The Nature of Ordinary Objects

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1 *Perception and Ordinary Objects*

ALEX BYRNE

Paradigmatic "ordinary objects" are objects that we can see with the unaided eye, for instance the tomatoes, pigs, and lemon-like bars of soap beloved by philosophers of perception.* In the Lockean tradition of "indirect realism", ordinary objects were conceived as speculative causes of perceptual experiences, which themselves involved direct awareness of ideas or sense data. Contemporary philosophy of perception almost invariably repudiates indirect realism, following the lead of, among others, Austin and Dretske. As Dretske puts it, "the tomato *is* the sensory core, the directly given" (1969: 75–6).[1]

The tomato and its ilk are frequently taken to have further significance. On one view, the tomato is a *constituent* of the experience of it:

> Some of the objects of perception – the concrete individuals, their properties, the events these partake in – are constituents of the experience. (Martin 2004: 39)

Another view (which may be held together with the constituency thesis) is that the perceiving subject is *acquainted* with the tomato:

> Perception consists most fundamentally in a relation of acquaintance directly with the constituents of the mind-independent world ... mind-independent material objects. (Brewer 2017: 216)

Compatibly with both the constituency and the acquaintance theses, the very possibility of thought about mind-independent reality may be placed on the tomato's shoulders:

> Attention to a tomato drops the tomato as an anchor of the objective world. (Hellie 2014: 250)

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1 In this essay, objects are *particulars*; accordingly, properties or universals are not objects.

Another indication of the importance of ordinary objects in the philosophy of perception is the amount of space devoted to the problem of hallucination. When one (visually) hallucinates a tomato, one seems to see a tomato but in fact sees nothing.[2] In the Lockean tradition, hallucination is in a sense basic: to see a tomato is to have an experience that is of exactly the same kind as a tomato-hallucination, appropriately caused by the presence of a tomato. The contemporary approach is the reverse: seeing a tomato is the basic notion, and hallucination is conceived of as failed seeing. But exactly how to account for the seeming presence of a tomato when no tomato is present is taken to be an exceedingly difficult issue, with a number of incompatible proposed solutions. The *tomato* is not the problem; rather, the problem is the absence of one.

Ironically, as the philosophy of perception has come to clasp tomatoes and other ordinary objects to its bosom, metaphysics has come to view them with grave suspicion. Some prominent metaphysicians deny that there are any. Thus van Inwagen: "My position vis-à-vis tables and other inanimate objects is that there are none" (1990: 99). (Van Inwagen thinks that there are *animate* objects, but the tomato is not one of those.[3]) Naturally, many prominent metaphysicians disagree, but the issue is often viewed as one that demands an initial position of neutrality, with opinion on either side being earned only by sophisticated argument. As Merricks puts it, the issue "must be decided on philosophical grounds" (2001: 9).

Why the initial neutrality, though? The metaphysicians of course acknowledge that the vulgar – or as we say these days, "folk" – speak of ordinary objects. But here they generally side with Hume against Berkeley, according the vulgar opinion little weight. The metaphysicians have a point: although the vulgar know a lot, the mere fact that they believe something is very weak evidence for it. "Common sense" or "intuitions" sometimes turn out to be nothing more than fashionable prejudices.

But there is more to appeal to than the vulgar. What about the deliverances of perception? For sympathizers with contemporary philosophy of perception, it is natural to take *perceptual evidence* to

2 Mixed cases, where one both hallucinates and sees, will be ignored, as will perceptual modalities other than vision. These restrictions will not affect the argument.

3 Thus there are tomato *plants*, according to van Inwagen.

consist in facts about individual ordinary objects – that *this* (the tomato) is red and bulgy, for example. And if so, then perception is decidedly not neutral on the existence of ordinary objects.

Metaphysicians are prone to disagree. I seem to see a tomato. Is there a tomato that I see, or merely a plurality of simples (or *atoms*), "arranged tomatowise"? According to Merricks,

> My visual evidence would be the same whether or not the atoms arranged [tomato]wise composed something. (2001: 9)[4]

Thomasson concurs, writing that the competing ontologies of eliminativists, such as van Inwagen and Merricks, and realists, such as herself, are "empirically equivalent" (Thomasson 2015: 158). Similarly, another realist, Korman, in the course of discussing "debunking" arguments for eliminativism, writes that "the arguments are best understood as targeting only those who believe in ordinary objects *for the usual reasons*, namely, that it seems perceptually as if there are objects of the relevant kinds" (Korman 2014: 4).

The quotation from Korman suggests that he does not take perceptual evidence to consist of facts about the perceiver's environment; rather, perceptual evidence (or the "usual reasons") consists of facts about perceptual *appearances*, or *seemings*. And Merricks and Thomasson likely agree. For example, Merricks claims that in "a world like ours except that, while there are atoms arranged [tomato]wise in that world, there are no [tomatoes]", things "would *seem to us* just like the actual world" (2001: 55). Unless Merricks is equating evidence with seemings, this remark is, in context, of little relevance.

In any case, the effectiveness of this maneuver is quite doubtful, because ordinary objects are hard to expunge from *mere seemings*. Perceptual experience, whether veridical or not, requires the existence of ordinary objects. The next two sections make that case, culminating in an argument for the existence of ordinary objects. The subsequent two sections object to a variety of ways of responding to the argument. The final section sums up.

[4] See also Merricks 2016. Merricks's explanation of the crucial locution 'arranged tomatowise' (4) assumes (as he notes) that counterfactuals with impossible antecedents are not vacuously true, a controversial position (see n. 21). For the sake of the argument, 'tomatowise' and the like will be taken for granted here.

1 Scene and Object

This section argues for the two main premises in the argument for ordinary objects. Simply to avoid distracting qualifications, the informal exposition will take the vulgar point of view and assume the existence of ordinary objects.

1.1 *The Successful Case*

Consider an everyday example of successful – hence veridical[5] – perceptual experience: you have keen vision and in excellent lighting conditions see a red tomato and a green lime on a white kitchen counter. You see these things as they are: the tomato looks red and is red, the lime looks dimpled and is dimpled, and so on. To repeat a question from P. F. Strawson, "How is it with you, visually, at the moment?" (Strawson 1979: 93). As Strawson says, a natural response is simply to specify what you see in more detail: "I see a red bulgy smooth tomato next to a green oval dimpled lime, against a white background."

Of course this specification is drastically incomplete. Attributes like glossiness and shading have been left out, as well as the spatial relations between the items in the scene and between those items and your position. Even the attributes themselves cannot be captured by ordinary adjectives like 'red', since the color of the tomato will be variously saturated, bright, and of a more determinate hue.

Once these additional parameters are included, one might expect that this would render the verb 'see' redundant. Color is detectable only by vision, but that is just one example: glossiness, (visual) texture, shading, and illumination are also proprietary visual attributes. Even Aristotelian "common sensibles" such as shape seem less common on closer examination: when one runs one's fingers over a black triangle on an otherwise white sheet of paper, is one's tactile experience of boundarylessness illusory? There is, after all, a triangular boundary that one can detect by sight. It is more attractive to say that the kinds of boundaries (and so shapes) detected by vision and tactile perception are different: visual boundaries concern how surfaces interact with light; tactile boundaries concern how they deform under pressure. Visual and

[5] Veridicality is necessary but not sufficient for success: see Johnston 2006: 271–4.

tactile shapes are of a common genus but are distinct species. This is supported by the physiological characteristics of our senses: the front ends of our visual and auditory systems, for example, are devoted to the recovery of different sorts of information about our environment.

Granted that 'see' is in principle dispensable, does a suitably detailed specification of the scene before your eyes provide a complete answer to Strawson's question? Those who think that experience has "sensational properties" (Peacocke 1983), or believers in "mental paint" (Block 2003) will answer no. The issue is controversial, but there is at least a presumption in favor of the opposite answer. The point of perception is to inform the animal about its environment; information about sensational properties or mental paint is ecologically useless. When asked Strawson's question, one would expect the environment to be the only place to look.

In any event, the argument of this essay would (probably) not be much affected even if sensational properties or mental paint were admitted, but the cost in additional complexity would be excessive. We will therefore leave sensational properties and mental paint on the shelf and work with a popular view we can call *presentationalism*, expressed in the following quotations:

> To know what one's experience is like is to know what properties, aspects or features are presented to one in having the experience. There seems to be no way to pick out the what it is like properties of the experiences without also picking out corresponding properties which objects may appear to have. (Martin 1998: 174)

> The phenomenal character of your experience, as you look around the room, is constituted by the actual layout of the room itself: which particular objects are there, their intrinsic properties, such as color and shape, and how they are arranged in relation to one another and to you. (Campbell 2002: 116)[6]

> [T]here are no images (two dimensional arrays) in the phenomenology of vision: it is the relevant tract of the environment that is present to consciousness, not an image of it. (McDowell 1994: 342)[7]

[6] See also Campbell in Campbell and Cassam 2014: 18: "The qualitative character of perceptual experience has nothing particularly to do with perception or experience; it is simply the qualitative character of the world observed."

[7] The subsequent sentence implies that the quotation describes "what visual consciousness is like".

Campbell's 'phenomenal character of your experience' could be replaced with the non-technical 'how things seem to you', on a contextually natural interpretation of that phrase. Put in terms of this latter locution, these three quotations suggest that "how things seem to you" can be exhaustively characterized by certain "properties, aspects or features" of the tomato, the lime, and so on (Martin), together with the "particular objects", the tomato and lime themselves (Campbell). Is that list complete? Not quite, as is brought out by Campbell's 'how they are *arranged*' and McDowell's '*tract* of the environment'. If we permute the colors in the scene, so that the tomato is green and the lime is red, we have not changed the "presented" properties or objects. But obviously we have changed how things seem. And, equally obviously, this shows that what is missing in the characterization of how things seem to you is that redness qualifies *the tomato*, and greenness qualifies *the lime*. Put another way: it's not enough to include the tomato and redness – we also need to include *the fact that the tomato is red*.[8]

Sometimes this point is explicitly acknowledged:

> My key claim here is that, whatever the basic ontological structure of the world, our fundamental mode of perceptual contact with that world is with facts – with things bearing properties – not directly with either properties or things *simpliciter*. (Fish 2009: 53)

We may thus isolate the following presentationalist thesis, strongly suggested by (among others[9]) the above quotations:

> TRACT: Visual states in successful perception are characterized by a certain sort of fact, that such-and-such things are arranged thus-and-so, which is (in McDowell's phrase) "present to consciousness", and which determines the way things seem.[10]

So far, we have just discussed the successful (veridical) case. What about unsuccessful cases? They are typically divided into hallucinations and

[8] This is a version of Jackson's "many-property problem" (Jackson 1975); see also Pendlebury 1990: 222.

[9] Another example: Tye 2009: 117.

[10] It may help to put TRACT another way (leaving the restriction to successful visual cases tacit): for all worlds w_1, w_2, and subjects S_1, S_2, if the same "tract of the environment", that things are thus-and-so, is presented to S_1 in w_1 and S_2 in w_2, then the way things seem to S_1 in w_1 is the same as the way things seem to S_2 in w_2.

illusions; for the moment we can ignore hallucinations and focus on illusions, where one sees an object but it is not as it looks.[11] (Hallucinations will take center stage in Sections 3 and 4.) Due to abnormal lighting or a contrast effect, the tomato may look to have a shade of red, or a particular shape, that it doesn't in fact have. In such illusory cases, there are no available facts to be present to consciousness and to determine the way things seem.

1.2 *The Illusory Case*

Granted, there are no available facts, but isn't a fact just a true proposition? That Obama was born in Hawaii is a fact; since it is also a true proposition, the fact and the proposition are one and the same. And assuming that facts are true propositions, the obvious candidates to characterize illusory visual states are *false* propositions. Even if the fact that the tomato is crimson is not to be had, the false proposition that the tomato is crimson is there for the taking. This would treat successful and illusory cases of perception in a pleasingly uniform manner, like the orthodox treatment of successful and unsuccessful cases of belief.

However, this move is liable to meet resistance, for instance from Fish:

> I am *not* using the term 'fact' in its more linguistic sense, wherein a fact is a true proposition – something that is only contingently true and hence might have been false. I am completely in agreement with Johnston when he claims that, on such an understanding of the term, the claim that sensing is directed at facts would 'not earn the right to the metaphor of the senses taking in *concrete* reality' ... [because] concrete reality does not consist of items that could have been false. (2009: 53)

As we saw, Fish takes the successful case to involve contact with a fact; he does not extend his view to illusory cases, on the grounds that, in the pertinent sense, facts are not true propositions.

The quoted passage contains two phrases that make Fish's view seem more plausible than it is. First, 'linguistic sense'. If facts understood as

[11] Note that illusions are not being *defined* in terms of 'looks': a Rolex knock-off can look expensive, but this is not a visual illusion (Siegel and Byrne 2016: 64–5).

true propositions are somehow linguistic, then since facts in *one* sense are surely not at all linguistic, there must be some *other* sense of 'fact' – just as Fish suggests. But there is nothing (interestingly) linguistic about propositions – the proposition that Obama was born in Hawaii is not constitutively connected to language in any way – and so nothing in the vicinity to suggest that 'fact' is not univocal. Second, 'concrete reality'. That the senses take in "concrete reality" is agreed on all sides. That is, we perceive spatiotemporally located objects and events, the constituents of concrete reality: we see Obama, and Obama speaking. In that same "object" sense of 'see', we do *not* see the true proposition that Obama is speaking. (Hardly surprising, since propositions are not located anywhere.) That might suggest that we are not, after all, in "perceptual contact" with true propositions. But there is no reason to take the "perceptual contact" relation to be that of *object-seeing*. (Somewhat similarly, there is no reason to take the propositional knowledge relation to be that of personal or acquaintance knowledge.)

Everyone should admit that in *one* sense facts are true propositions.[12] Since there is little evidence that 'fact' is ambiguous, an objector may well concede that the items with which we are in "perceptual contact" are *not*

[12] King disagrees: "there is ample evidence that expressions of the form 'the fact that ...' and 'the [true] proposition that ...' designate different things and that 'bare' that-clauses are capable of designating either kind of thing" (King et al. 2014: 68). He adduces three pieces of evidence. First, some that-clauses happily admit 'the fact that' (a diagnostic for *factive* contexts) and some do not (*non-factive* contexts):

a Jeff regretted the fact that he didn't go skiing.
b Jeff believed [*the fact] that he didn't go skiing.

Second, quantification across factive and non-factive contexts:

c *Everything Scott says Jeff discovers.

Third, causation:

d That Scott knocked caused Jeff to open the door.
e The fact that Scott knocked caused Jeff to open the door.
f *The true proposition that Scott knocked caused Jeff to answer the door.

However, these pieces of evidence are more suggestive than compelling. The starred sentences seem anomalous but not false (or not obviously so). If what someone says can't be discovered, why doesn't (c) seem false? (Compare 'Everything Scott proves Jeff disproves', which does seem false.) For reasons of space this issue will be left unresolved. (For an objection from Soames, see King et al. 2014: 64–5; for King's reply, see 68–9; for further exchanges, see 177–81 and 201–8.)

facts. Rather, they are fact-like entities, requiring a technical label, say 'states of affairs'. These "states of affairs" might not be recognized explicitly by ordinary thought and talk but, the defender will insist, are mandated by theoretical reasons – most likely, because true propositions need "truthmakers".

Whether these theoretical reasons are cogent is disputed. Here we will have to make do with a prima facie case for a propositionalist treatment of both successful and illusory cases.[13] This granted, TRACT may be extended to:

SCENE: Visual states (successful or illusory) are characterized by a certain sort of proposition, a *scene*, that such-and-such things are arranged thus-and-so, which is present to consciousness and which determines the way things seem.

It is worth noting that although SCENE claims a significant respect of overlap between successful and illusory cases, it is compatible with a significant respect of difference. Perhaps in the successful cases one bears a certain relation – call it *sensing*[14] – to a scene, while in the illusory cases one bears another relation – call it *experiencing* – to a scene, with sensing and experiencing thought of as analogous to knowing and believing.[15] Thus sensing entails experiencing, but not conversely; sensing is factive, but experiencing is not. SCENE can go a long way toward accommodating the "disjunctivists", who hold that the successful cases are quite unlike illusions.[16]

1.3 *Phenomenological Particularity*

SCENE is one of the two main premises in the argument for ordinary objects. To accommodate the eliminativist, 'successful' will henceforth mean *successful-according-to-the-realist*, and 'illusory' *illusory-according-to-the-realist*; accordingly, although the eliminativist might

[13] For an argument that a uniform propositionalist treatment is compatible with taking the successful case to involve a relation to a (non-propositional) state of affairs or truthmaker, see Logue 2014.

[14] See Johnston 2006: 268 and Fish 2009: 53.

[15] For a view that dispenses with the analogy and takes sensing and experiencing to be *ways* of knowing and believing, see Byrne 2016.

[16] A qualification: not all disjunctivists put illusions in the right-hand disjunct; some just put hallucinations there (see Byrne and Logue 2008: 60).

deny SCENE, he does not deny that there are successful and illusory visual states.

To motivate the other main premise, return to Strawson's question, "How is it with you, visually, at the moment?" "I see a red bulgy tomato . . ." is incomplete in way we have not yet highlighted. You do not merely see *a* tomato, you see *this* tomato; you do not see a qualitatively identical tomato in the pantry. Vision presents you with a *particular object*, this tomato; it does not present you with the tomato in the pantry. To borrow a useful expression from Schellenberg, your visual state has *phenomenological particularity*: "it (perceptually) seems to [you] as if there is a particular object present" (2010: 22). Better: it seems to you as if *this* object is present. Accordingly, the environmental fact you sense, that determines the way things seem to you, concerns *this* tomato, not merely some tomato or other.[17]

And similarly in illusory cases. They have phenomenological particularity just like the successful ones. When the tomato looks crimson but isn't, the ostensible fact that you experience, that determines the way things seem to you, concerns this tomato – although on this occasion the ostensible fact is merely a false proposition. This false proposition is thus *singular* or *object-dependent*. Characterizing object-dependence precisely is a tricky issue that we can leave aside here.[18] This plausible claim will suffice: if a scene p is object-dependent then p's presentation to S entails that there is an object o such that S is (visually) aware of o.

Let us say that an *ordinary case* is one that is, by realist lights, a case of seeing an ordinary object. So, a plausible accompaniment to SCENE is:

OBJECT: If SCENE is true, scenes in ordinary cases are object-dependent.

[17] A potential source of confusion is the fact that 'way'-talk, as in 'the way things seem', is general, indifferent to the identity of objects. Imagine looking at one tomato (Tom) and then a qualitatively identical tomato (Tim). The presented scene changes: the first presented scene concerns one particular tomato; the second presented scene concerns another. Likewise, "seemings" change, in this sense: it first seems to you as if *this* object (Tom) is present and then it seems to you as if *that* object (Tim) is present. However, the way things seem *doesn't* change. There is no route back from "the way things seem" to the presented scene, which is why SCENE says that the presented scene *determines* the way things seem.

[18] See Glick 2017.

This is our second premise, and we can now turn to the argument for ordinary objects.

2 Argument OO

SCENE, OBJECT, and one more premise give us *Argument OO*:

SCENE: Visual states (successful or illusory) are characterized by a certain sort of proposition, a *scene*, that such-and-such things are arranged thus-and-so, which is present to consciousness and which determines the way things seem.
OBJECT: If SCENE is true, scenes in ordinary cases are object-dependent.
OD → OO: If scenes in ordinary cases are object-dependent, there are ordinary *objects*.
OO: There are ordinary objects.

Ignoring the last premise for the moment, those who abjure ordinary objects have two options: reject SCENE, or reject OBJECT. Which one should the eliminativist pick? Notice that according to the eliminativist, an ordinary case of "seeing a tomato" is really a kind of *hallucination*: one *seems* to see a tomato, but there is no ordinary object that one sees. And, as mentioned at the start, philosophers of perception have expended much energy on theories of hallucination. In fact, the parallel is very close, because an argument similar to Argument OO – *Argument HO* – concludes that there are *hallucinatory* objects:

SCENE†: Hallucinatory visual states are characterized by a certain sort of proposition, a *scene*, that such-and-such things are arranged thus-and-so, which is present to consciousness and which determines the way things seem.
OBJECT†: If SCENE† is true, scenes in hallucinatory cases are object-*dependent*.
HO: There are hallucinatory objects.

(Notice that no third premise is necessary.) If Argument HO is sound, then when one hallucinates a tomato, one is visually aware of *an object*. Anxious to avoid hallucinatory objects, philosophers of perception have (in effect) tried to resist this argument, some by rejecting the first premise, and some by rejecting the second. Can't the eliminativist simply pick from this menu of attempted solutions?

This question will be examined over the next two sections. But it might be thought that rejecting the third premise of Argument OO provides a quicker way out. "Seeing a tomato", on the eliminativist picture, is not *exactly* like (paradigmatically) hallucinating one. Admittedly there is no tomato or any other ordinary object, but *there are some things there*, namely atoms arranged tomatowise. Could the scene in a successful case of "seeing a tomato" simply be a fact about pluralities, something like: *those* [the atoms] are arranged tomatowise at location *L*? That scene is object-dependent (with the atoms as the pertinent objects), so this suggestion accepts both SCENE and OBJECT, while rejecting OD → OO.

An immediate problem is that phenomenological particularity is not respected: if the scene is plural why does it appear "as if a particular object is present"?[19] Moreover, when scenes *are* plural, as when one sees spilled rice on the kitchen floor, the objects are large enough for the visual system to detect – that is why it can extract the information from the retinal stimulus that there are *some things*. But the metaphysician's atoms are undetectable by vision, just like the atoms of chemistry: when one is confronted by atoms, vision is in no position to tell as much.

So, rejecting the last premise seems an entirely unpromising strategy. Let us canvass some leading alternatives.

3 Rejecting SCENE

If "seeing a tomato" does not involve the presentation of a scene, what does it involve? The three main suggestions can be lifted from the accounts of hallucination due to Martin (2004), Fish (2009), and Johnston (2004).

First, Martin. Setting some subtleties aside, his view is this: to hallucinate a red tomato is *simply* to be in a situation that is indiscriminable from a situation in which one veridically sees a red tomato: "at least when it comes to a mental characterization of the hallucinatory experience, nothing more can be said than the relational and epistemological claim that it is indiscriminable from the perception ... there is only a negative characterization of ... hallucinatory experience: it is nothing

[19] For examples that demonstrate the clear phenomenological difference between seeing a plurality as a (mere) plurality and seeing a plurality as a particular, see Green 2016.

but a situation which could not be told apart from veridical perception" (Martin 2004: 72); "such experiences have no positive mental characteristics other than their epistemological properties of not being knowably different from some veridical perception" (82).

Sometimes when one hallucinates a tomato one *can* tell that one is not veridically seeing – by the testimony of the hallucination-inducing neuroscientist, for example. So Martin restricts the relevant ways of knowing to "introspection and reflection" (47). Martin's proposal, co-opted on behalf of the eliminativist, is then this. When one looks at atoms arranged tomatowise, no scene is present to consciousness; rather, all that is going on is that one can't tell by introspection and reflection that one isn't veridically seeing a tomato.

The problem is that the usual arguments for eliminativism have a decidedly *a priori* flavor. So – at least by the eliminativist's lights – presumably one *can* tell by introspection and reflection that one isn't veridically seeing a tomato, simply because one can tell by introspection and reflection that there are no composite objects like tomatoes. Martin's negative epistemological conception of hallucination is thus of no aid to eliminativism.

This objection applies straightforwardly to a particular kind of eliminativist: the *nihilist*, who thinks that there are no composite objects at all. However, an *organicist* – like van Inwagen and Merricks – has a reply. According to the organicist, the only composite material objects are living organisms. So there are no tomatoes, because they are not organisms. But this latter fact is *not* apparent from introspection and reflection. In other words, the organicist can agree that one *can't* tell by introspection and reflection that one isn't veridically seeing a tomato, because one can't tell by introspection and reflection that tomatoes (if there are any) aren't organisms.

Unfortunately, this brings only temporary relief. Consider hallucinating a dead fish. On the present proposal, all that is going on is that one can't tell by introspection and reflection that one isn't veridically seeing a dead fish. But – at least by the organicist's lights – presumably one *can* tell by introspection and reflection that one isn't veridically seeing a dead fish, simply because one can tell by introspection and reflection that there are no non-living composite objects like dead fish.

Turning from the dead fish to the happily living Fish, is his conception of hallucination better suited to eliminativism?

According to Fish, if someone hallucinates a tomato she has no "phenomenal experience" of a tomato, but instead merely suffers the "cognitive effects" (principally "judgments and beliefs") produced by a "possible veridical experience" of a tomato (2009: 94–7). Naïve hallucinators do not just mistakenly think they *see* things; they mistakenly think they (phenomenally) *seem* to see things. Fish's proposal, co-opted on behalf of the eliminativist, is then this. When one looks at atoms arranged tomatowise, no scene is present to consciousness; rather, (a) one does not have a phenomenal experience of a tomato, and (b) one has the cognitive effects produced by a possible veridical experience of a tomato.

As before, there is an immediate problem for the nihilist, because any version of eliminativism is supposed to be non-contingent. It didn't just happen that there are no composite objects like tomatoes – there couldn't have been any. So, by the nihilist's lights, there are no "possible veridical experiences" of tomatoes, and Fish's proposal – at least as officially formulated – is of no help.[20]

As before, the organicist has a reply. Admittedly, assuming that tomatoes are essentially inanimate, there could not have been any. But there could have been *tomato-lookalike-organisms*: living organisms with the same visible properties as tomatoes. The organicist may thus revise the Fish-style proposal as follows. When one looks at atoms arranged tomatowise, no scene is present to consciousness; rather, (a) one does not have a phenomenal experience of a tomato, and (b) one has the cognitive effects produced by a possible veridical experience of a tomato-lookalike-organism.

Yet again as before, the relief is only temporary. This may work for tomatoes, but one may hallucinate almost anything – for instance, bicycles, space shuttles, and sewing machines. The proposal requires wildly speculative modal biology, delivering a bizarre menagerie of possible bicycle-lookalike-organisms and the rest.

Finally, Johnston's view, which makes use of a *sensible profile*:

[20] The nihilist might reply by switching to a counterfactual formulation (cf. Fish 2009: 94–5) – one has the cognitive effects that *would have* been produced by a veridical experience of a tomato – while maintaining that counterfactuals with impossible antecedents are sometimes true and sometimes false, just like the more typical examples. But this heterodox position about counterfactuals is very difficult to defend (Williamson 2016; see also Korman 2014: 5–6).

Consider the sensed field or scene before your eyes. Now attend to the relational and qualitative structure that is visibly instantiated there in the scene. It consists of just the properties and relations of which you are visually aware, when you are seeing the scene. It is a scene type or *sensible profile*, a complex, partly qualitative and partly relational property, which exhausts the *way* the particular scene before your eyes is if your present experience is veridical. (Johnston 2004: 134)

One may attend to particular objects that one sees. One may also attend to the properties or features that those objects instantiate. And once that last claim is granted, attention to the more complicated property that is the "sensible profile" should be unobjectionable.

In the successful case, one sees (say), that mighty pig, the Empress of Blandings, against a grassy background. One is aware of the Empress, but also the complex qualitative-cum-relational property that the whole scene instantiates. Undergoing a corresponding hallucination of such a corpulent pig against a grassy background, one is not aware of any animal, but is (Johnston argues) aware of the uninstantiated sensible profile one is aware of in the successful case.

The core claim is that awareness of the uninstantiated sensible profile is all that is needed to account for hallucination:

When we see we are aware of instantiations of sensible profiles. When we hallucinate we are aware merely of the structured qualitative parts of such sensible profiles ... The act/object account of hallucination is secured by treating hallucination as visual awareness of an uninstantiated sensible profile. If some such presented profile strikes a subject as [a tomato], then the subject counts as hallucinating [a tomato]. (2004: 137, 156)

Johnston's proposal, co-opted on behalf of the eliminativist, is then this. When one looks at atoms arranged tomatowise, no scene is present to consciousness; rather, one is aware of a certain sensible profile, a complex uninstantiated property. That profile (more exactly, one of its "structured qualitative parts") "strikes one" as a (red, bulgy) tomato, which accounts for the phenomenological particularity of one's visual state.

But why would something that is neither red nor bulgy (indeed, not colored or shaped at all), and not even a particular (sensible profiles and their parts are universals), strike one *as* a red bulgy object? And there is a further question for the organicist, who admits the Empress into his ontology. If *un*instantiated sensible profiles strike one as particular objects, why does the *instantiated* sensible profile, when one sees the Empress, not also do so? In that situation, surely the only entity that strikes one as a particular object is the Empress herself. It is unclear that there are adequate answers to these questions.[21]

4 Rejecting Object

Return to Argument OO:

Scene: Visual states (successful and illusory) are characterized by a certain sort of proposition, a *scene*, that such-and-such things are arranged thus-and-so, which is present to consciousness and which determines the way things seem.
Object: If Scene is true, scenes in ordinary cases are object-dependent.
OD → OO: If scenes in ordinary cases are object-dependent, there are ordinary *objects*.
OO: There are ordinary objects.

We have just examined three ways of denying Scene and briefly reviewed some of their problems. Let us now turn to the alternative strategy of denying Object. Here there are two leading proposals: gappy propositions and descriptive scenes.

In the literature on the puzzles posed by empty names, one proposal is that a sentence like 'Vulcan is a planet' expresses a "gappy proposition".[22] If we follow Russellians and represent the proposition that Venus is hot as <Venus, being hot>, then the proposition that Vulcan is hot can be represented as <__, being hot>, with a "gap" corresponding to the empty name 'Vulcan'.[23] A gappy "proposition"

[21] Johnston's explanation of particularity appeals to the fact that the uninstantiated sensible profile involves (uninstantiated) relations to places and times, e.g., "the property of being a ... red [bulgy] thing at a certain changing distance and direction from the present position, at the present time". This "relational element ... mimics spatial and temporal extent, and thereby mimics particularity" (142). What is not obvious is why being aware of a "complex of universals" (142), some of which *include* spatiotemporal relations, should make one inclined to take that complex to *stand in* spatiotemporal relations.

[22] Let us assume for illustration that 'Vulcan' is an empty name. For the view that it refers to a planetary character in a work of fiction inadvertently authored by the French astronomer Jacques Babinet, see Salmon 1998.

[23] Note that the proposition should not be *identified* with the ordered pair (see, e.g., King et al. 2014: 32). The usual set-theoretic definition of <a, b> as {{a}, {a, b}} is not usually supposed to be defined when there is no *pair* to be ordered, but it could be, thus <_, b> = {{}, {b}}.

is not like a fake diamond: it is supposed to be a genuine proposition, which can be believed and asserted, among other things.[24] The gappy proposition that such-and-such things are arranged thus-and-so can thus serve as the (ostensible) tract of the environment that is present to consciousness in hallucination.[25] There is no need to force the phenomenology of hallucination into an unnatural mold, as with Johnston's view that the hallucinator is mistaking a sensible profile for a particular object. On the gappy proposition view, we can reconcile two apparently incompatible desiderata: that in hallucination an ostensible tract of the environment is present to consciousness, and that the hallucinator is not aware of any particular object.

Comparing the scenes in a case of seeing a china frog and a matching case of hallucination, Tye writes,

> The second content [i.e., scene] is just like the first except that where the first has a concrete object in it, the second has a gap. The two contents, thus, have a common structure. This structure may be conceived of as having a slot in it for an object. In the case of the first content, the slot is filled by the china frog. In the case of the second content, the slot is empty. (Tye 2009: 81)

Schellenberg develops a Fregean version of the gappy content view on which the first content has an object together with a "mode of presentation" in the slot, while the second hallucinatory content only has a mode of presentation (Schellenberg 2010, 2011, 2013).

Tye later rejected the gappy content view, chiefly because it is hard to make sense of the relevant structure with a "gap" in it (Tye 2014).[26] Here are two more objections.

First, there is the issue of truth values. The gappy proposition that Vulcan is hot is not true. (If it is true, then by parity the proposition that Vulcan is cold is true too, but they can't both be true.) Is it then false? Intuitively, the proposition is no more false than it is true (cf. Salmon 1998: 318, n. 54).[27] But supposing that it is neither true nor false seems

[24] Braun strikes a faint note of caution, saying only that gappy propositions are "semantical objects that (at the very least) strongly resemble propositions" (1993: 461). However, he argues that gappy propositions have truth values, and can be believed.

[25] In addition to Tye and Schellenberg (discussed below), see, e.g., Gupta 2006: 26, n. 18.

[26] See also Sainsbury and Tye 2012: 152–7.

[27] Braun, however, thinks that (atomic) gappy propositions are all false (1993: 464).

to lead straightforwardly to a contradiction (Williamson 1994: 187–9).[28]

Second, consider some cases where a complex singular term containing a name 'n' refers to a structured entity with n as a component, for instance 'The object consisting of this donut with n wedged into the hole', 'The ordered pair with n as its first member and 6 as its second', 'The object formed by stacking n on top of this red brick and that blue brick on top of n'. If 'n' is an empty name, these singular terms do not refer. 'The object consisting of this donut with Vulcan wedged into the hole' does not refer to the donut (with an empty hole in the middle), 'the ordered pair with Vulcan as its first member and 6 as its second' does not refer to <_, 6>, and 'the object formed by stacking Vulcan on top of this red brick and that blue brick on top of Vulcan' does not refer to a scattered object consisting of the red and blue bricks separated by a (Vulcan-sized?) gap. Rather, these expressions do not refer at all: there is no such thing as the object consisting of this donut with Vulcan wedged into the hole. Following this model, one would predict that the complex singular term 'The proposition that n is hot' fails to refer when 'n' is empty, rather than referring to a gappy proposition. But if there are gappy propositions, presumably the proposition that Vulcan is hot is one of them.[29]

In response, one might deny that gappy propositions are propositions. (After all, an under-construction house, with gaps where the walls should be, is doubtfully a house.) Accordingly, they do not obey principles governing propositional truth and falsity, are not picked out by expressions of the form 'The proposition that so-and-so', and so are immune to the previous two objections. But since they are not propositions, they cannot serve as items that are *ostensibly the case* in hallucination. In fact, these gappy non-propositions are essentially equivalent to Johnston's sensible profiles. If there is an account of hallucination on offer here, it is Johnston's, which we have already examined.

[28] For a modalized version of Williamson's argument see Magidor 2013: 87–8.

[29] What about intensional transitives? 'The search for Nessie' refers to a search (that might have started three years ago and ended last week) even though – we may suppose – 'Nessie' is empty: there are no monstrous aquatic animals in Loch Ness. But this does not threaten the argument just given, because the search for Nessie is not (or not obviously) a structured event with a "gap" where an existent object of a search would be found. That is: the search for (existent) X is not a structured event with X as a constituent. (Thanks here to Derek Ball.)

Finally, there is at least some tension between rejecting composite objects like tomatoes and embracing composite objects like structured propositions. (Similarly with embracing composite universals like Johnston's sensible profiles.) It would thus be no surprise to find an eliminativist about tomatoes also chary about admitting structured propositions, and indeed Merricks is an example (2015, ch. 4). If one props up one's eliminativism about ordinary objects with another sort of composite entity, there is a danger that the motivation for the propped-up view will bring the whole edifice tumbling down.[30]

The second way of denying OBJECT is less theoretically encumbered. Uncontroversially, not all propositions are object-dependent: the proposition there are yetis, for example. That proposition has nothing to fear from the non-existence of Himalayan apes, other than falsity. Granting SCENE, if the scenes in ordinary cases are likewise object-*in*dependent, then OBJECT is false.

On this descriptive proposal, the putative objects of perception get pinned down by description. When you see this pad, the fact (or, in general, the scene) that is presented by vision is not an object-dependent proposition concerning this pad but a descriptive proposition: the so-and-so is yellow and rectangular, say. Korman, for instance, holds this view. On seeing a tree in good light, "(and grossly oversimplifying), when we encounter the leafiness of the leaves, the woodiness of the trunk . . . we have an experience of the form $\exists x[Leafy(x)\ \&\ Woody(x)]$" (2014: 13).[31]

The decisive objection to this proposal is analogous to Kripke's "argument from error" objection to the description theory of names (Kripke 1980: 83–5). Imagine you see Pad-1, a white square pad on the left of your desk. Due to a crafty arrangement of lights and mirrors, Pad-1 appears to you as a yellow, elongated rectangular pad on the right of your desk. The scene mischaracterizes Pad-1: it is neither yellow, an elongated rectangle, nor on the right. In fact, Pad-2 is also on your desk: it is yellow and rectangular, and in exactly the position where Pad-1 appears to be. Pad-2 is occluded and you do not see it. According to the descriptive proposal, the yellow rectangular

[30] A helpful compendium of eliminativist motivations is in Korman 2016.
[31] See also Jackson 2015.

pad on the right – Pad-2 – is presented to you, not Pad-1. And that is the wrong answer.[32]

5 Conclusion

It would be premature to announce that Argument OO is sound; the preceding discussion has been too compressed for that. Still, we may conclude that the argument is hard to resist. SCENE, incidentally, is not strictly needed; TRACT would also serve. Those, like Fish, who think that the successful cases fundamentally involve perceptual contact with facts (not understood as true propositions) will endorse a modified version of Argument OO with the same conclusion. Even those (like Brewer) who claim that "perception consists most fundamentally in a relation of acquaintance" with ordinary objects, rather than relations to facts or propositions, can mount their own (heavily) modified version of Argument OO. Resisting these other OOish arguments will involve appeal to the theories of hallucination already considered.

Some of the objections to these theories were quite general; other objections (specifically, the ones directed against Martin and Fish) only had force on the assumption of eliminativism about ordinary objects. For all that has been said, a realist about ordinary objects could repurpose either Martin's or Fish's theory of hallucination. And that, one might think, is all to the good: Argument OO may be sound, but Argument HO presumably is not. Martin or Fish may yet show us why Argument HO has a false premise. Unfortunately, however, the matter is not quite so straightforward. There are other, more general, objections to Martin and Fish (indeed, each of these philosophers objects to the other[33]). If Argument OO is indeed

[32] Adapting Searle's account of perceptual intentionality (Searle 2015: 60–70), one might allow that scenes are object-dependent with respect to *particular experiences*. Thus the relevant description is something like: the object causing *this visual experience* is yellow, an elongated rectangle, and on the right. Since that object is Pad-1, the objection is evaded. But, first, this flatly rejects the appealing and scientifically sensible presentationalist idea that it is simply the *environment* that "present to consciousness" when one perceives things as they are. And, second, the required conception of a "visual experience" (a "mental event in my head" (2015: 64), only extrinsically related to any external objects), is quite suspect (Byrne 2009).
[33] For Fish's objections to Martin, see Fish 2009; for the converse, see Martin 2013. See also Siegel 2008 and Pautz 2013.

sound, then perhaps Argument HO is as well. We will have to leave this potential embarrassment unresolved.

Metaphysicians who deny that there are ordinary objects tend (like most philosophers) to take perceptual *seemings* for granted. They see no difficulty in this, because the seemings are supposed to be metaphysically neutral bystanders. The argument of this essay has been that these metaphysicians are wrong: if ordinary objects are nothing, perceptual seemings are too.

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