

## NAIVE REALIST PERSPECTIVES ON SEEING BLURRILY

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### *Abstract*

Naive realists hold that experience is to be understood in terms of an intimate perceptual relation between a subject and aspects of the world, relative to a certain standpoint. Those aspects of the world themselves shape the contours of consciousness. But blurriness is an aspect of some of our experiences that does not seem to come from the world. I argue that this constitutes a significant challenge to some forms of naive realism. But I also argue that there is a robust form of naive realism which is unfazed by the blurriness of some of our experiences, even when that blurriness is understood as a subjective modification of consciousness.

### **1. Introduction**

Naive realists hold that experience is to be understood in terms of an intimate perceptual relation between a subject and aspects of the world. Those aspects of the world shape the contours of consciousness.

Naive realism is seemingly in trouble if there are aspects of experience which are not traceable to the world (are non-presentational) and are subjective contributions. The quality of blurriness which characterizes blurry vision has been thought to be like this, and has thus been thought to be problematic for naive realism. One sort of naive realist response holds that blur is, after all, to be accounted for just in terms of the real presence of aspects of the world. I consider two ways of working this out, and find them wanting.

What then of naive realism? Though some discussions of the view may obscure this, I argue that the central naive realist ideas we began with and some of their motivations sit comfortably with there being non-presentational and subjective elements to experience.

## 2. Some Aspects of Naive Realism

Naive realists hold that some of our perceptual experiences consist in relations to things in the mind-independent world.

Many will agree that *perceptions* relate us to external things, so when Freddy sees a book there must be a book there to be seen. Perceiving something is thus like kicking something. But naive realists hold, more distinctively, that this is true of a certain class of *experiences*. We can distinguish the experiences we have in genuine cases of perception – that is, cases where one genuinely perceives the world – from other sorts of experiences (e.g., hallucinations). Naive realists hold that the experiences had in genuine cases are constitutively relational. When Freddy sees the book and thus has an experience of it, his very experience itself is a case of Freddy's being perceptually related to the book. Thus, according to the naive realist, some perceptual experiences themselves are world-involving.

Now to unpack and qualify these ideas. I will restrict attention to visual perception and visual experience throughout. Let us begin by considering the following conception of experience articulated by Martin:

[T]o have an experience is to have a viewpoint on something: experiences intrinsically possess some subject-matter which is presented to that viewpoint. To understand such experience and what it is like, one has to understand that viewpoint on that subject-matter, and hence also to attend to the subject-matter as presented to the viewpoint.<sup>1</sup>

This articulates what we might call *the viewpoint conception of experience*. (a) to have a visual experience is to have a viewpoint on something, to be presented with entities. That is, experience has a *presentational aspect*. Additionally, (b) there is a tight connection between the presentational aspect of experience and its subjective character. This viewpoint conception of experience is not unique to naive realism. The distinctive content of naive realism comes in how (a) and (b) are cashed out.

First, (a). The naive *realist* is committed to the idea that in visual experience we are presented with *familiar denizens of*

<sup>1</sup> M. G. F. Martin, 'Setting Things Before the Mind', in Anthony O'Hear (ed.) *Current Issues in Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 157–179, at p. 173.

*mind-independent reality* (e.g., familiar material objects like tables, instances of their properties, events involving such particulars, other visual phenomena such as rainbows and shadows, etc). We are presented with familiar mind-independent entities, entities which do not constitutively depend for their existence on our awareness of them, and which are the ordinary things we pre-theoretically take ourselves to be aware of. To capture this, let us say that experience has an *objective presentational aspect*.

Further, naive realists hold not only that experience involves the presentation of objective entities, but that the *manner* in which we are presented with such entities is to be understood in *relational* terms:

[V]isual experiences are relational: the object perceived is a constituent of the conscious experience itself.<sup>2</sup>

The intended contrast is with views which understand the presentation of objective entities *representationally*, so we should understand the relationality of experience in non-representational terms.<sup>3</sup> Thus naive realists hold that in experience we are presented with objective entities, and this is to be understood in terms of a primitive *non-representational relation* to such entities. And to be clear, the naive realist commitment is to a *relational* dimension of experience which is to be understood non-representationally, not to the distinct idea that experience is, *tout court*, non-representational.

What then of (b), the idea that there is a tight connection between the presentational aspect of experience and its subjective character? Here the naive realist appeals to the way they conceive of the presentational aspect of experience, that is, as (at least partly) objective and relational. By presenting us with aspects of objective reality, in an intimate relational way, such aspects of reality themselves – not representations of them – are part of what constitutively shapes the contours of conscious experience:

[T]he phenomenal character of your [T]he 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

<sup>2</sup> John Campbell, *Reference and Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> See here Matthew Soteriou, 'Perceiving Events', *Philosophical Explorations* 13 (2011), pp. 223–241, at p. 225.

properties, such as colour and shape, and how they are arranged in relation to one another and to you.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, the strands of naive realism that I have extracted so far are these. First, a particular understanding of (a). Here the naive realist holds that at least some of the presentational aspect of experience can be accounted for as follows: (a1) We are presented with objective entities, and (a2) such presentation is to be understood in terms of a non-representational relation to such entities. Second, a particular understanding of (b). Here the naive realist holds (b1) that the objective entities which we are related to in experience are constitutive of the character of experience.<sup>5</sup>

Consider Freddy who sees a book for what it is. Freddy has an experience in which he is presented with objective entities (a book, and perhaps some of its qualities such as its bluish colour). A partial description of the subjective character of his experience seems to reveal a link between this objective presentational aspect of Freddy's experience, and its subjective character, by making unashamed mention of the presented entities: the book looks bluish and rectangular to Freddy. The naive realist proposes that owing to the intimate non-representational relation between Freddy and the book, the very book itself is manifest in Freddy's experience and thus constitutive of some of the subjective character the experience has.

This is not yet a complete outline of the core commitments of naive realism, but more details will be brought to bear in section (4) below. Before moving on, I will briefly outline two motivations for naive realism.<sup>6</sup>

First, as Strawson notes 'mature sensible experience (in general) presents it-self as . . . an *immediate* consciousness of the existence of things outside us'.<sup>7</sup> The naive realist can give a simple explanation of this phenomenological datum: experiences involve the *real presence* of things outside us, in the sense that they are relations to such things.

A second motivation comes from considering the explanatory role of experience with respect to thoughts about our

<sup>4</sup> Campbell, *Reference and Consciousness*, p. 116.

<sup>5</sup> Here 'constitutive' need not mean 'exhaustively constitutive'.

<sup>6</sup> Further motivations are to be found in M. G. F. Martin, 'The Transparency of Experience', *Mind and Language* 17 (2002), pp. 376–425, and Heather Logue, 'Why Naive Realism?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 112 (2012), pp. 211–237.

<sup>7</sup> P. F. Strawson, 'Perception and its Objects' in G. F. Macdonald (ed.) *Perception and Identity* (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 41–60, at p. 47.

environments (see Campbell, *Reference and Consciousness*). Freddy sees a book before him and can thus form demonstrative thoughts about it, such as *that book is blue*. Part of what is involved in Freddy's being able to think this thought is his grasp of the demonstrative component *that book*. It is conscious experience of the object in question, Campbell thinks, which explains Freddy's grasp of this demonstrative component. Conscious experience provides Freddy with knowledge of the reference of 'that book', and so enables him to think demonstrative thoughts about it. Experience can play this role, Campbell holds, only if it constitutes a simple kind of acquaintance with an object, where acquaintance is understood, as it traditionally is, as a sort of relation to an object. The naive realist theory of experience maintains, as we have seen, that conscious experience involves a simple, non-representational, relation to the objects we are aware of. It is thus well suited to capture the explanatory role of experience that Campbell highlights.

This is just to note factors which give a rationale for holding naive realism, factors which make a case for its being a reasonable position to adopt. But of course they do not come close to establishing naive realism as the correct theory of experience.<sup>8</sup> And there are challenges to the position. I will consider one challenge in the remainder: the challenge from blurry vision. The challenge is interesting in itself, but also because it is a particular case of a more general issue: how, if at all, seemingly subjective elements of experience can be accommodated in theories of experience which make much of the role of the world beyond us in accounting for the character of experience.

### 3. Seeing Blurrily: A Challenge

The phenomenon of seeing blurrily constitutes a challenge to naive realism.<sup>9</sup> The naive realist places emphasis on the worldly entities we are aware of in constituting the subjective character of visual experience. Owing to the real presence of aspects of the world in experience, experience has the subjective character it

<sup>8</sup> I do not myself know if naive realism should be afforded that status.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Pace, 'Blurred Vision and the Transparency of Experience', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 88 (2007), pp. 328–354; A. D. Smith, 'Translucent Experiences', *Philosophical Studies* 140 (2008), pp. 197–212; and Keith Allen, 'Blur', *Philosophical Studies* 162 (2013), pp. 257–273.

has. But in an experience in which one sees blurrily, there is an aspect of the subjective character of one's experience which seems not to be contributed by aspects of the world. As Smith notes, 'blur [seeing blurrily] is hardly to be accounted for simply by some object in the world being a constituent of an experience'.<sup>10</sup>

A simple way to develop the challenge is as follows. Freddy can go from seeing the book sharply (with his glasses on), to seeing the book blurrily (with his glasses off). There is a clear phenomenological difference between these two episodes of seeing: they differ in subjective character. Yet in each case what is really present is held fixed: a bluish rectangular book. So there must be aspects of subjective character which are not constituted by aspects of the world really present in experience.

Suppose, for the time being, that the naive realist wants to account for *all* aspects of subjective character in terms of the presentation of objective entities. Call this *ambitious naive realism*. Clearly, blurry vision constitutes a challenge to ambitious naive realism. Whether it is fatal needs further consideration. I will start with some further details of the naive realist view (section (4)) which will lead us to see how an ambitious naive realist might push back on the challenge from seeing blurrily as we have construed it so far (section (5)).

#### 4. Developing Naive Realism

What is involved in capturing an aspect of subjective character in *naive realist* terms? We have only partially cashed this out. Let us return to the passage of Martin's we began with, but this time with extra emphasis:

[T]o have an experience is to have a *viewpoint* on something: experiences intrinsically possess some subject-matter which is presented to that viewpoint. To understand such experience and what it is like, *one has to understand that viewpoint* on that subject-matter, and hence also to attend to the subject-matter as presented to the viewpoint.<sup>11</sup>

In accounting for the subjective character of experience we do assign a role to the presented entities of experience, but we

<sup>10</sup> 'Translucent Experiences', p. 199, fn. 3.

<sup>11</sup> 'Setting Things Before the Mind', p. 173, emphasis mine.

cannot neglect the viewpoint one has in being presented with such entities. There is a phenomenological role for the *point of view* one adopts in a given experience.

More generally, Campbell suggests that one always experiences an object from a *standpoint*, and there is a whole host of factors relevant to the sort of standpoint one has on what one is given in experience which can make a difference to the subjective character of one's experience:

The notion of a standpoint must encompass more than merely the position of the observer . . . to describe the standpoint explicitly we have to say which sensory modality is involved; and that will determine further factors we have to fill in. For example, suppose the modality is vision. Then we need, further, position, but also relative orientations of the viewer and object, how close the viewer is to the object, whether there is anything obstructing the light between them, and so on.<sup>12</sup>

Let us understand 'standpoint' or 'standpoint conditions' to include all of the conditions mentioned here by Campbell. Thus a visual experience and a tactile experience are experiences involving different standpoints (for they involve different perceptual modalities). But two visual experiences can involve different standpoints if the conditions of illumination, or viewpoint, differ between them. And so on for the other factors alluded to above.

Naive realists, as I now understand them, hold that experience is not a simple two-place relation, but rather a relation between a subject and an entity, relative to *a certain standpoint* – or *set of standpoint conditions*.<sup>13</sup> Altering the standpoint can make for variation in subjective character, even when the scene is held fixed. The standpoint plays a phenomenological role. But how exactly does this work?

In Brewer's framework the standpoint conditions play a role in this sense. They are part of what makes it the case that objects (objectively) *look* certain ways. (Here I am talking about looks as objective properties of objects, not subjective appearances). Suppose one sees a white piece of chalk in peculiar conditions

<sup>12</sup> John Campbell, 'Consciousness and Reference' in Brian McLaughlin, Ansgar Beckermann, and Sven Walter (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 648–662, at pp. 657–658.

<sup>13</sup> A three-place relation, see 'Consciousness and Reference', p. 657.

where it is bathed in red light.<sup>14</sup> *Relative to such conditions*, the chalk looks red. That is, it has the property of looking red. (Brewer cashes this out in terms of the idea that relative to the illumination conditions it has visually relevant similarities to a paradigm red piece of chalk). Acquaintance with the piece of chalk, *in those conditions*, allows the chalk's looking red to constitutively shape one's consciousness so as one's experience is a case of something looking red *to one*.

The role of standpoint conditions *C*, for Brewer, is that relative to them *O* has certain looks *F* properties (relational but objective properties), such that conscious acquaintance with *O* in *C* is acquaintance in which *O*'s looking *F* is part of what makes it the case that *O* looks *F* to *S*. On this way of understanding things, standpoint conditions have an *additive function*. They are part of what makes it the case that objects have certain visible properties – those relational looks properties. The properties are standpoint-relative properties.

We can allow also that standpoint conditions have a *selective function*. Consider an ideal case, as opposed to an illusory case: Freddy sees the book for the bluish rectangular thing it is. We can say that acquaintance with the book in certain standpoint conditions *C* means that certain of the features that the book has *anyway* – independently of those conditions – are now perceptually salient, ready to constitutively shape Freddy's conscious experience. So being presented with a book relative to a certain standpoint (e.g., in conditions of natural daylight) serves to make perceptually salient the bluish colour and other features of the book, that other standpoints do not serve to make salient (e.g., when one looks at the book in dark light).

The naive realist holds that the standpoint conditions are part of what is involved in a given experience having the subjective character it has. They still maintain the idea that the subjective character of experience is constituted by presented entities and qualities, but the standpoint makes a difference to this by addition and/or selection of visibly manifest qualities. The fundamental characterization of which modification of consciousness an experience is, is given in terms of objective entities, really present in one's experience, *relative to standpoint conditions*.

<sup>14</sup> The example is Brewer's.



### 4.1 *Revisiting the Challenge*

How can we bring these extra details of the naive realist position to bear on the issue of seeing blurrily?

In one case Freddy is in a position to see the book before him sharply, and in the other he can see it only blurrily. A naive realist can insist that there *is* variation in what is really presented in Freddy's experience across the cases, owing to a variation in the standpoint. What is held fixed is that Freddy is presented with a bluish rectangular book. However, for all that, relative to one set of standpoint conditions the book has visible relational features which are manifest to Freddy. (This is to work the standpoint conditions in their additive role). And/or for all that, which of the properties the book has anyway which Freddy has access to may vary, as a function of variation in standpoint conditions. (This is to work the standpoint conditions in their selective role).

As it stands this is merely a structural suggestion about how an ambitious naive realist account of seeing blurrily might be developed. What we have not secured is a plausible naive realist story about how aspects of the world, really present in experience, can be what grounds the distinctive phenomenology of seeing blurrily. I will now consider two options for the ambitious naive realist which map on to the suggestions above: one which exploits the standpoint conditions in their additive role, and one which exploits them in their selective role. These two approaches correspond to two of the existing intentionalist approaches to seeing blurrily, so I will sketch the naive realist position in each case as an adaptation of the corresponding intentionalist position.

## 5. Seeing Blurrily and Ambitious Naive Realism

Dretske aims to account for blurry vision solely in terms of properties the objects of perception are represented as having, and his suggestion for how to do this is simple: when one sees blurrily one represents things as blurry.<sup>15</sup> In discussing what Dretske means by 'blurry', Smith helpfully offers the following:

It denotes what I'm using the term 'fuzzy' to denote: the property of having indistinct boundaries and surface details. Dretske

<sup>15</sup> Fred Dretske, 'Experience as Representation', *Philosophical Issues* 13 (2003), pp. 67–82, at p. 77.

himself is, indeed, happy to use the latter term. To be blurry, he writes, is a matter of having 'fuzzy edges'. This is an objective feature that objects can possess in and of themselves, without reference to how they are perceived. To be fuzzy is to lack a sharp boundary: something that may be true of a swirl of mist, for instance, whether it is perceived or not.<sup>16</sup>

And Smith goes on to put Dretske's central contention as follows:

[B]lurred vision is a visual representation [as] of a fuzzy object, and . . . the blurredness of a visual experience . . . is simply a matter of that experience representing a fuzzy object. Blurredness is not a 'quality' that an experience possesses; and when we introspect, we shall not discover any such quality, but only the fuzziness that some object is represented as possessing.<sup>17</sup>

How are we to account for the blurriness which part characterizes how things are subjectively for Freddy in seeing a book on the desk blurrily? On Dretske's account this is a matter of Freddy visually representing aspects of the scene as fuzzy. The boundaries of the book, the desk, the printed letters on the book's cover, and so on, are represented to be fuzzy. Dretske's account makes blurry experiences a species of misrepresentation, for such elements (the edges of the table, etc) are not actually fuzzy or indistinct.

Despite eschewing Dretske's intentionalist framework, a naive realist can take over something like Dretske's account. Suppose that the standpoint conditions, *C*, mean that Freddy can see nearby objects only blurrily (Freddy is longsighted and does not have glasses). Relative to *C*, the scene before Freddy is seen by him as blurry. This can be construed in terms of elements of the scene (e.g., the printed letters on the cover of the book) looking fuzzy to Freddy. And *looking fuzzy* can be construed as a standpoint-relative visible property. That is, a complex relational property which the letters have relative to *C*. The property in question (the fuzzy look) is not instantiated when the standpoint conditions are such that Freddy is in a position to see sharply (when he puts glasses on). In being acquainted with the letters in *C*, this fuzzy look is visually manifest to Freddy; the letters thus shape the contours of Freddy's conscious experience so that they look fuzzy *to him*.

<sup>16</sup> 'Translucent Experiences', p. 201.

<sup>17</sup> 'Translucent Experiences', p. 203.

The subjective character of blurred vision is conceived of not in terms of the (mis)representation of fuzziness, but rather in terms of the real presence of entities which instantiate a standpoint-relative *looks fuzzy* property. Going from seeing blurrily to seeing sharply is an alteration in one's standpoint which makes a difference to which visible properties the entities really present in experience *actually instantiate*. Thus it seems that the phenomenological difference between seeing blurrily and seeing sharply can be accounted for in an *ambitious* naive realist framework, where the goal is for all aspects of subjective character to be accounted for in terms of the real presence of objective entities in experience.

But unfortunately for the ambitious naive realist the objections Smith raises to Dretske's approach apply to the naive realist adaptation of it. What we are offered conflicts with the phenomenological facts. For an 'object can look fuzzy without any blur attaching to the visual perception at all. Conversely, when I am seeing blurrily, it need not seem to me that I am seeing something fuzzy'.<sup>18</sup> A thing's looking fuzzy to one does not entail that one sees it blurrily, and seeing something blurrily does not entail that it looks fuzzy to one.

Regarding the first point, Smith notes that a 'cloud, or an Impressionistic watercolour figure, or a patch of light projected onto a screen, can have an indistinct boundary and can hence look fuzzy. This, however, is quite different from blur'.<sup>19</sup> With his glasses on Freddy can see such fuzzy objects, and they look fuzzy to him, but he sees them quite *sharply*. He might go to seeing them blurrily if he takes off his glasses.

Also, suppose that Freddy upgrades his 15 year old laptop to a modern machine with a high-resolution screen. Text displayed on his old laptop has a jagged and fuzzy look to it, but letters on the new machine look sharp. Now Freddy has not gone from seeing blurrily to seeing sharply in switching laptops. Indeed, suppose he puts the screens side-by-side, he can see text on both screens at the same time, on the old laptop the text looks fuzzy to him, on the new laptop it looks sharp to him. Freddy is obviously not seeing blurrily and sharply at the same time. *What* he is seeing on one side manifests a fuzzy look, and on the other side it manifests a sharp look. But this can all be within the context of sharp vision.

<sup>18</sup> 'Translucent Experiences', p. 203.

<sup>19</sup> 'Translucent Experiences', p. 200.

But does seeing a thing blurrily entail that it looks fuzzy to one? Suppose that Freddy goes from seeing the text displayed on the high-resolution screen sharply to seeing it blurrily. Does this mean that Freddy now sees the sharp text as fuzzy? Not obviously. Smith notes that 'when one sees something in a blurred way, one does not take oneself to be seeing something fuzzy: one cannot see the thing clearly enough for it to look that way!'<sup>20</sup> Smith buttresses the point as follows:

If I did visually represent a fuzzy object [or if an object looked fuzzy to me] whenever I experienced blurred vision, I would in such cases, in the absence of overriding collateral information, believe that a fuzzy object was before me. But I do no such thing. Precisely because, when I see blurrily, I cannot see too well, I am unsure what is before me. This is not itself a matter of my theoretical judgement overriding the deliverances of my senses. It is not as though I realize that I am suffering from blurred vision, and so fail to be convinced by what I seem to see: the presence of a fuzzy object. The absolutely basic, animal response to blurred vision is uncertainty about the nature of one's surrounding. It is not . . . perceptual certainty that fuzzy objects are before me.<sup>21</sup>

If seeing a thing blurrily entailed that the thing looked fuzzy to one, then we would expect one to have an inclination to believe it to be fuzzy (in the absence of overriding information). But seeing blurrily does not involve such inclinations, and rather involves epistemic humility about one's surroundings.<sup>22</sup>

Let us consider, then, a different approach. I will consider how a naive realist might adapt the representationalist account of seeing blurrily we find in work by Tye.<sup>23</sup> Tye agrees that seeing a sharp thing blurrily is not a matter of inaccurately representing it to be fuzzy. So how *are* we to understand the character of seeing blurrily? Tye says that

[in seeing blurrily one's experience] makes no comment on where exactly the boundaries lie. Here there is no inaccuracy

<sup>20</sup> 'Translucent Experiences', p. 201.

<sup>21</sup> 'Translucent Experiences', pp. 203–204.

<sup>22</sup> See also Allen, 'Blur', p. 256.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Tye, 'Blurry Images, Double Vision, and Other Oddities: New Problems for Representationalism?' in Quentin Smith and Aleksandar Jokic (eds.) *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) pp. 7–32.

... one simply loses information ... one undergoes sensory representations that fail to specify just where the boundaries and contours lie. Some information that was present with eyes focused is now missing. In particular, [one gets] less definite information about surface depth, orientation, contours, etc.<sup>24</sup>

And Tye illustrates his proposal with the following example:

Consider a watercolour painting done on wet paper so that the edges of the coloured shapes blur. If I view such a painting with my glasses on, I have a clear impression of a blurry representation. Now consider a watercolour painting done on dry paper with sharp edges to the coloured shapes. Viewing a painting of this sort with my glasses off, I have a blurry impression of a clear representation ... [W]ith the blurry watercolour, my visual experience represents quite precisely the blurriness of the edges; that is, it represents (a) that the edges definitely fall between spatial regions *A* and *B* of the paper and (b) that it is indefinite exactly where between *A* and *B* on the paper the edges fall. With the clear watercolour, seen without glasses, my visual experience is silent on the precise locus of the edges; that is, my experience represents that the edges of the coloured shapes definitely fall between *A* and *B* while failing to represent exactly where it is between *A* and *B* the edges lie.<sup>25</sup>

In seeing the clear watercolour blurrily, Tye notes, my visual experience represents that the edges of the coloured shapes definitely fall between *A* and *B* while failing to specify exactly where between *A* and *B*. Thus on Tye's account, when one sees the clear watercolour blurrily one's experience does have spatial content, but it is relatively unspecific spatial content. This fact about the content of experience is supposed to account for the subjective character of blurred vision.

In conceiving of the spatial content of blurred vision as unspecific Tye leaves some things open. For we can ask what it is for the spatial content of experience to be unspecific (with respect to edge location, say), and there are different options available to us here. Suppose then that an experience of the clear watercolour represents that the edge lies between *A* and *B*, but fails to specify

<sup>24</sup> 'Blurry Images, Double Vision, and Other Oddities ...', p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> 'Blurry Images, Double Vision, and Other Oddities ...', p. 20.

where exactly between *A* and *B* the edge lies. The experience thus has unspecific spatial content. But this may be because it represents disjunctively (e.g., that the edge is either at *p*<sub>1</sub> or *p*<sub>2</sub> or *p*<sub>3</sub> (and so on), where *p*<sub>1</sub>, *p*<sub>2</sub>, *p*<sub>3</sub> etc are locations between *A* and *B*), or it may be because it represents a determinable property (that is, represents the edge as having a single determinable location consistent with its being at any of the points between *A* and *B*), or perhaps another account is to be given. It does not matter for our purposes what Tye's considered view is, but I mention this so as to aid the discussion of how a naive realist might exploit something like Tye's proposal. I think here the naive realist can plausibly appeal to determinable spatial properties. Let us see how this might work.

First we can distinguish standpoint conditions *C*<sub>1</sub>, from standpoint conditions *C*<sub>2</sub>. *C*<sub>1</sub> involves a set of factors such that relative to these conditions Freddy has sharp vision of nearby objects (e.g., *C*<sub>1</sub> might specify that Freddy has his glasses on). In contrast, *C*<sub>2</sub> involves a set of factors such that relative to these conditions Freddy has blurry vision of nearby objects (e.g., *C*<sub>2</sub> might specify that Freddy has his glasses off).

Consider again Tye's clear watercolour. The naive realist can work the standpoint conditions now in their *selective* as opposed to additive role. When Freddy perceives in *C*<sub>1</sub>, certain of the visible spatial features that the coloured shapes have anyway, independent of *C*<sub>1</sub>, are manifest to Freddy, but such features are simply not manifest to Freddy when he perceives those shapes in *C*<sub>2</sub> (even though they are still instantiated in those conditions). The standpoint conditions are not being exploited as something that makes a difference to which properties the coloured shapes *actually instantiate*, but rather as just making a difference to which of the properties the shapes instantiate anyway are *available* in perception. Depending on the standpoint, certain of the features that the coloured shapes have anyway will be in view, and others will not.

The edges of the coloured shapes in Tye's clear watercolour are located precisely between *A* and *B*. In virtue of this, a relatively determinate location property they have is *being there at a particular point between A and B*. Call this property *L*<sub>1</sub>. But the edges also have, in virtue of having *L*<sub>1</sub>, a relatively *determinable* location property: *being somewhere or other between A and B*. Call this further property *L*<sub>2</sub>. The naive realist can suppose that when Freddy sees the edges of the coloured shapes relative to *C*<sub>1</sub> – seeing

sharply – the relatively determinate location of the edges (*L1*) is visibly manifest to Freddy, shaping the contours of his conscious experience. Yet when he sees those edges relative to *C2* – seeing blurrily – there is a change in which properties of the edges are available to Freddy. Relative to *C2* such determinate spatial features are no longer available, just more determinable ones (such as *L2*) are. In *C2* the edges are really present in Freddy's experience, yet only their determinable spatial properties are available to shape his conscious experience.

So it looks like the naive realist has things to say about seeing blurrily congenial to defending *ambitious* naive realism. The distinctive phenomenological character of seeing blurrily can be accounted for in terms of the real presence of aspects of the world. And here appeal is made to the real presence of relatively determinable as opposed to relatively determinate spatial features.

But it is difficult to see how what we are offered in this account of seeing blurrily is sufficient to capture the distinctive phenomenology of seeing blurrily. Since what we are offered, in terms of the perceptual availability of just relatively determinable as opposed to relatively determinate spatial features, characterizes other sorts of experience which *do not* have the distinctive character of seeing blurrily. For instance, Smith mentions seeing objects that are very far away.<sup>26</sup> Here, the relatively determinate spatial properties of such objects, seen without a telescope or some such device, are not available to shape one's consciousness, though (arguably) some of the determinable spatial properties will be. But that is no guarantee that one sees such distant objects *blurrily*. Whether one does is a further question. Vision of distant objects is not *ipso facto* blurry vision. Further, seeing an object in *peripheral vision* involves a lack of determinate spatial information. The determinate location of the object is not available to shape one's conscious experience, though (arguably) its relatively determinable location is. Yet phenomenologically such parafoveal vision seems quite different to seeing blurrily. (This criticism is offered in the works by Pace, Smith, and Allen cited earlier).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> 'Translucent Experiences', p. 207.

<sup>27</sup> A reply to this objection, suggested by Bence Nanay, is that there are many representational/presentational differences between parafoveal vision and blurred vision. For instance, in blurred vision one usually still has access to the determinate colour features of objects, not so in parafoveal vision where such features are not available to one (and, Nanay claims, where merely determinable colour features are available to one). But

Allen develops this criticism by adding that one distinctive phenomenological difference between parafoveal vision and seeing blurrily is that in seeing blurrily, but not normal parafoveal vision, things often appear with ‘haloes’ around their edges.<sup>28</sup> This is a positive aspect of the phenomenology of seeing blurrily which simply is not captured just in terms of the materials we are offered in Tye’s account, or its naive realist counterpart.

In this section I have considered, and found wanting, some of the ways one might defend *ambitious* naive realism in the face of the phenomenon of seeing blurrily. Such a defence requires an account of the distinctive phenomenology of seeing blurrily in terms of the real presence of aspects of the world in experience. My claim is not that ambitious naive realism should be rejected, just that it is in need of further defence and development.

## 6. Seeing Blurrily and Robust Naive Realism

Suppose that we cannot sustain ambitious naive realism. What then of naive realism? We might contrast ambitious naive realism with *minimal* naive realism: the position which holds merely that *some* aspects of the subjective character of experience are constituted by objective entities which are really present in experience. The blurred character of experiences in which we see blurrily might not be susceptible to naive realist treatment, yet for all that the minimal naive realist position can be maintained.

But I now want to argue that even if the ambitious naive realist project fails in the face of seeing blurrily, the naive realist is not forced to the minimal position. There is room for a version of naive realism which is much more committed than the minimal version, and which can draw on the motivations for naive realism mentioned earlier, but which falls short of the ambitious form. I will call this *robust naive realism*.

the initial objection is not that there is no representational/presentational difference between the cases of blurry vision and parafoveal vision. It is rather that what we are told is going on in the case of seeing blurrily, and which captures entirely the character of seeing blurrily, is *also* going on in parafoveal vision. It is then puzzling that parafoveal vision does not manifest the character of blurry vision. It is no explanation of why it does not manifest such a character to merely add that in parafoveal vision, unlike blurry vision, one does not have the same degree of colour information.

<sup>28</sup> See also Smith, ‘Translucent Experiences’, p. 200, fn. 7.



I will take on three assumptions for the sake of argument. Although the conclusion of the last section is more modest, let us suppose

- (i) we must reject ambitious naive realism, and the project of trying to account for the character of seeing blurrily in naive realist terms.

Additionally, suppose that the character of seeing blurrily is exactly how it seems to be (at least to many of us). When we see blurrily, as opposed to sharply, it seems as if there is an aspect of the character of experience which is not a matter of the presentation of anything, but rather makes a difference to the *way* in which presented entities and qualities are presented to us: Freddy sees the book *blurrily*, he sees the blueness of the book *blurrily*, and so on. Blurriness, as it figures in seeing blurrily, seems to be a quality which is not presented but, as it were, *infects* the presentation of what is presented. So let us suppose that

- (ii) blurriness, as it is involved in seeing blurrily, is an aspect of experience which is not a matter of, or constituted by, the presentation of entities in experience – it is a *non-presentational aspect*.<sup>29</sup>

Even with (ii) in place it is still open how we are to substantively account for the character of seeing blurrily. Maybe *blurrily* is a *sui generis* way of perceiving, maybe blurriness is a *sui generis* modification of consciousness, maybe it can be accounted for in terms of qualia, or sensational qualities. No doubt there are other options. For the sake of discussion here suppose that

- (iii) blurriness, as it is involved in seeing blurrily, is a subjective or mental contribution, something which we bring to or impose upon the character of experience.

I will argue that even if we take on these three contentious assumptions about blurriness, we can absolutely maintain a robust form of naive realism, and the motivations for naive realism we considered earlier.

What, then, is *robust naive realism*? Let us return again to the relatively neutral viewpoint conception of experience considered

<sup>29</sup> To say that blurriness is non-presentational is just to say that insofar as experiences involve blurriness, the blurriness aspect is not merely a matter of the presentation of entities or wholly constituted by presented entities. It does not mean that there can be blurriness without presentation.

at the outset: in having a visual experience (a) one is presented with entities, and (b) there is a tight connection between this presentational aspect of experience and its subjective character. A robust naive realist takes on these further commitments: (1) In visual experience insofar as we are presented with entities, we are only ever presented with familiar mind-independent entities (so non-physical but mind-independent sense-data are not presented to us, nor are subjective sense-data). And (2) all such presentation is to be understood in terms of a non-representational relation to such entities. For instance, it is not that the manner in which we are presented with, say, shapes, is (non-representationally) relational but the manner in which we are presented with colours is (non-relationally) representational. It is all (non-representationally) relational. And (3) all aspects of the subjective character of experience corresponding to its presentational aspect are constituted by the objective presented entities we are related to, relative to certain standpoint conditions. Claims (1)–(3) obviously constitute a robust form of naive realism, and a highly contentious view.

The first point to make is that *robust* naive realism does not amount to *ambitious* naive realism. Since consistently with (1)–(3), there may be aspects of the subjective character of experience which not only are not traceable to the real presence of some aspect of the world, but which are not faithfully understood just in terms of the *presentation* of entities at all. So (i) – the rejection of ambitious naive realism – is consistent with robust naive realism.

Second, since according to (ii) blurriness is a non-presentational aspect of the subjective character of some experiences (i.e., those we have when we see blurrily), and robust naive realism is consistent with there being such aspects of subjective character, robust naive realism is consistent with (ii).

Suppose that Freddy sees a bluish rectangular book on the desk before him. The robust naive realist can say that Freddy's experience has an objective presentational aspect: he is presented with a book, and some of its qualities such as its colour and shape. They can add that this is to be understood in terms of the real presence, as opposed to representation, of those objective entities. And, finally, the robust naive realist can add that those aspects of the world, really present in Freddy's experience, are constitutive of some of the subjective character of his experience. None of this is spoiled if we then add that Freddy sees the scene blurrily and hold that this is a non-presentational aspect of experience.

But what if we add an application of (iii), that the blurriness of Freddy's experience is a subjective or mentalistic contribution? Adding this strikes me as perfectly consistent with the idea that the aspects of the world which Freddy sees are still there, really present, shaping the other aspects of the character of Freddy's experience in just the way the robust naive realist holds.

A quality of blur infecting the presentation of such entities, mentalistically conceived or otherwise, *modifies* the character associated with the presentation of such entities, but it does not get in the way, or prevent, the presentation of such entities. It is hard to see how the quality of blur modifying an experience could get in the way of or prevent the presentation of entities in experience. For it seems that the blurriness of experience *depends upon* the presentational aspect of experience. That is, blurriness can form part of the character of a visual experience only if it, so to speak, *attaches* to the presentation of entities in experience. We can make sense of experiencing *blueness* in a blurry way, or experiencing an *edge* in a blurry way, or experiencing a *book* in a blurry way, but not of merely *experiencing blurrily*. For blurriness to show up in experience at all it must be given colour, or shape, or extent, or substance, it must merge with the presentational aspect of experience. So blurriness does not compete with the presentation of entities for space in the structure of experience, it positively requires the presentation of entities in the structure of experience. Adding to this that blurriness is a subjective contribution, whereas the presentation of entities is a matter of the real presence of the world in experience does not seem to make this structural point any more or less problematic.

Logically, then, it seems that we can maintain robust naive realism even if we grant proponents of the challenge from blur contentious assumptions about the character of the blurriness involved in blurry experiences (namely, (i)–(iii)). There does not seem to be any straightforward challenge to robust naive realism from blurry vision. But the point needs further consideration. I will consider two additional challenges.

First, if we allow that the character of seeing blurrily is non-presentational and mentalistic surely that increases the pressure on us to account for *other* aspects of the subjective character of experience in the same way. Without a principled way of dividing up aspects of the character of experience, moving to robust naive realism might seem like an *ad hoc* response to the challenge from blur.

But we have a simple principle for treating blurriness in a non-presentational way, which does not carry over to other aspects of subjective character, such as those pertaining to object, colour, and shape: as already noted, the blurriness involved in seeing blurrily does not even *seem* to be a presentational aspect of experience, yet the seeming involvement of objects, colours, and shapes in experience *does* seem to be presentational. So I do not think we should see robust naive realism as a position for a naive realist to move or retreat to in the face of certain challenges. The robust form of naive realism should be the starting point for the naive realist who wants to take on non-minimal commitments. And in light of this I think we can add that there is something perverse about ambitious naive realism, or at least with viewing that as the naive realist starting point. For why should a naive realist adopt a position on which all aspects of the character of experience are to be accounted for in terms of the presentation of entities when it is not even the case that all aspects of the character of experience strike us as being like that?

Second, robust naive realism may not face a straightforward challenge from blur, but if we adopt the robust naive realist position, and also the contentious assumptions about the character of blurriness ((i)–(iii)), can we still hold onto the motivations for naive realism we considered earlier?

Yes. Consider again Strawson's phenomenological datum: that experience in general presents itself as an immediate consciousness of the existence of things outside us. It is a point in support of naive realism that it can explain well this phenomenological datum. The point holds for robust naive realism, even given our assumptions about blurriness. The robust naive realist can account for this phenomenological fact insofar as she holds that in general visual experience involves the presentation of objective entities, where this is understood in terms of a direct relation to such entities.

And consider again Campbell's idea about the explanatory role of experience with respect to demonstrative thought. Freddy sees the book on the desk and thinks *that book is blue*. Conscious experience provides Freddy with knowledge of the reference of 'that book', and so enables him to think this demonstrative thought. The idea of Campbell's we encountered earlier was that experience can play this role only if it constitutes a simple kind of acquaintance with an object. The *robust* form of naive realism maintains that conscious experience involves a simple,

non-representational, relation to the objects we are aware of. It is thus well suited to capture the explanatory role of experience. The account is not spoiled if we allow that some aspects of some experiences of objects – e.g., blurriness – are non-presentational and subjective. Suppose Freddy has a blurry experience of the book, and suppose we allow that the blurriness of his experience is non-presentational and subjective. That Freddy's experience has these aspects understood in these terms does not, as I argued earlier, prevent Freddy from being presented with the book, nor does it cause a problem for our understanding this in relational terms. Nor does it somehow show the relation Freddy bears to the book to be anything less than primitive. So even in this case Freddy's experience of the book can provide him with knowledge of the reference of 'that book' precisely because it is relational in the way the robust naive realist holds.

I have argued that even if ambitious naive realism fails, and blurriness is non-presentational and subjective, a robust form of naive realism remains which is not *ad hoc* or unmotivated.

## 7. Conclusion

Naive realists hold that experience is to be understood in terms of an intimate perceptual relation between a subject and aspects of the world, relative to a certain standpoint. Those aspects of the world are really present in experience, as constituents, and shape the contours of consciousness. Though some discussions obscure this, these central naive realist ideas sit comfortably with there being non-presentational and subjective elements in the structure of experience. I have tried to show this with reference to blurriness (which I assumed to be non-presentational and subjective). If I am right, we should be able to accommodate other seemingly non-presentational and subjective aspects of the character of experience within a robust naive realist framework.<sup>30</sup>

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