ways of elaborating this claim (in terms of *semantic* and *metaphysical* indeterminacy). This is an option of last resort, to be endorsed only after one finds oneself unmoved by arguments for and against (K) after thorough investigation. And even though I haven't established that we are in such a difficult situation, the option should at least be on our radar—and to date, it's been overlooked.

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