

RECENT WORK

*Recent Work in Perception: Naïve Realism and its Opponents*¹

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Suppose that you are looking at a vase of flowers on the table in front of you. You can visually attend to the vase and to the flowers, noticing their different features: their colour, their shape and the way they are arranged. In attending to the vase, the flowers and their features, you are attending to mind-independent objects and features. Suppose, now, that you introspectively reflect on the visual experience you have when looking at the vase of flowers. In doing so, you might notice various features of your experience, for example that individual petals on the flowers are difficult to distinguish. Although in introspection your interest is in the character of your experience, your attention is still to the objects of your experience – to the mind-independent vase and the flowers. Since attending to your experience involves attending to the mind-independent objects and features of your experience, your experience seems introspectively to involve those mind-independent objects and features.²

In general, then, when we introspect a visual experiential episode, it seems that we are related to some mind-independent object or feature that is present and is a part, or a constituent, of the experience. We can call this property – the property of having some mind-independent object or feature as a constituent – the naïve realist (NR) property of experiences. It is widely accepted

- 1 There has been a reawakening of interest in the philosophy of perception [that perhaps can be dated to the publication of Crane (1992)], and over the past 15 or so years a great many papers have been published on the subject. Any survey of recent work must therefore be highly selective. In this survey, I focus on the view – naïve realism – elaborated and defended in a series of papers by Martin (1998, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2006), and the argument I present is my interpretation the argument developed at much greater length and sophistication in these papers. I do this because the view is novel and important, and because I agree with Crane (2006) that the question of whether or not naïve realism (or something like it) is true is the central problem in the philosophy of perception.
- 2 Strawson is right when he suggests that a theory of perceptual experience should start from the fact that ‘mature sensible experience (in general) presents itself as, in Kantian phrase, an *immediate* consciousness of the existence of things outside us’ (1979: 99).

that visual experiences seem to have the NR property;³ naïve realism is the view that some experiences – the veridical ones – actually do have it:

(Naïve Realism) veridical experiential episodes have mind-independent objects and features as constituents.

On a plausible conception of phenomenal character, the phenomenal character of a perceptual experience just is those properties of the experience that explain the way it introspectively seems. Naïve realism is then the view that veridical perceptual experiences have a phenomenal character that consists of relations to mind-independent objects and features; it is the view that they have, as I shall say, a NR phenomenal character.

What reason is there for thinking that naïve realism about visual experiences is true? The NR claims that the best explanation of the fact that visual experiences introspectively seem to have the NR property – seem to have a NR phenomenal character – is that veridical experiences actually do have it: having the NR property explains the way visual experiences introspectively seem. Those who reject naïve realism claim that although experiences introspectively seem to have the NR property, their seeming that way is not explained by the fact that they actually do have it. According to such views, visual experiences have a phenomenal character that does not consist of relations to mind-independent objects and features; it is the view that experiences have, as I shall say, a non-NR phenomenal character.

If naïve realism is true then it follows that the kind of experience you have when veridically perceiving the vase of flowers could not occur in the absence of the vase and flowers that are its constituents, and so could not occur were you merely hallucinating the vase rather than seeing it. Naïve realism therefore entails a rejection of the common-kind assumption:

(CKA) Whatever kind of experiential episode that occurs when you perceive, that same kind of episode can occur when you hallucinate.

Theories of perception that reject CKA are disjunctivist theories, and naïve realism is therefore a form of disjunctivism about visual experience (although it does not claim – in part for reasons discussed below – that there is *nothing* in common between veridical perceptual experiences, and non-veridical and hallucinatory experiences).

There are many different theories that qualify as disjunctive theories, and it is important not to confuse the commitments of other theories with those of naïve realism. The primary motivation for some of these theories is epistemic; they argue that a disjunctive conception of experience is necessary for

3 It would be accepted, I think, by anyone who accepts the claim that experiences are transparent; that claim is defended by, among others, Harman (1990), and Tye (1992); for a critical discussion, see Martin (2002), Kind (2003) and Stoljar (forthcoming).

knowledge of the mind-independent world.⁴ Others are motivated more by semantic considerations, where disjunctivism follows from a view about the kind of representational content that experiences have. Although naïve realism has important epistemological consequences (Martin 2006: Part 3), it is essentially a view about the phenomenal character of perceptual experiences. It is not a view about the kind of representation content experiences have and, in particular, it is not the view that perceptual experiences have externally individuated or object-dependent content [although, the NR need not deny that, in some sense, experiences have content, they do deny that having content plays any significant explanatory role; for an argument against the idea that perceptual experiences have representational content, see Travis (2004)].

Many people find CKA compelling because they accept some version of the *causal argument*.⁵ The causal argument appeals to the idea that the character of hallucinatory experiences supervenes on the state of the subject's brain. Suppose that it is possible to keep fixed the exact state of your brain when you are looking at the vase of flowers, whilst at the same time removing the vase and the flowers. Were this to happen, there would be no change that you could detect in the character of your visual experience even though you would no longer see the vase of flowers: you would be having a hallucinatory experience brought about by a state of your brain that matches (or is of the same kind as) that state which is involved in your seeing the vase. There is, therefore, a state of your brain that is sufficient to determine your experience, and that state can be brought about in the normal way by the vase of flowers reflecting light which stimulates your retinas, produces activity in your visual cortex and so on; or it can be brought about in some other, abnormal way that does not involve the vase of flowers. According to the causal argument, since your brain is in the same kind of state in both the veridical and the hallucinatory situations, your experience in both situations must be of the same kind too; and since your experience in the hallucinatory case does not have the vase and the flowers as constituents, your experience in the veridical case does not either. Therefore, naïve realism is false.

This argument appeals to the idea that two events are of the same kind if they are produced by the same kind of cause (the 'same-cause same-effect' principle): an event e_1 is of the same kind (K) as an event e_2 if event e_1 is produced by the same kind of proximate causal condition as e_2 . But such a general causal principle is false if there are kinds of events that have

4 This kind of view is associated with McDowell (1982, 1994, 1998). For a discussion of McDowell's motivations, see Haddock and Macpherson (2008); and see Ginsborg (2006). McDowell's view seems recently to have changed in some respects (see e.g. McDowell 2008; see also Travis 2007).

5 Robinson (1994: 151) develops a version of this argument (see also Martin 2004: Section 4; Johnston 2004: 115–6).

non-causal necessary conditions for their occurrence (Martin 2004a: 56–58; 2006: 368–71). The NR thinks there are such events, as do externalists and singular-thought theorists in the philosophy of mind. A necessary condition for having a water-thought is that there be water in my environment; a necessary condition for thinking about that cat is that the cat exists; thoughts brought about by the same proximate causes but in an environment that does not contain water or in which the cat does not exist would be different thoughts. That suggests we need to modify the ‘same-cause same-effect’ principle to take into account such non-causal necessary conditions: an event e_1 is of the same kind (K) as an event e_2 if event e_1 is produced by the same kind of proximate causal condition as e_2 in circumstances that do not differ in any non-causal conditions necessary for the occurrence of an event of kind (K).

According to naïve realism, there are non-causal conditions necessary for the occurrence of a perceptual experience – the vase and flowers that are its constituents – that are absent when you hallucinate, so the kind of event that occurs when you veridically perceive the vase of flowers cannot occur when you hallucinate a vase of flowers; but there are no non-causal conditions for the occurrence of the hallucinatory experience that cannot also obtain when you veridically perceive the vase of flowers, so the kind of event that occurs when you hallucinate can occur when you veridically perceive. Therefore, according to the modified same-cause same-effect principle, whatever kind of experience is produced when you have a causally matching hallucination of a vase of flowers, the same kind of experience will be produced when you veridically perceive the vase of flowers.

The NR is therefore forced to accept the conclusion that ‘whatever the most specific kind of mental event that is produced when having a causally matching hallucination, that same kind of event occurs when having a veridical perception’ (Martin 2006: 369); but that falls short of establishing (CKA) because ‘no instance of the most specific kind of mental event that occurs when having a veridical perception occurs when having a (causally matching) hallucination’ (Martin 2006: 361). Since there is nothing inconsistent in the idea that a single event – a veridical perceptual episode – can be an instance of two different kinds – veridical *and* hallucinatory – that conclusion is not inconsistent with naïve realism. It does, however, threaten to undermine the motivation for accepting naïve realism in the first place. The problem comes from the role of experiences in explanation. When we have the following kind of asymmetric relation between properties:⁶

For all e , if e has p then e has h , and for some e , e has h but lacks p ,

6 This is the kind of asymmetric relation that is typical of the determination relation, but the relation in this case does not seem to be one of determination: veridically perceiving is not a way of hallucinating in the way that being scarlet is a way of being red.

and some p-event *e* occurs and produces an effect, we can ask: did *e* have that effect because *e* had *p*, or because *e* had *h*? The following screening off principle seems plausible: an event *e* being *h* screens off being *p* as an explanation of some effect of *e* if, had *e* occurred and been *h* but not *p*, then *e* would still have had that effect.⁷ For example, a cloth sample being red screens off its being scarlet as an explanation of its being picked out by a machine if, had the sample been red but not scarlet (by being crimson, say) it would still have been picked out. In that case, it would be false to say that it was picked out because it was scarlet since it would have been picked out whether or not it was scarlet (Martin 2004a: 62).

Given the screening-off principle, anything that we appeal to the occurrence of a veridical perceptual experience to explain and which could also be explained by a hallucinatory experience will, even in the veridical case, be explained by the fact that the experience is of the same kind as a hallucination and not by the fact that the experience is a veridical perception. There are effects of veridical perceptual experiences that cannot be explained by hallucinatory experiences (Peacocke 1993; Martin 2004a: 64), but the effects that concern us are those which the NR claims are explained by the phenomenal character of veridical perceptual experiences.

When you introspect a (causally matching) hallucinatory experience of a vase of flowers, the experience introspectively seems to involve the vase of flowers – and so seems to have the NR property – in just the same way as the veridical experience. For the purposes of argument, we can assume that there is some property of the hallucinatory experience – its phenomenal character – that explains its seeming that way. Since hallucinatory experiences lack the NR property – and so have a non-NR phenomenal character – its seeming to have the NR property is not explained by its actually having the NR property.

According to the conclusion of the modified causal argument, your veridical experience of the vase of flowers is an event of the same kind as the matching hallucinatory experience, so we can ask: what explains the fact that the veridical experience seems to have the NR property? Does the veridical experience seem to have the NR property because it is an experiential episode with a NR phenomenal character, or because it is an experiential episode with a non-NR phenomenal character? According to the screening off principle, the non-NR phenomenal character screens off the NR phenomenal character in explaining the fact that the veridical experience seems to have the NR property since, had the experience occurred and had the non-NR phenomenal character but lacked the NR phenomenal character, it would still seemed to have the NR property. Therefore, having a NR phenomenal character does not explain the fact that veridical perceptual experiences introspectively seem to have the NR property. But if having the NR property

7 For a discussion and defence of this kind of principle, see Yablo 1992.

does not explain the fact that veridical perceptual experiences seem to have the NR property, then the claim that naïve realism provides the best explanation of that fact is false, and the argument for naïve realism is undermined. So, although the conclusion of the modified casual argument is not directly inconsistent with naïve realism, it is when combined with the plausible assumption that hallucinatory experiences have a non-NR phenomenal character.

The NR response to this objection is to question the assumption that causally matching hallucinatory experiences have a non-NR phenomenal character that could be in explanatory competition with the NR phenomenal character of veridical experiences (Martin 2004a: 65–81, 2006). Since the phenomenal character of an experience comprises whatever of its properties explains the way it introspectively seems, the NR is questioning the assumption that there are any ‘robust’ properties of hallucinatory experiences that explain how they introspectively seem.⁸ What all such hallucinatory experiences have in common is that they cannot be introspectively told apart from the corresponding veridical experience; that, according to the NR, is all that they have in common: the ‘only positive mental characteristics [of hallucinations brought about through matching causal conditions of veridical perceptions] are negative epistemic ones – that they cannot be told apart by the subject from veridical perception’ (Martin 2004a: 73–4). In other words, ‘there is no more to the phenomenal character [of a causally matching hallucination] than that of being [introspectively] indiscriminable from a corresponding visual perception’ (Martin 2006: 369). That an experiential episode has the property of being indiscriminable from a veridical perception is sufficient to account for the explanatory role of hallucinatory experiences (for a detailed discussion and an argument that this is problematic for those who accept CKA, see Martin 2004a: Section 7; for a critical discussion; Siegal 2004; Byrne and Logue 2008; Hawthorne and Kovakovich 2006).

What is it for a hallucination to be indiscriminable through introspection from a veridical perception? If two things are discriminable it is possible to know that they are not identical, so two things are indiscriminable if it is not possible to know that they are not identical: experience e_1 is indiscriminable from experience e_2 by a subject S at a time t if and only if S cannot know at t by introspection alone that experience e_1 is not experience e_2 .⁹ The NR

8 The indiscriminability property which, according to the NR, explains how hallucinatory experiences introspectively seem is not ‘robust’ in as much as it picks out experiences in terms of an epistemic relation they stand in to veridical experiences without there being any deeper explanation of why that relation obtains.

9 The condition ‘by introspection alone’ is intended to rule out those situations in which the subject knows in virtue of having some collateral information that her experience is not veridical.

claims, therefore, that there is nothing more to the phenomenal character of a hallucinatory experience than having the ‘indiscriminability property’ of being not introspectively knowably not a veridical perception (Martin 2004a: 76–81).¹⁰ This is an ‘epistemic’ account of the nature of hallucinatory experiences, and many writers have found it implausible. Consider the following three objections.

Dogs lack the cognitive abilities necessary for having introspective knowledge of their experiences, so there will be no perceptual experience that a dog can know to be distinct from a veridical perception. That means that all the experiences of a dog will be indiscriminable from each other, and hence that each experience the dog has is of the same kind as any other experience it has. Examples of this kind can be generalized to other cognitively unsophisticated subjects, and to subjects who are for some reason – excessive alcohol or drugs, say – incapable on an occasion of acquiring introspective knowledge. All of the experiences such subjects will have the indiscriminability property, so each of their experiences, according to the epistemic account, will be of the same kind as any other. Such a conclusion is absurd (Seigel 2004, 2008; Martin 2006: 379–87).

According to the epistemic account, being in a state that has the indiscriminability property is sufficient for it to seem to you that you are perceiving something – sufficient for you to have an experience introspectively just like a veridical perception. A zombie – that is, a creature that is a physico-functional duplicate of you, but which lacks consciousness – could satisfy the purely epistemic condition of not being able to know introspectively that its experience was not a veridical perception of a vase of flowers, but would not, *ex hypothesi*, be having an experience just like your veridical perception of the vase of flowers. So, either the NR must deny the possibility of zombies, or the epistemic account of hallucinations is inadequate. As Sturgeon (2008: 134) puts it, ‘How could satisfying a purely epistemic condition be sufficient for a phenomenal experience?’

Hallucinations differ from one another – a hallucination of a red cube is different from a hallucination of a green sphere. According to the epistemic account, these differences consist in facts about discriminability. The phenomenal character of a red cube hallucination consists in its being not knowably not a veridical perception of a red cube, whereas the phenomenal character of a green sphere hallucination consists in its being not knowably not a veridical perception of a green sphere. Suppose you hallucinate a green sphere. You can presumably know, on the basis of introspection, that you are not perceiving a red cube, i.e. the following seems true: if you are having a green sphere experience then you can know that you are not perceiving

10 For further discussion of this use of indiscriminability, see Farkas (2006), Seigel (2004, 2008), Byrne and Logue (2008), Sturgeon (2008), Hawthorne and Kovakovich (2006).

a red cube.¹¹ The consequent of this conditional ascribes to you potential knowledge of a positive fact about a hallucinatory experience. According to the epistemic account all there is to the phenomenal character of the hallucinatory experience is the fact that it is not knowably not a veridical perception of a green sphere; that fact about what you can not know does not imply that you are not perceiving a red cube, and the epistemic account seems not to have any further resources to explain how you can have positive knowledge of hallucinatory experiences (Siegel 2008: Section 5).

Each of these objections describes something we want to explain by appeal to the character of hallucinatory experiences that the epistemic account cannot explain. If the objections are right then the NR seems caught between, on one hand, giving a characterization of the phenomenal character of hallucinatory experiences which is such that it screens off the NR phenomenal character of veridical experiences and, on the other, not giving a characterization that is sufficiently robust to explain the various consequences of hallucinatory experiences.

These objections assume a conception of introspection and its relation to the phenomenal character of experiences that the NR rejects. It follows from the correct account of introspection that an experience can seem to have a phenomenal character even if it lacks one, since it is sufficient for an experience to seem to have a phenomenal character that it purports to present some mind-independent object or feature, and it can do that whilst lacking a phenomenal character (Martin 1998, 2006: 383–99).

To see this, consider how we acquire knowledge of what our experiences are like. When we introspect our perceptual experiences, we direct our attention to the objects and features the experience presents. In introspecting a visual experience of a red cube, for example, we attend to the cube and its redness. Since our experience is not itself red or cubic, what we attend to is not a property of the experience: it is an object or feature that is independent of experience. Attending to an object presented by an experience is a way of coming to know about what that experience is like. In attending to a red cube, I can come to know that my experience seems to be a certain way – that it seems to be the experience of a red cube. So, just as our perceptual knowledge of objects is grounded in our awareness of the objects or features presented by that experience, so our introspective knowledge of what experience is like is grounded in reflection on and awareness of those objects and features; it is not grounded in awareness of properties of the experience. In the veridical case, ‘attending to what one’s experience is like cannot be separated from exploiting and attending to the features of the world as perceived’

11 This seems plausible, but it is something that the NR is committed to accepting since it is the contraposition of the following claim: not knowably not a veridical perception of a red cube \rightarrow not having a green sphere experience, which the naïve realist would accept (Siegel 2008: 218–9).

(Martin 1998: 17). When we hallucinate, our experience does not actually present any objects or features, it merely purports to present them: it is for us *as if* some object is there. In introspecting such non-veridical experiences, we engage in the same process as in the veridical case, so in the non-veridical case attending to what one's experience is like cannot be separated from exploiting and attending to the features of the world as purportedly perceived.

If how experience seems is grounded in how objects (or purported objects) seem then the two necessarily go together; it could not seem introspectively to someone as if things seem a certain way to them unless their experience presents, or purports to present, things as being that way. A necessary condition of its introspectively seeming to you that you are experiencing a red cube is that you have an experience that purportedly presents a red cube, therefore its introspectively seeming to you that you have an experience of a red cube is sufficient for you to be having an experience that presents or purports to present a red cube. It therefore follows from this model of introspection that there is constitutive connection between experience and introspective awareness: 'if it is true of someone that it seems to them as if things seem a certain way, as if they are having a certain sense experience, then they are thereby having that experience' (Martin 2006: 397); but the connection is an epistemic rather than a metaphysical one. Consider again the three objections.

In the case of the cognitively unsophisticated, the subject fails to acquire knowledge through a failure to attend, or to make judgements on the basis of attending, to the objects purportedly presented by the experience. That means we can idealize away the subject's failure and say that two experiences are indistinguishable if, were the unsophisticated subject to have the cognitive capacities necessary to attend to the purported objects of the experience and judge accordingly, they would not be able to discriminate them (Sturgeon 2008: 127–9).

The zombie problem questioned how satisfying an epistemic condition, something a zombie could do, could be sufficient for having sensory experience. According to the NR's preferred account of introspection, having a certain kind of introspective knowledge is sufficient for having sensory experience; since the relevant introspective knowledge is knowledge that is acquired in a certain way, the NR is not only committed to denying the possibility of zombies, but also to denying that zombies can acquire knowledge in that way. Since the relevant way appeals to judgements grounded in attention to the objects of conscious awareness, such a denial is plausible.

According to the epistemic account of hallucinations, there is no more to the phenomenal character of an experience than the facts about discriminability. That makes puzzling how we could come to have positive knowledge of hallucinatory experiences; but it is only puzzling if we suppose that knowledge of hallucinatory experiences must be grounded in awareness of the phenomenal character of the experience. If, as the NR claims, knowledge

of an experience is grounded in awareness of the purported objects of the experience, then we can explain how a subject can have positive knowledge of an experience that lacks a phenomenal character.

In outlining the view of introspection required to answer the objections, I appealed to the idea that hallucinatory experiences purport to present objects and their features, and suggested that in introspection we can attend to these purportedly presented objects. But what is it for an experience to purportedly present something? A hallucinatory experience purports to present something without there actually being *anything* presented; what, in such cases, explains the fact that phenomenally it seems to the subject of the experience that there is something there? And how is it possible to introspectively attend to nothing? Just this worry is expressed by Smith (2002) in the following passage:

When . . . we turn to hallucination [t]o say that the subject is not aware of *anything* is surely to under-describe this situation dramatically. Perhaps we can make sense of there being ‘mock thoughts,’ but can there really be such a thing as mock sensory awareness? . . . [W]e need to be able to account for the *perceptual attention* that may be present in hallucination. A hallucinating subject may, for example, be mentally focusing on one element in a hallucinated scene, and then another, describing in minute detail what he is aware of. In what sense is all this merely ‘mock’? . . . The sensory features of the situation need to be accounted for. How can this be done if such subjects are denied an object of awareness? (224–5).

One way to understand this complaint is as an expression of the sense-datum theorist’s claim that an experience cannot purport to present something as being some way unless there is actually something that way that is presented by the experience.¹² If we accept that claim, then the NR account of hallucinatory experiences is inadequate; but it is difficult to see how the main alternative to naïve realism – the representational theory of experience – is any better.

There are many varieties of the representational theory, but all share the idea that experiences are analogous to beliefs in having contents that represent the world as being a certain way. Just as with belief, an experience can represent something as being some way even when nothing is; so hallucinations are simply experiences with contents that misrepresent. That basic idea can be elaborated in different ways, and theorists differ in their view of the kind of content experiences have, and in their account of the relation to content that experiences involve (for a survey, discussion and references,

12 For Smith’s own solution, see Smith (2002: Chapter 9); for a critical discussion, see Siegal (2006). For a survey and criticism of some recent attempts to address Smith’s complaint within a broadly representationalist framework (Pautz 2007).

see Seigel 2005). All agree, however, that there is an intimate connection between the content of an experience and its phenomenal character. It is the fact that an experience has contents that represent, say, a vase of flowers, which explains what it is for a veridical experience to present a vase of flowers; and, since an experience can represent something that is not there, that fact also explains what it is for a hallucinatory experience to purport to present a vase of flowers. The representationalist is, therefore, in no position to reject the NR's account of hallucinatory experiences on the grounds that there cannot be experiences that purport to present objects when there are no objects presented. Since the representationalist's dispute with naïve realism cannot be about absence of objects, it must be about absence 'one level up' (Martin 2006: 47): a dispute about the properties of experiences.

Suppose that the NR could provide some explanation, in terms of properties of the experience, of what it is for a hallucinatory experience to purportedly present something. Given the account of introspection, the fact that an experiential episode has those properties would be sufficient to explain the way that the experience introspectively seems; if there are properties of hallucinatory experiences that are sufficient to explain how those experiences introspectively seem, then we can use the screening off argument to undermine the argument for naïve realism. So, the NR must deny that there is anything in common to all experiences that purport to present the same thing that could explain their doing so: all that can be said about hallucinatory experiences that purportedly present objects is that they are introspectively indiscriminable from experiences that actually present objects. In contrast, the representationalist claims that hallucinations have something in common with perceptions that explains their purported presentation of objects, namely that they have representational content. If that is, what is at issue between the NR and the representationalist then it is difficult to see why anyone persuaded by Smith's complaint should find the representationalist account any more satisfactory than that given by the naïve realist.

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