

Introspection as a Game of Make-Believe

by

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to provide an account of introspective knowledge concerning visual experiences that is in accordance with the idea of transparent introspection. According to transparent introspection, a person gains knowledge of her own current mental state *M* solely by paying attention to those aspects of the external world which *M* is about. In my view, transparent introspection is a promising alternative to inner sense theories. However, it raises the fundamental question why a person who pays attention to something *extra-mental* should be epistemically justified in holding a belief about something *intra-mental*. In his *Naturalizing the Mind*, Fred Dretske solves this problem by conceiving of introspection concerning visual experiences as an inference based on a connecting belief. Although Dretske's account proves defective upon closer inspection, its essence can be salvaged by looking upon introspection as being a game of make-believe.

Keywords: transparent introspection, visual experiences, Fred Dretske

1. Introduction

Many philosophers regard the idea of transparent introspection as a promising alternative to the inner sense theory of self-knowledge.¹ According to transparent introspection, I come to know introspectively that I am in a mental state *M*, not by attending to *M* itself, but by focusing on the external objects and properties which *M* is about.² A perfect example is the way we gain introspective knowledge about our current

¹ For advocates of transparent introspection, see Byrne (2005), Crane (1998), Dretske (1995), Evans (1982), Falvey (2000), Fernandez (2003), Gallois (1996), Harman (1990), Moran (2001), and Tye (1995) – to name but a few. For recent formulations of the inner sense theory, see Armstrong (1968, p. 323), Lycan (1996), and Rosenthal (1997).

² The notion of transparency is ambiguous in many ways. Sometimes, for example, it is used to refer to the idea that it is impossible for a subject to be ignorant of any of her current mental states. Transparency in this sense is a privileged access thesis – alternatively called ‘self-intimation’ – which seems to be

beliefs: when I try to answer the question whether I believe that p , it seems as though I do so through answering the question whether p is the case. Gareth Evans expresses this idea as follows:

[I]n making a self-ascription of belief, one's eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, directed outward—upon the world. If someone asks me 'Do you think there is going to be a third world war?', I must attend, in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomena as I would attend to if I were myself answering the question 'Will there be a third world war?' I get myself in a position to answer the question whether I believe that p by putting into operation whatever procedure I have for answering the question whether p .³

If transparent introspection is to be a genuine alternative to the inner sense theory of self-knowledge, it should not only be applicable to beliefs, but also to *other* mental states. However, in order to be suited for transparent introspection, mental states have to be about aspects of the external world – for otherwise there would be nothing for the subject to focus on.⁴ It seems as though not all mental states satisfy this condition.

affirmed by Descartes, Hume and Brentano. It should be clear that 'self-intimation' has nothing to do with what I call 'transparent introspection' here. Another thesis trading under the name of 'transparency' is a claim typically endorsed by representationalists: that when I try to attend to the phenomenal character of my perceptual experience it seems to me as though I do so through attending to the features of mind-independent objects. This is more closely related to what I call 'transparent introspection', but different nonetheless, as the former is restricted to the phenomenal character of one's perceptual experiences, whereas the latter is not.

³ Evans (1982, p. 225).

⁴ Three clarifications: First, I use 'external world' as an umbrella notion referring not only to material objects in physical space but to other persons and their minds, abstract objects, one's own past mental states, and other things as well. The external world relative to me at time t contains, then, all items that are not identical with any of the token mental states I have at t . Second, I use 'aspects of the external

Consider bodily sensations: are we really prepared to say that itches, tickles, or pains are about aspects of the external world?⁵ At any rate, this problem does not arise in connection with *visual experiences*. Visual experiences represent the world in a certain way, and the way the world is according to a visual experience can be specified by a proposition which gives something like a description of those aspects of the subject's environment which are (or seem to be) visible from the subject's point of view. I take these assumptions to be relatively uncontroversial.⁶ Thus, in contrast to bodily sensations, visual experiences are well suited for transparent introspection. For this reason, I will restrict my analysis to introspective knowledge of current visual experiences.

world' as a stylistic variant of 'external objects and properties'. For the sake of simplicity, I ignore the fact that some mental states – for example, the judgment that I am in pain – are about one's own current mental states, and hence do not count as mental states which are about aspects of the external world. This does not affect my argument, however. Let us call a mental state which is *not* about one of one's own current mental states a 'first-order mental state'. Then the idea of transparent introspection can be glossed as follows: a subject gains knowledge of her current *first-order mental state* Φ solely by paying attention to those aspects of the external world Φ is about. Third, instead of saying that mental states 'are about' aspects of the external world, I might equally have said that they 'represent' those aspects. Since the verb "to represent" is sometimes limited to the definition of "to have the function to indicate", however, I prefer to talk in terms of aboutness: I want to avoid issues concerning the naturalization of mental content here.

⁵ For a negative answer to this question, cf. McGinn (1982, p. 8) and McGinn (1989, p. 44). For a positive answer, cf. Tye (1997).

⁶ I would like to stress that I do *not* claim that visual experiences *only* have representational content. As an advocate of transparent introspection, I am committed only to the much weaker claim that all visual experiences have *some* representational content.

How exactly do I come to know that I am currently undergoing a certain visual experience by focusing on aspects of the external world? In my view, the best account of transparent introspection of visual experiences so far is to be found in the second chapter of Fred Dretske's *Naturalizing the Mind*. According to Dretske, I come to know what my current visual experience is like, not by attending to my visual experience itself, but by focusing on the 'worldly' aspect of which I am visually aware. So, in light of Dretske's account, acquiring introspective knowledge about one's own visual experiences seems to be a two-stage process. First stage: grasp a proposition which describes how the world is according to your visual experience. Second stage: attach the first-person-operator 'I have the visual experience that ...' to this proposition.

But now a new question arises: Why am I *justified* in proceeding from, say, 'There is something blue over there' to 'I have the visual experience that there is something blue over there'? You may be inclined to think that the proposition that *there is something blue over there* guarantees the truth of the proposition that *I have the visual experience that there is something blue over there*. But this is not the case. The fact that there is something blue over there neither implies nor indicates anything about the mind of a particular person in central Europe. Hence, Dretske needs to say why a subject is justified in proceeding from stage one to stage two. Why does focusing on aspects of the external world give me the right to make claims about my mind? This problem is generally known as the *problem of transparency*.⁷

⁷ Cf. Byrne (2005, p. 95). Though not explicitly under that name, the problem is also present in Dretske (2003, p. 2), Evans (1982, p. 231), Martin (1998, p. 110), and Moran (2003, p. 413).

In *Naturalizing the Mind*, Dretske solves this problem by introducing an additional element to his picture: a ‘connecting belief’ which mediates between the first and the second stage. Thus, the introspection of one’s own visual experiences turns out to be something like an inference which starts with a premise about the external world, continues with a connecting belief and terminates in a conclusion about something mental.

In my view, Dretske’s account is ingenious. However, it suffers from a serious defect: as I will explain, upon closer inspection, the connecting belief always turns out to be false. For that reason, Dretske has changed his original view. In his writings subsequent to *Naturalizing the Mind*, he omits the idea of connecting belief altogether. But perhaps this move was precipitous. There is a way to reconstruct introspection of visual experiences as an inference based on a connecting belief without the inevitable failure of the connecting belief as construed by Dretske. Such a reconstruction is the objective of this paper.

I will proceed as follows. First, I would like to present a more detailed account of Dretske’s theory of introspection in *Naturalizing the Mind* and expose more clearly what I take to be its crucial shortcoming. Then, I will develop an alternative to that theory by drawing on the idea of make-believe. This alternate construction both salvages Dretske’s idea of a connecting belief and avoids the inevitable pitfall inherent in his original theory.

2. Criticism of Dretske's Account

In the second chapter of *Naturalizing the Mind*, Dretske claims that one ‘comes to know ... that one is experiencing blue by experiencing, not the experience of blue, but ... the blue object one sees.’⁸ According to Dretske, introspective knowledge about visual experiences is a species of *displaced perception*. An uncontroversial example of displaced perception is this: we come to know how much gas remains in the fuel tank, not by looking at the fuel tank, but by looking at the fuel gauge on the dashboard. We know, for example, that the tank is empty by seeing that the needle points to ‘E’. Hence, to perceive *k* ‘displacedly’ is to acquire knowledge about *k* by perceiving, not *k*, but another object *h*.

I arrive at my judgment about the tank by looking at the needle. So far, so good. But why does my judgment qualify as *knowledge*? Dretske’s answer is that the content of my judgment about the tank – *that the tank is empty* – can be reconstructed as a conclusion drawn from two premises: the first says that *the needle points to ‘E’*, and the second says that *the needle would not point to ‘E’ if the tank were not empty*. In general, displaced perception can be represented as an inference from a ‘perceived fact’ and a ‘connecting belief’ to a ‘target fact’:

h is *G* (‘perceived fact’)

h would not be *G* if *k* were not *F* (‘connecting belief’)

k is *F* (‘target fact’)

⁸ Dretske (1995, p. 44).

It is obvious that an inference of this type would not lead to knowledge if the connecting belief were not true. Imagine that you see that the needle points to 'E'. Since you believe the fuel gauge is functioning properly, you conclude that the tank is empty. However, unbeknownst by you, it is not working: its needle would point to 'E' even if the tank were full. In this case, you do not *know* that the tank is empty – even if the tank actually *is* empty. Simply speaking, it is a necessary condition for displaced perception that the connecting belief be true.

How is this account to be applied to introspective knowledge of visual experiences? Take, for example, my knowledge that *I have the visual experience of something blue*. This is our target fact. If Dretske is right – recall that he says that I come to know what I visually experience by looking at the object of my experience – the perceived fact reads *There is something blue*.

But what proposition could serve as connecting belief? If we construe the current case analogously to the case of the fuel tank, we are forced to choose the following: *There would not be something blue if I did not have the visual experience of something blue*. It is obvious, however, that there could have been something blue even if I did not have the visual experience of something blue. Objects exist and exemplify properties independently of whether we experience them or not. The proposition chosen to serve as connecting belief is simply false. Therefore, a necessary condition for displaced perception is not satisfied.⁹

⁹ This is very similar to a criticism that Andreas Kemmerling made in his 'How Self-Knowledge Can't Be Naturalized' (1999). Dretske admits that Kemmerling has a point (cf. Dretske 2003, p. 9). For a similar criticism to Kemmerling's, see Aydede (2003).

It is largely for this reason that Dretske later distances himself from the account of introspection he gave in *Naturalizing the Mind*. In his subsequent writings, he still thinks of introspection

as displaced fact-awareness (awareness that I am representing things as P by awareness of a physical object and its property P), but there is no connecting belief. As we grow up, we begin by knowing what we ... experience (i.e. P) ... and we learn that we can add the prefix ... 'it seems to me' ... to whatever that is. So our ... knowledge of what it is we experience (P) gets transformed into knowledge ... that we experience P.¹⁰

As already indicated, this revision to his original theory is not entirely satisfactory. Something like a connecting belief is needed in order to solve the problem of transparency, i.e. to explain why we are epistemically justified in adding the prefix 'it seems to me' to whatever we experience. Thus, the rest of this paper outlines an account of introspection of one's own visual experiences that keeps the idea of connecting belief alive.

3. A Preliminary Sketch

Although Dretske's account contains an inherent flaw, his original theory was correct insofar as introspection of one's own visual experiences is an inference-like process starting with a premise about something extra-mental and – via a connecting belief –

¹⁰ Personal communication, 9 May 2000. For the details of Dretske's revised view about introspection, see Dretske (1999).

terminating in a conclusion about something intra-mental. Thus, I will stick with this overall picture in what follows. However, while maintaining its essence, I will depart from Dretske's account with respect to the content of the connecting belief.

According to Dretske's overall picture, acquiring introspective knowledge about one's own visual experiences is a two-stage process. In the first stage, I grasp a proposition which describes how the world is according to my visual experience. In the second stage I attach the first-person-operator 'I have the visual experience that ...' to this proposition. Let us focus on the first stage first. Suppose that I have a visual experience of a blue wall in front of me. How do I manage to grasp a proposition that specifies the content of this experience, i.e. the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me*? The answer seems simple: just consider the case in your own environment.

It should be obvious, however, that this proposal does not work. Imagine that, although I have the visual experience of a blue wall, I believe that the wall is illuminated by blue light (or that I have swallowed a drug that makes white objects appear blue and blue objects appear white). As a result, I believe that there is a *white* wall in front of me. Therefore, my answer to the simple question 'What is the case in my environment?' would not read 'There is a *blue* wall in front of me', but 'There is a *white* wall in front of me'.

So, if the first stage of transparent introspection started with asking myself the simple question of what the case in my environment is, the second stage would frequently lead to wrong results. Recall that the second stage consists in attaching 'I have the visual experience that ...' to the proposition grasped at the first stage. In the case described,

then, we would obtain the judgment that *I have the visual experience that there is a white wall in front of me*. However, my visual experience does not represent the wall as *white* – instead, the wall visually appears to be blue.

Since, in my view, introspective judgments about my current visual experiences cannot go wrong so easily, I suggest the following: in order to grasp a proposition which specifies the way the world is according to my visual experience, I first have to pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal¹¹ and then, while pretending, ask myself about the case in my environment.¹² This is supposed to rule out cases like the one described above: even if I believe that the wall that appears to be blue is really white, pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal will lead me to grasp the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me* – for pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal amounts to taking appearance as reality.¹³

¹¹ In my view, optimal perceptual conditions are those in which the subject would not have a visual experience representing the world to be a certain way unless the world really was that way.

¹² I take this to be a paraphrase of Evans's proposal: '[A] subject can gain knowledge of his internal informational states in a very simple way ... He goes through exactly the same procedure as he would go through if he were trying to make a judgement about how it is at this place now, but excluding any knowledge he has of an extraneous kind. (That is, he seeks to determine what he would judge if he did not have such extraneous information.)' (Evans 1982, p. 227 f.).

¹³ This may seem unnecessarily complicated. Indeed, it would be simpler to say, 'How do things visually appear to you?'. I do not put it this way because the appropriate answer to that question would not be 'There is a blue wall in front of me', but 'It visually appears to me as if there was a blue wall in front of me'. The latter answer is of no use in this connection since it does not express a proposition which specifies *the way the world is according to my visual experience*. Rather, it expresses a proposition which specifies *the way I am visually appeared to*. Furthermore, the question 'How do things visually appear to you?' asks the subject to provide information about the way she is visually appeared to, i.e. it forces her

It may be instructive to conceive of this first stage of transparent introspection as a move in a game of make-believe. By pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal, I create a *fictional* environment – just as children who play in a sandpit create a fictional environment by pretending that a pile of sand is a cake. In order to make this claim more perspicuous, suppose not only that I *believe* that the wall that appears to be blue is really white, but also that the wall that appears to be blue *really is* white. When, in this situation, I pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal, I give birth to an environment that contains an object which does not actually exist: a *blue* wall illuminated by daylight. Hence, I will speak of a fictional environment in this connection.

So, the environment which I have to imagine according to the rule that shapes my game of make-believe sometimes differs from my actual environment. But does it *always* differ? Consider the following situation: Although perceptual conditions are optimal, I nevertheless believe that they are sub-optimal – I believe, for example, that I suffer from an hallucination of a blue wall. In this case, the environment I imagine by pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal does not differ from the actual environment: both contain a blue wall illuminated by daylight. Thus, on the face of it, it seems that the environment which I have to imagine according to the rule that shapes my game of make-believe is *not always* fictional.

to gain some introspective knowledge. Since my account is intended to explain how a subject gains introspective knowledge, I should not bring up the question ‘How do things visually appear to you?’ in developing my account. To do so would be to presuppose that which I want to explain.

However, the coincidence of imagination and reality does not logically lead us to this conclusion. Contrarily, the environment I imagine by pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal is *always* fictional. Of course, the ‘interior fittings’ of the environment I imagine – the objects that make up this environment – do not always differ from the ‘interior fittings’ of my actual environment: if perceptual conditions are optimal (and, consequently, my visual experience is veridical), both ‘interior fittings’ happen to coincide. This is not to say that both environments are actual. Since the environment I imagine is *a product of my imagination*, it still is fictional – regardless of whether it coincides with reality or not.¹⁴

One might suspect that even in normal perceptual situations – i.e. situations wherein one is not preoccupied with introspecting one’s own visual experiences – the environment, seen from a first-person point of view, is fictional. Do we not always pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal? Not necessarily. Normal perceptual situations are those in which, even though we know that perceptual conditions are sub-optimal, we are preoccupied with discerning the case in our own environment. In these situations, we do *not* pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal. For this would be rather counterproductive. Instead, we use our background beliefs about sub-optimal perceptual conditions to assess the qualities of the things in our environment. Consider the case of buying a tie. Typically, in-store lighting is such that discrimination of colour is rather difficult. Nevertheless, we typically succeed in buying the tie with the desired colour, say green. We manage to do that, not by pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal, but by taking into consideration the fact that lighting conditions are sub-

¹⁴ The environment I imagine when perceptual conditions are optimal, then, is analogous to a work of fiction that, coincidentally, describes the world as it really is.

optimal. For example, we choose the tie that looks grey since we know that ties that look grey on the bargain table in the store are in fact green. If we pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal we would refrain from choosing the tie that looks grey, for we would treat the grey-looking tie as a tie which really is grey.

Up to this point, I have looked only at cases where the subject believes that perceptual conditions are sub-optimal. But what about cases wherein the subject already believes that perceptual conditions are optimal? Does such a subject really have to *pretend* that perceptual conditions are optimal before she asks herself what the case in her environment is? It seems that she does not, since it is sufficient that she asks herself the simple question, ‘What is the case in my environment?’ in order to grasp a proposition which specifies the content of her visual experience. Suppose that I suffer from an hallucination of a blue wall, but nevertheless believe that perceptual conditions are optimal. In this case, it seems unnecessary to pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal in order to grasp the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me* – for I accept that proposition anyway. Therefore, it seems wrong to describe the first stage of transparent introspection as a move in a game of make-believe without qualification. Sometimes, one might object, I do not pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal, but simply ask ‘What is the case in my environment?’.

This is a fair objection. Admittedly, it is not always necessary to pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal in order to grasp a proposition which specifies the content of my visual experience, since in many cases I already accept the proposition in question. Nevertheless, pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal is essential to the first stage of transparent introspection. The reason is that otherwise I would not be justified

in moving on to the second stage, i.e. I would not be justified in attaching ‘I have the visual experience that ...’ to the proposition grasped at the first stage.¹⁵ The relation between the first and second stages of transparent introspection will be elaborated in section 5, and it will become clear why we cannot go without pretence.

4. Digging Deeper

Up to this point, I have wondered how it is possible for the subject to grasp a proposition which expresses how things visually appear to her without attending to her visual experience itself. In order to cope with cases wherein the subject believes that perceptual conditions are sub-optimal, I have suggested regarding the procedure in question as a move in a game of make-believe: by pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal, the subject ‘creates’ a fictional environment toward which she directs her attention. In this section, I would like to enlarge upon this idea. For this purpose, I would like to recall some of the elements which, according to Kendall Walton, are essential for games of make-believe.

¹⁵ We have to distinguish, then, two cases: in the first, I pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal, while believing that perceptual conditions are sub-optimal; in the second, I pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal, even though I already believe that perceptual conditions are optimal. In the former case, I act analogously to someone who imagines a fictional world different from the world as it really is, whereas in the latter case I act analogously to someone who imagines that the world as it really is is a fictional world.

According to Walton, players in games of make-believe use *props* that are, together with *principles of generation*, the source of *fictional truths*.¹⁶ In the example Walton uses to introduce these ideas, Eric and Gregory decide to pretend that tree-stumps are bears. In the course of their game, they wonder whether there is a bear behind the bush nearby. In this example, the props are the stumps, the principle of generation reads ‘Stumps are bears’, and the proposition that *there is a bear behind the bush* is a candidate for a fictional truth. Whereas props and principles of generation are arbitrary, it is beyond the power of the players to decide which propositions are fictional truths. If props and principles of generation are fixed, fictional truths are not arbitrary. Which propositions count as true-in-the-game is settled by the *actual* world. For example, the proposition that *there is a bear behind the bush* would not be fictionally true – relative to the game played by Eric and Gregory – if there were actually no stump behind the bush. According to Walton, it is this ‘objectivity’ that makes games of make-believe so attractive: the worlds created in the course of those games afford as many surprises as the actual world does.

Now, suppose again that I have the visual experience of a blue wall illuminated by daylight while facing a white wall illuminated by blue light. If we accept the proposal that the procedure by which I determine the content of my visual experience is a move in a game of make-believe, then the principle of generation reads, ‘Perceptual conditions are optimal’ and the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me* is – relative to this principle – a fictional truth.¹⁷ But where do the props figure? What are

¹⁶ Cf. Walton (1990, pp. 35-43.)

¹⁷ Question: ‘You have assumed that my visual experience is not veridical: there is no blue wall illuminated by daylight in front of me, but only a white wall illuminated blue. So what if my visual

the things playing the same role for us as the stumps play for Eric and Gregory? One might assume that this role is played by the material objects in my environment – the blue illuminated white wall in front of me, for example – but this is not correct. There is a condition for props which is not met by material objects in my environment. As we have seen in the case of Eric and Gregory, props and their features are the items that are suited to fill in the blank in the following statement: ‘The proposition p would not be fictionally true – relative to the game in question – if there were actually no ___’. However, the following statement is not true:

The proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me* would not be fictionally true – relative to the game played by me – if there were actually no white wall illuminated blue in front of me.

It is not true because the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me* could have been fictionally true even if there actually hadn’t been a white wall illuminated blue in front of me. The proposition could also have been fictionally true, for example, if there had been a hologram of a blue wall in front of me. It could have been fictionally true

experience was veridical? What if there really was a blue wall in front of me? It seems that in that case the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me* is no longer a fictional but an actual truth.’ Answer: The modifiers ‘fictional’ and ‘actual’ are not mutually exclusive. One and the same proposition can be both fictionally and actually true. To say that p is a fictional truth is just to say that p is true relative to a given corpus of principles of generation. It is not to say that, in the actual world, p is not the case. As we saw before, the same goes for the notion of ‘fictional environment’: if my visual experience was veridical and there really was a blue wall in front of me, then the environment ‘created’ by pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal would contain the same objects as the actual environment does. But that does not mean that the environment ‘created’ by pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal is *not* fictional. It is still fictional. Its ‘furnishings’ simply happen to coincide with the ‘furnishings’ of the actual environment.

even if there had been *nothing* in front of me! Consider the case in which there is a gaping void in my sightline and I am just looking at an empty region of space. Nonetheless, I have the visual experience of a blue wall due to the hallucinatory effect of a certain drug. In this case, the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me* is still a fictional truth relative to the game characterised by the principle of generation to the effect that perceptual conditions are optimal. But there are no relevant material objects which could serve as props.

Taking my cue from Walton again, I suggest solving this problem by drawing on the idea of *internal* props.¹⁸ Why not consider a subject trying to grasp a proposition that specifies the content of her visual experience as taking part in a game of make-believe involving an internal prop? The prop in question is the subject's visual experience itself, for it is a property of her visual experience – its content – that determines, together with the principle of generation 'Perceptual conditions are optimal', the fictional truth of the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me*. If it did not visually appear to me as if there were a blue wall in front of me, the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me* would not be fictionally true.

However, another problem arises at this point. If a subject takes part in a game of make-believe, she typically does not lose herself in the fictional world created by that game. She still keeps half an eye on the actual world. Eric and Gregory, for example, are still aware that the objects figuring as bears in the fictional world created by their game are

¹⁸ Walton introduces the notion of internal props in the context of dreams. His idea is that dreams are games of make-believe in which experiences serve as props. Cf. Walton (1990, pp. 43-51). In using the notion of internal props, however, I do not want to commit myself to Walton's account of dreams.

just stumps in the actual world. Taking part in a game of make-believe means having a split consciousness: while focusing on the fictional facts, the participant is aware of the real facts at the same time. She never gets a ‘pure’ glimpse of fictional objects, since the props block her view. Gregory and Eric, though preoccupied by their game, never see *only* bears. The stumps always shine through, so to speak. If this is true, the claim that the procedure by which I recognize the way the world is according to my visual experience is a move in a game of make-believe is disastrous to the idea of transparent introspection – for it implies that I keep half an eye on my visual experience.

But this is a pseudo-problem. It may often be true that a subject taking part in a game of make-believe keeps half an eye on the props, but, as Walton points out, it is not *generally* true: there are games of make-believe in which the player is ‘lost in the fictional world—oblivious ... to the manner in which fictional truths are generated’.¹⁹ Therefore, it is not inconsistent to say that a subject plays a game of make-believe with her visual experiences, even though she does not pay any attention to them. Recognizing the way the world is according to one’s visual experience seems to be such a game: the player ‘looks through’ her visual experience at what it ‘reveals’ about her environment.

There is still another objection to my account, however. If a subject takes part in a game of make-believe, one might say, she typically *decides* to do so. Eric, for example, agrees with Gregory to pretend that stumps are bears. To adopt a principle of generation and thus take part in a game of make-believe is a deliberate decision. It requires something like an act of explicit endorsement of the principle of generation in question. In

¹⁹ Walton (1990, p. 50). The example Walton gives here is that of a Balinese trance dance.

introspection, however, such an act is not apparent. The subject does not say to herself, ‘Let’s pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal!’.

This objection can be handled by referring to games of make-believe which are played without deciding to do so. Watching a play in a theatre is an example: seeing Anita Björk play Agnes in Ibsen’s *Brand*, we pretend that she *is* Agnes. Without so pretending we could not play the social game commonly called ‘watching a play’. However, we do not decide, in an act of explicit endorsement, to pretend that Anita Björk is Agnes – we just do so when Anita Björk enters the stage. Perhaps, then, our ability to play a game of make-believe with our visual experiences by pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal (and, while so pretending, answering questions about our environment) belongs to those culturally ingrained habits that we exhibit without deliberately deciding to do so – such as playing the game of watching a theatrical performance.

5. The Second Stage of Transparent Introspection

Up to this point, I have answered the question of how I am able to realize the way the world is according to my visual experience without any need to ‘look inward’. My answer is: pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal and, while so pretending, consider the case in your own environment. The result will be an ‘as if’ judgment that *in my environment things are so and so*.²⁰

²⁰ I speak of ‘as if’ judgments here, because the subject might grasp a proposition, but – while playing the game – said proposition is not really accepted. The subject merely *pretends* that she accepts it.

Judgments of this sort, however, are not judgments about my current visual experience – they are judgments about the fictional environment ‘created’ in the course of the game of make-believe. Therefore, they do not count as *introspective* judgments. In order to count as introspective, those judgments have to be enriched by the operator ‘I have the visual experience that’. But now we face the following question: Why am I justified in proceeding from ‘There is a blue wall in front of me’ to ‘I have the visual experience that there is a blue wall in front of me’? The truth of the proposition that there is a blue wall in front of me does not guarantee that I have the visual experience that there is a blue wall in front of me. Moreover, the fact that there is a blue wall in front of me does not even indicate that I have the visual experience that there is a blue wall in front of me. As we have already seen in connection with Dretske’s account, the reason is that the statement ‘There would not be a blue wall in front of me if I did not have the visual experience that there is a blue wall in front of me’ is not true. This is just another facet of the aforementioned problem of transparency.

In the face of this difficulty, reliabilism may seem an option: a subject is justified to proceed from ‘There is a blue wall in front of me’ to ‘I have the visual experience that there is a blue wall in front of me’ because transitions of this type frequently lead to true judgments.²¹ This reaction, however, is overly hasty. To be sure, reliabilism is an

²¹ However, this proposal only works with the proviso that the judgment that things in one’s own environment are so and so is the result of a game of make-believe as just described. Otherwise the transition from ‘In my environment things are so and so’ to ‘I have the visual experience that in my environment things are so and so’ would not frequently lead to true judgments. Think of a blind person who judges that things in her environment are so and so on the basis of testimony, touch, and smell. For this person, transitions from ‘In my environment things are so and so’ to ‘I have the visual experience that in my environment things are so and so’ always lead to false judgments.

option, but we should resort to it only if *inferential justification* fails. In this case, inferential justification is a viable option. Let *B* stand for the proposition grasped in the course of the game of make-believe described above, i.e. the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me*. Consider, then, the following argument:

- (1) *B* is fictionally true (relative to the current game of make-believe).
- (2) *B* would not be fictionally true (relative to the current game of make-believe) if I did not actually have the visual experience that there is a blue wall in front of me.
- (3) Therefore, I have the visual experience that there is a blue wall in front of me.

Premise (1) marks the point where the subject ‘drops out’ of the game and conceives of *B* as it really is, i.e. as a fictional truth relative to the current game of make-believe. Premise (2), then, reflects upon the mechanism by which the fictional truth of *B* is generated. The subject ‘realizes’ what the prop must be like in order to render *B* fictionally true.

Notice that this argument is free from the difficulty besetting Dretske’s account: the analogue to Dretske’s connecting belief, i.e. premise (2), is true: the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me* would indeed not be fictionally true if I did not have the visual experience that there is a blue wall in front of me. Furthermore, it should be clear now why pretence is essential to the first stage of transparent introspection.²² Suppose that I suffer from an hallucination of a blue wall, but nevertheless believe that perceptual conditions are optimal. Thus, I believe that there is a blue wall in front of me. Merely believing that there is a blue wall in front of me, however, is not enough to get

²² Cf. section 3, where I raised the question why a subject who already believes that perceptual conditions are optimal has to pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal nonetheless.

the argument to work. The reason is that, if I do not *pretend* but only *believe* that there is a blue wall in front of me, premise (1) of the argument would turn out to be false – for there would not be a game of make-believe relative to which the proposition that *there is a blue wall in front of me* was fictionally true.

Even if these points are granted, however, the view presented in this paper will encounter resistance. It may be charged with over-intellectualisation, for it is only too obvious that a subject need not explicitly go through any such process of inference in order to have introspective knowledge about her current visual experience. Introspective knowledge is spontaneously produced – it is not the conclusion of a train of thought. But I plead ‘not guilty’ to this charge. That a subject’s belief that *p* is inferentially justified by argument *A* does not imply that the subject has actually *inferred* that *p* from *A*’s premises. It only implies that the subject justifiably believes *A*’s premises and, probably, justifiably believes that those premises make *p* probable.²³ Furthermore, it is not even required that the subject has *occurrent* beliefs about those matters. It suffices that the beliefs in question are *dispositional*.²⁴

²³ I consider this to be the received definition of inferential justification. Cf. the *locus classicus* Fumerton (1976). There is, however, an ongoing debate about whether Fumerton’s ‘Principle of Inferential Justification’ leads to sceptical consequences. The inserted ‘probably’ is due to the fact that, in order to block those consequences, some participants in this debate deny that the subject has to *justifiably believe* that the premises make *p* probable. Huemer (2002), for example, claims that it is just required that *it is true* that the premises make *p* probable. Though I sympathize with Huemer on this point, I do not want to get involved in the debate. In the case of transparent introspection, even the stronger condition – that the subject has to justifiably believe that the premises make *p* probable – is met.

²⁴ Again, I consider this to be the received opinion. If it were a condition for inferential justification that the subject actually had to entertain and accept all propositions that constituted part of the evidence

These conditions are usually met by subjects who are capable of playing the sort of game described above.²⁵ Pretending is a mental attitude which normal subjects can deliberately switch on and off. Therefore, every normal subject who pretends that perceptual conditions are optimal is able to drop out of the game and conceive of the ‘truths’ it delivers as they really are, i.e. as fictional. Even if a subject does not consciously entertain the proposition expressed by premise (1) – because, for example, she is lost in the game – it is plausible that she would accept that proposition if she were to consider it. So, a normal subject who entertains *B* in the course of the game of make-believe in question has at least a justified dispositional belief to the effect that *B* is fictionally true (premise (1)).

The same goes for premise (2), which touches upon the relation between fictional truths, props, and principles of generation. Premise (2) says that the fictional truth of *B* is the result of an interplay between two factors: first, the principle of generation according to which perceptual conditions are optimal and, second, the visual experience that there is a blue wall in front of me. Given those factors, that *B* is fictionally true is an *a priori* truth that can be discovered by everyone who is acquainted with the idea of a game of make-believe. Even if a subject does not consciously entertain the proposition expressed by (2) – because, for example, she never thought about the mechanisms which yield fictional truths in games of make-believe – it is plausible that she would do so if a good-natured philosopher coaxed her into an appropriately sophisticated frame of mind. So, a

justifying her judgment, then virtually no judgment would ever be inferentially justified. Cf. Fumerton (1976, p. 566).

normal subject who entertains B in the course of the game of make-believe in question has at least a justified dispositional belief to the effect that B would not be fictionally true if she did not actually have the visual experience that there is a blue wall in front of her (premise (2)). Since the transition from (1) and (2) to (3) is not particularly logically complex, it is also plausible that normal subjects have the justified dispositional belief that (3) is implied by (1) in conjunction with (2).

6. Conclusions

Before I summarize I would like to add a short diagnostic remark. The act of considering the acquisition of introspective knowledge of one's own visual experiences as involving a move in a game of make-believe is not only plausible taken by itself, but also explains the fact that so many people are inclined to think that knowledge of one's own visual experiences requires taking a 'look inside'. This serves as independent evidence in support of my account.

As we have seen, by choosing 'Perceptual conditions are optimal' as a principle of generation, the subject 'creates' something like a fictional physical space. Even if I know, for example, that there is a white object in front of me which is illuminated blue, the principle demands that I pretend that there is blue object in front of me which is illuminated by daylight. In order to determine the content of my current visual experience, I do not have to describe what I take to be the *actual* physical space – which

²⁵ I am not committed to the view that those conditions are *always* met: the idea of transparent introspection does not imply that our introspective judgments are *always* justified – let alone true.

contains the *white* object – but the *fictional* physical space I imagine – which contains the *blue* object. However, fictional physical objects are often confused with actual mental entities. Recall that McX – W.V. Quine’s opponent in ‘On What There Is’ – held the view that Pegasus is an idea. Quine comments that,

McX never confuses the Parthenon with the Parthenon-idea. The Parthenon is physical; the Parthenon-idea is mental ... The Parthenon is visible; the Parthenon-idea is invisible. We cannot easily imagine two things more unlike, and less liable to confusion, than the Parthenon and the Parthenon-idea. But when we shift from the Parthenon to Pegasus, the confusion sets in ...²⁶

Proponents of the view that introspective knowledge about one’s own visual experiences requires taking a ‘look inside’ make the same mistake as McX. They confuse fictional physical objects created in the course of a game of make-believe – say, the daylight illuminated blue object from my example – with actual mental entities – say, a blue-coloured sense datum.

So, in a sense it may be true to say that introspection is accompanied by a shift of attention. But it is wrong to describe this phenomenon as a shift from the *outside* to the *inside*. What really happens is this: we shift the focus of attention from the *actual* to the *fictional*.

We are left, then, with the following picture. When I introspect my own current visual experience, I go through a two-stage process. At the first stage, I switch into an ‘as if’ mode by pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal, and turn my attention to the fictional environment which is ‘created’ thereby. As a result, I make an ‘as if’ judgment

²² Quine (1948, p. 22).

that *in my environment things are so and so*. At the second stage, I return to an ‘as is’ mode by stopping pretending, and I proceed to a second-order judgment to the effect that *I have the visual experience that in my environment things are so and so*.²⁷ I do not need to worry about epistemic justification, since it will be automatically supplied by certain propositions which I justifiably believe.

Consider a final example which brings together all the conceptual elements considered so far. Suppose that I suffer from the hallucination of a pink elephant.²⁸ How do I come to know introspectively that I have the visual experience of a pink elephant? According to the first part of my story, I pretend that perceptual conditions are optimal and ask myself, while so pretending, ‘What is the case in my environment?’ Since pretending that perceptual conditions are optimal results in taking my visual experience at face value, I will answer myself, ‘There is a pink elephant in front of me’. What I am doing here can be regarded as playing a game of make-believe relative to which the proposition that *there is a pink elephant in front of me* is true. This game is shaped by a principle of generation that reads, ‘Perceptual conditions are optimal’ and uses my visual experience as a prop. This is not to say that, while playing the game, I attend to

²⁷ It is an obvious requirement of my account that the subject possesses the concept of visual experience. That implies that only subjects who have the concept of visual experience can have introspective knowledge (or beliefs) about their visual experiences. I do not think, however, that this requirement is too strong, for it is generally conceded that, in order to know that *p*, the subject has to possess the concepts which make up the proposition that *p*.

²⁸ It does not matter to my account whether I *know* that I suffer from an hallucination. Thus, I leave this possibility open.

my visual experience. Rather, I attend to the fictional object which is ‘created’ in the interaction of the principle of generation and the prop – to wit: the pink elephant.²⁹

According to the second part of my story, I drop out of the game and form a second-order judgment by attaching ‘I have the visual experience that’ to the proposition grasped at the first stage. As a result, I obtain, ‘I have the visual experience that there is a pink elephant’. This judgment is a piece of knowledge, since it is not only true, but also inferentially justified. Its justification stems from two different propositions: the first is that the proposition that *there is a pink elephant* is fictionally true (relative to the current game of make-believe), the second is that the proposition that *there is a pink elephant* would not be fictionally true (relative to the current game of make-believe) if I did not actually have the visual experience that there is a pink elephant. Of course, I do not need to ‘occurrently’ believe these propositions – it suffices that I dispositionally believe them. Dispositionally believing those propositions, in turn, does not require any sophisticated theoretical background, but only familiarity with the idea of make-believe. This is guaranteed – at least for the majority of us – by the process of being socialized into a culture where techniques of make-believe loom large.

²⁹ Question: ‘What does it mean that the pink elephant is “created” in interaction of the principle of generation and the prop?’ Answer: The proposition that *there is a pink elephant* (which actually is true-in-the-game) would not be true-in-the-game if the item which actually serves as a prop, i.e. the visual experience of a pink elephant, did not exist or if the rule which actually serves as the principle of generation, i.e. ‘Perceptual conditions are optimal’, were not valid. Thus, the pink elephant’s existence-in-the-game is not wholly arbitrary, but depends upon both the prop I encounter during the game and the rule I adopt as a principle of generation. The notion of creation, then, is supposed to designate this relation of dependence.

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