Naïve Realism and Phenomenal Similarity

Sam Clarke [a] and Alfonso Anaya [b]

[a] Department of Philosophy, York University,
S900 Ross Building, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3, Canada
spclarke@yorku.ca

[b] Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México,
Maestro Circuit, Mario de La Cueva s/n, C.U., 04510 Ciudad de México, CDMX, Mexico
alfonso.anaya@filosoficas.unam.mx

Abstract: It has been claimed that naïve realism predicts phenomenological similarities where there are none and, thereby, mischaracterizes the phenomenal character of perceptual experience. If true, this undercuts a key motivation for the view. Here, we defend naïve realism against this charge, proposing that such arguments fail (three times over). In so doing, we highlight a more general problem with critiques of naïve realism that target the purported phenomenological predictions of the view. The problem is: naïve realism, broadly construed, doesn't make phenomenological predictions of the required sort. So, as a result, opponents must resign themselves to attacking specific incarnations of naïve realism, or approach matters quite differently.

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Naïve realism is gaining popularity. There are many reasons for this (see: Campbell 2002; Fish 2009; Putnam 1994). However, a key reason (perhaps *the* key reason) has been the purported fact that naïve realism captures the phenomenology of everyday perceptual experience better than rival accounts (e.g. Hellie 2007; Martin 2002; Pautz 2016; Soteriou 2014). Whether or not this compels us to endorse the view, it suggests that naïve realism deserves serious consideration as a framework within which to understand conscious sense perception.

Recent papers by Neil Mehta (2014; Mehta & Ganson 2016) provide reason to think this mistaken. As Mehta observes, there is an intuitive sense in which perceptual experiences can be similar to one another. For instance, my visual experience of the scarlet billiard ball might seem *similar* to that of the burgundy billiard ball, at least in certain respects. But, according to Mehta, naïve realists are committed to false predictions in these cases; they predict similarities where there are none and, thereby, mischaracterise the phenomenology. Thus, naïve realism is false, or (at best) poorly motivated.[1]

Here, we show that Mehta's argumentative strategy fails. Others have already sought to show this, but their critiques have fallen short of target. After introducing Mehta's argument, we explain why this is so (§1). We then turn to the real problems the argument faces and note that each of its premises can (and, perhaps, should) be rejected, the upshot being that Mehta fails to secure his conclusion three times over (§2). In so doing, we highlight problems for a broad range of objections to naïve realism that target *the* phenomenological predictions of *the* view (§3). As we explain, these objections invariably fail since naïve realism (broadly construed) fails to make phenomenological predictions of the required sort. If true, opponents must resign themselves to targeting specific incarnations of naïve realism, or approach matters quite differently.

[1] Mehta's stated target is a view he labels *phenomenal particularism*, "the view that external particulars… are sometimes part of the phenomenal character of experience" (2014, p.311). This is a central tenet of naïve realism, as it is

1. Naïve Realism and the Problem of Phenomenal Similarity

In perceptually experiencing normal middle-sized objects, we seem to be acquainted with those very objects. For instance, in visually experiencing the apple on my desk, it seems to me that I am seeing *that very apple* and that what I am aware of is *the* apple and *its* properties. In this sense, my experience seems to be transparent, or 'diaphanous' (Moore 1903).

Many believe that naïve realism provides the best account of this phenomenological datum. According to the naïve realist, things seem this way, because they are. In successfully perceiving the apple, I stand in a non-representational relation of acquaintance to the apple itself, such that it will be impossible to fully capture the phenomenal character of my experience without invoking this psychological (non-representational) relation (see: Brewer 2007, p.89; Campbell 2002, p.116). In this way:

> the actual objects of perception, the external things such as trees, tables and rainbows, which one can perceive, and the properties which they can manifest to one when perceived, partly constitute one's conscious experience, and hence determine the phenomenal character of one's experience. (Martin 1997, p.93)

In broad strokes, this is the naïve realist thesis.

Naïve realism enjoys further virtues. It seems to show how perceptual experience could secure knowledge of a mind independent world (McDowell 1982; Travis 2005; Kalderon 2011) and how experience could support demonstrative reference to this world's inhabitants (Snowdon 1992; Campbell 2002). Admittedly, it has also been seen to sport less intuitive commitments. Most prominently, it has seemed committed to a form of phenomenological disjunctivism wherein its account of veridical perception does not carry over to causally matching hallucinations (Martin 2004). But, while many find this hard to palate (e.g. Burge 2005) naïve

realists typically embrace this suggestion and have devoted a large amount of time to defending its plausibility (see: Soteriou 2016). This is not to say that phenomenal disjunctivism is unproblematic, only that naïve realism is not straightforwardly ruled out by a commitment to this.

For this reason, Mehta's argument from phenomenal similarity appears to offer critics of naïve realism a promising way forward. Rather than highlighting counterintuitive consequences of the view, that have proven notoriously difficult to assess, it purports to show that naïve realism makes straightforwardly false predictions and must, then, be rejected. To this end, Mehta introduces his *wine case*, which he considers a "decisive" objection to the view (2014, p.318). Here, we are invited to consider two perceptual experiences involving a numerically identical body of wine. In the first of these (E1), we have a successful visual experience of the wine as it is housed in a glass. But moments later (when someone spills the wine over our lap) we have a second experience (E2). This one is tactile, as opposed to visual, but like E1 involves a successful perceptual experience of the same body of wine.

As Mehta presents things, this is problematic for the naïve realist because E1 and E2 are different. Indeed, he claims that they are "completely different" from a phenomenological point of view, possessing no phenomenological similarities whatsoever (ibid., p.319). But, according to Mehta, this is not what the naïve realist predicts. She takes the phenomenal character of one's successful perceptual experiences to be constituted and determined (at least in part) by the entities perceived. And, in E1 and E2, there seems to be a common entity; after all, both experiences ground knowledge of, and demonstrative reference towards, the same body of wine. Thus, naïve realism is seen to predict some kind of phenomenal similarity in E1 and E2. The purported fact that no similarity obtains shows that naïve realism gets the phenomenology wrong and should be rejected.

Crudely:

P1. E1 and E2 result from successful perception of the same object

P2. Thus, the naïve realist should predict a similarity in their phenomenal character

P3. But there is no similarity to be found

C. So, naïve realism makes false predictions and should be rejected

As we will see, Mehta's argument is problematic. Indeed, in §2 we will see that the naïve realist can (*and perhaps should*) reject all of its premises (P1, P2 *and* P3), on independently motivated grounds, without shirking standard motivations for the view. So, if we are right, Mehta's argument fails quite spectacularly. But, before exposing these failings, let us clarify the challenge it poses in two respects:

First, Mehta's naïve realist need not predict that E1 and E2 have *the same* phenomenal character. As Mehta and Ganson (2016) present matters, this was missed in French and Gomes (2016). French and Gomes were right to point out that the naïve realist has the resources to explain phenomenological differences between the two experiences (for reasons we discuss in §2.2). However, Mehta's argument does not rely on the claim that E1 and E2 possess no difference in their phenomenal character. Rather, it relies on the purported fact that they possess *no similarities* where the naïve realist is committed to there being "at least one" (Mehta & Ganson 2016, p.3). Consequently, the challenge, as Mehta sees it, is not to show that naïve realism can accommodate some difference between E1 and E2. It is to show that a genuine similarity obtains (*contra* P3) or that naïve realism is, somehow, not committed to one (by rejecting P1 and/or P2).

A second (related) point concerns the notion of a phenomenal similarity. Mehta never explains what this amounts to. However, a subsequent response by Morgan (2017) sets out to show that E1 and E2 are phenomenologically similar in at least one respect (*contra* P3): in that they both present the subject with spatial properties. Plausibly, Morgan is right about this (touch and vision both seem to be spatial senses). But, if this is the best we can do, it buys naïve realism nothing more than a pyrrhic victory. While visual experiences like E1, and tactile experiences like E2, are both spatial, Mehta will hold that naïve realists are committed to more than just this. After all, a phenomenological similarity of Morgan's sort accords no role to the *particular* objects of perception; plausibly, all visuo-tactile experiences are spatial, irrespective of the particulars they involve the perception of (e.g. the perceived body of wine). Since it is a central tenet of naïve realism that the phenomenal character of veridical perception is at least partly constituted by the *particular* mind-independent entities perceived, Morgan's response falls short of target. It won't do to simply point out *a* similarity (any similarity at all) between the two experiences. The challenge is to point out, or deny the naïve realist's commitment to, a phenomenal similarity that is, in some way, constituted by the particular entities perceived in these cases – specifically, the body of wine that Mehta assumes common to E1 and E2.

2. Troubles With Mehta's Argument

We now turn to the real reasons why Mehta's argument fails, showing that all of its premises can (and perhaps should) be rejected on independently motivated grounds, without shirking standard motivations for naïve realism. While the problems with each premise are, to some extent, familiar from the existing literature, they have been missed by those embracing Mehta's argument. Moreover, when these problems are considered in tandem, they render a prominent approach to critiquing naïve realism obsolete. This latter point is taken up in §3.

2.1 Are the same objects being perceived?

According to P1 of Mehta's argument, experiences E1 and E2 involve a subject's perceptual relation to a common object: a body of wine. For Mehta, this commits the naïve realist to a phenomenal similarity between these. But must the naïve realist hold that E1 and E2 involve a common object *of perception*?

They need not. To see why, note that Mehta's 'objects' are metaphysically loaded. In day-to-day life, 'objects' are macroscopic material things, like apples or (perhaps less obviously) bodies of wine. But this common sense notion is inappropriate when alluding to the 'objects of perception' (cf. Austin 1962; Soteriou 2018).[2] Leaving aside the many 'objects of perception' that are not objects for common sense – e.g. shadows, rainbows, reflections, and flashes of light—the notion is inadequate when applied to the perception of events. Events fill time in a way that the 'objects' of common sense do not. For this reason, endurantists have held that events are distinctive in that, unlike material objects, they unfold through time and are not wholly present at any given moment (Mourelatos 1978; Vendler 1957).[3] In spite of this, few would wish to exclude events as potential 'objects of perception' – we can see the apple, but we can also see the apple rolling across the table. Consequently, it does not follow from the supposed fact that E1 and E2 involve successful perception of what common sense deems the same object (or perhaps more accurately, the same physical entity – a numerically identical body of wine) that both experiences involve a common 'object of perception'.

Once recognised, the naïve realist finds room to reject P1 of Mehta's argument. For instance: they might simply deny that the relevant object of perception is *the body of wine* in either E1 or E2.

[2] Naïve realism is commonly advertised as a common-sense account of perceptual experience. But it is important to note that the view is labelled this way insofar as it attempts to vindicate *a* pre-theoretical claim: that perception makes us aware of the mind-independent objects which populate the world. This does not mean that the naïve realist seeks to commit to *all* common-sensical views in metaphysics or other areas of philosophy.

[3] Of course, the picture suggested has been contested—perdurantists argue that we should think of material objects as filling time in a way similar to that of events (see: Lewis 1976).

Instead, they might endorse a sparse view of conscious experience on which *the* objects of perception are simply low-level properties; perhaps just colours and spatial properties in the case of vision, and temperatures and spatial properties in the case of touch (see also: Morgan, 2017, p.2048). Since it is plausible to suppose that properties like colour and temperature are not perceived both tactually *and* visually, and since the spatial properties of the body of wine differ in E1 and in E2, this would imply that E1 and E2 do not involve a common object of perception.

Framing matters in this way, the naïve realist would not shirk any commitment to "the view that external particulars… are sometimes part of the phenomenal character of experience" (Mehta, 2014, p.311). This is because, on this view, the external particulars in question would simply be the *particular* low-level properties of the wine, out there in the world, at times t1 and t2. Furthermore, this would not reflect an *ad hoc* move for the naïve realist. This is because many theorists have found independent reason to embrace a sparse view of conscious experience, including those with no sympathy for naïve realism whatsoever (e.g. Prinz, 2012). This is not to suggest that naïve realists must embrace a sparse view of conscious experience (see: Campbell, 2005; Fish, 2009). Nor is it to suggest that this is the only way in which P1 might be rejected (see: Anaya & Clarke, 2017). Our point is just that P1 is a metaphysically loaded assumption in need of substantial defence. The naïve realist has ample room to reject it.

2.2 Sameness of object does not imply phenomenal similarities

The naïve realist need not accept that E1 and E2 involve a common object of perception. Consequently, they can contest P1 of Mehta's argument. But, suppose they accept this (and P3), if only for the sake of argument. Would this commit them to phenomenological similarities in the resulting experiences, as P2 of Mehta's argument suggests? Again, it seems not.

Although Mehta fails to clarify what is meant by a 'phenomenological similarity', a natural starting point would be that two experiences are 'phenomenologically similar' just in case they are phenomenologically identical in *some* respect (see: French and Gomes *archived*, p.4). Here, my experience of the scarlet macaw and my experience of the scarlet billiard ball might qualify as 'similar' insofar as both involve type-identical scarlet phenomenology.[4] P2 would then claim that naïve realists are committed to E1 and E2 being *the same* in some analogous respect, where this sameness derives from a common object perceived.

This is weaker than claiming that an experience of the wine in E1 must be identical to that of E2 in its phenomenal character. As French and Gomes' (2016) make clear – and Mehta & Ganson (2016) concede – contemporary naïve realists would reject this stronger claim. Contemporary naïve realists do not construe perceptual experience as a simple two-part relation between a subject and an object. Rather, phenomenal character is also seen to depend upon the 'standpoint' from which the object is experienced (e.g. Martin 1998, p.173). Here, 'standpoint' should be understood loosely. As Campbell emphasises, it "must encompass more than merely the position of the observer" (2009, p.657), for to "describe the standpoint explicitly we have to say which sensory modality is involved" (658) such that we can determine which further (objective) conditions (e.g. lighting, temperature, etc.) are relevant to the character of the resulting experience. Since, E1 and E2 involve a different viewpoint on the same object in precisely this respect (they involve perceiving a body of wine through different sense modalities) a naïve realist who invokes a 'third relatum' of this sort *predicts* phenomenological differences in E1 and E2.

This does not meet Mehta's objection, however. As Mehta and Ganson (2016) stress, the challenge is not to accommodate phenomenal differences in E1 and E2; it is to accommodate

[4] This would render phenomenal similarities absolute. Mehta speaks of E1 and E2 possessing *no* similarities when there should be "at least one" (Mehta & Ganson 2016, p.3). This suggests that he is thinking of it in something like this way, rather than as a relative notion.

the purported fact that E1 and E2 lack any phenomenal similarities whatsoever (here, we are simply granting P3 for the sake of the argument). On the above reading, this requires accommodating the purported fact that they differ in all phenomenal respects, bar those deemed common to any two visuo-tactile experiences, irrespective of the particulars involved.

Prima facie, a third relatum, as Campbell introduces it, fails to show how this could be. There, a standpoint is appealed to in order to make sense of the fact that different mind-independent conditions can be relevant to the phenomenal character of different perceptual experiences. Thus, it accommodates the fact that lighting conditions are relevant to the way objects appear visually in a way they are not relevant to their tactile or auditory appearance. However, setting things out in this way has an unfortunate consequence: it suggests that the phenomenal character of an experience will still be fixed by the mind-independent objects perceived, once we factor in the relevant mind independent conditions they are in, relative to the observer. Since E1 and E2 are taken to involve the successful presentation of a common object, this allows Mehta to maintain that this still requires the naïve realist to predict some commonality in the phenomenal character of E1 and E2; one which grounds knowledge of, and reference towards, the same particular (see: Mehta & Ganson 2016).

This is a mistake. Naïve realists need not hold that mind-independent facts fix the phenomenal character of perceptual experience, all by themselves. Rather, they can (and, as far as we can tell, invariably do) hold that phenomenal character admits of subjective modification (see: Allen 2013; Brewer 2013; Fish 2009; French 2014; French & Gomes *archived*; Pace 2007; Soteriou 2013, ch.5). This is coherent because there is no reason why the perceptual relation naïve realists posit, and which invokes both a subject and mind independent factors, cannot be affected by the state of the former independently of the latter. Indeed, there is good reason for thinking it must.

To illustrate, Anaya and Clarke (2017) consider a case in which a subject is short sighted in one eye and long sighted in another, such that an object *O* at a distance *d* appears clearly through one eye but blurrily through the other. Here, there is a difference in the phenomenal character of the resulting experiences. But, this difference cannot be attributed to the object[5], or the mind-independent conditions one is aware of. After all, it is *the same* 'object' being perceived under *the same* conditions, through *the same* sense modality. For this reason, Anaya and Clarke suggest that the phenomenal difference should instead be explained by invoking a subjective *manner* or *way* in which the subject is related to the object (*blurrily* vs. *clearly*) and that this manner should be factored into a description of the third relatum (see also: French, 2014). But if this is plausible here, it remains unclear why a naïve realist could not allow E1 and E2 to differ in any given respect (*pace* P2 of Mehta's argument).

To be clear: moves of this sort are common in the Naïve Realism literature. Indeed, French and Gomes (archived) make precisely this point in response to Mehta's argument. Nevertheless, it is easy to miss the force of the suggestion. To illustrate, we can imagine Mehta responding flat-footedly; stating that if E1 and E2 share a common particular, and this common particular is *part* of the constitutive basis of both experiences, then *ipso facto* E1 and E2 share a similarity. But, while there is a trivial sense in which this is true (E1 and E2 would thereby have *something* in common) to suggest that this entails a *phenomenal* similarity in the resulting experiences would be to misconstrue the proposal. For, while the naïve realist is committed to the claim that perceived objects are constituents in perceptual experience, i.e. that they have *an impact* on the experience's phenomenal character, this leaves open that the *same* object may have a *completely different* impact on phenomenology under different circumstances. Since E1 and E2 occur under different circumstances, the naïve realist has scope to argue that the experiences would have completely

[5] A naïve realist might propose that this blurriness involves acquaintance with a relatively determinable (yet mind-independent) property of the same object. To see the non-trivial problems that this suggestion faces, see French (2014) and Smith (2013).

different phenomenal characters. In other words: even if it is true that E1 and E2 share *a part* (i.e. they are experiences which involve the *same* object), this does not entail that there must be a similarity in their phenomenology, for the part common to E1 and E2 need not be (or give rise to) a common *phenomenal part*.

An analogy brings this into focus: Note that an element, like oxygen, might react quite differently when placed in contact with two distinct chemicals (e.g. lithium and water). In both cases, the result of these reactions would nevertheless possess some kind of similarity from the perspective of chemistry (both reactions would have been part-constituted by oxygen, and necessarily so). Regardless, it does not follow that the result of these distinct reactions should bear any similarity from the perspective of the manifest image. From the perspective of the manifest image, the effects of oxygen may have been completely different in either case, possessing no manifest similarities whatsoever. And so our proposal is that the naïve realist is under no pressure to deny that something analogous might be true of perceptual phenomenology. They can perfectly well allow that a single object plays an indispensible and constitutive role in fixing the phenomenal character of two experiences (and that, at some level of description, the two experiences thereby share a similarity), while allowing that the result of its contribution is *entirely* different for their resulting phenomenal characters, as manifest in experience.

Critics might object that this is *ad hoc*. But, this would be unfair. As we have seen, a standard motivation for naïve realism is epistemic: naïve realism purports to show how perceptual experience can provide a secure source of knowledge about a mind independent world (Putnam 1994; Travis 2005; Kalderon 2011). But, if naïve realism is motivated in this way, it naturally predicts subjective differences of this sort. For, returning to an earlier example: if *clearly* seeing a material object places us in a better epistemic position to form judgements about that object's precise location and boundaries, when compared with an otherwise identical *blurry* experience of

the same object (as it plausibly does—see: Tye 2003), and if it is the phenomenal character of the experience that is supposed to ground this difference (as is intuitively the case—see: Pritchard 2012), then the epistemic difference seems to imply phenomenal differences in the presentation of the object; differences which (we have now suggested) could be put down to the manner or way in which the object is being perceived.

Similar points apply to Mehta's wine case. Even if E1 and E2 involve a common object, and involve successful perception of this under relevantly similar conditions, it need not follow that the two experiences bear any given similarity in their phenomenal character. A subjective difference in the resulting experiences is naturally predicted since an experience of the object in E1 grounds knowledge of different facts about the object than those grounded by E2. For instance, the tactile experience, E2, may place us in a better position to ascertain the location of the wine in relation to our body, and to ascertain its temperature, when compared with E1. But, for the phenomenal character of these experiences to ground these epistemic differences, there has to be a corresponding difference in the way the object is presented in either case. Consequently, there is independent reason for the naïve realist to suppose that the body of wine impacts experience differently in these cases. Thus, they need not (and, perhaps, should not) predict phenomenal similarities in E1 and E2, even if these involve a common object of perception.

Admittedly, we began with a specific characterisation of 'similarity'. Since Mehta fails to clarify his use of the term it is possible that we have mischaracterised this in some way. Regardless, these considerations are far reaching. They do not simply show that the phenomenal character of E1 and E2 need not be identical in any given respect; they show that there may be no non-arbitrary extent to which two experiences of a common object may differ. Provided that phenomenal differences correspond to epistemic differences this can naturally be ascribed to a

difference in *the way* that mind independent objects are presented in experience. Thus, a naïve realist need not accept P2 of Mehta's argument, even if they accept P1.

2.3 Phenomenal Similarities are Hard to Assess

Let us now turn to the third, and final, premise of Mehta's argument, P3: that E1 and E2 are entirely lacking in relevant phenomenal similarities. Mehta's entire argument turns on this suggestion. But even if one grants P1 and P2 (if only for the sake of argument), this is independently problematic.

Mehta thinks that P3 can be established through mere reflection on what it would be like to undergo E1 and E2, remarking that "this point [is] obvious upon reflection" (Mehta & Ganson 2016, p.3225). But why should reflection reveal that E1 and E2 are nothing alike in their phenomenal character? The idea seems to be that were we the subject in the wine case we would be unable to identify a phenomenal similarity between E1 and E2 through introspection on our own experience. Thus, P3 might be supported as follows:

P4. We cannot find, through introspection, a similarity in the phenomenal character of E1 and E2.

P5. If we cannot find, through introspection, a similarity in the phenomenal character of two experiences, then they have no similarities at all.

C. Therefore P3: the phenomenal characters of E1 and E2 share no similarities at all.

This is a bad argument. Consider P4. Is it really true that if we found ourselves in the wine case we would not recognise phenomenal similarities between E1 and E2? Arguably, in feeling wine spreading on one's lap we would become aware of its fluidity, liquidity having a distinctive feel.

Moreover, in seeing the wine housed in a glass we also might also become aware of its fluidity, since liquids may also look phenomenally distinctive. On these grounds, a naïve realist might argue that we would be able to recognise a similarity in the phenomenal character of E1 and E2, and one that depends importantly on the mind independent nature of a particular object perceived.

Pressure could also be placed on P5. P5 maintains that a subject's inability to find similarities in the phenomenal character of two experiences entails that these possess no similarities at all. But this is something that naïve realists would reject. Naïve realists object to the idea that subjective experience must be introspectively transparent (see: Soteriou 2013: 199). Thus, when two experiences are indiscriminable for their subject, they do not assume that they possess the same phenomenal character. This allows them to deny that veridical perception must be of the same fundamental kind as subjectively indistinguishable hallucination (Martin 2004).[6] But, once the naïve realist allows this much – that two experiences can be indistinguishable for the subject, yet differ in phenomenal character – they should not accept that two experiences, akin to E1 and E2, that are identical in any given respect, must be straightforwardly recognised as such. When one fails to find a phenomenal similarity of the required sort, this failure may simply reflect further introspective limitations.

Again, opponents might think this an ad hoc move. Again, it is not. Views which take our powers of introspection to be limited in the relevant respects have received considerable motivation in the recent philosophical literature among theorists who have, to our knowledge, never shown an interest in naïve realism (e.g. Schwitzgebel 2008; Williamson 1996).[7] This suggests that they can be independently motivated. Furthermore, naïve realists may take well-

[6] This is a key difference between naïve realism and other relational views, like traditional sense data views (see: Ayer, 1940).
[7] This point is also exploited in critiques of naïve realism (e.g. Schellenberg, 2016, pp.33-4).

known cases of perceptual illusion to independently support the suggestion. For instance, the naïve realist might contend that in the Müller-Lyer illusion there is a similarity in our experience of the two lines' lengths, but one that is not recognisable on the basis of introspection alone (for a related suggestion, see: Brewer 2008).

Admittedly, opponents are likely to be dubious of this. But, empirical work supports the contention. As Ian Phillips (2016) points out, signal detection theory (Green & Swets 1966) holds that reporting one's perceptual experience depends upon both perceptual sensitivity to the perceived object(s) *and* a response criterion, or response bias, adopted when assessing the situation. From this perspective, an inability to recognise that the two lines of the Muller-Lyer are equal lengths could reflect a bias to report our perception of the lines in a given way, rather than a perceptual sensitivity to the lines' lengths themselves. Of course, there are delicate issues about how this relates to perceptual experience. Nevertheless, most authors interpret the effect of response bias as reflecting post-perceptual or 'decisional' cognition (ibid.; Macmillan & Creelman 2005, p.xiii). This suggests that the effect of bias on subjective report or judgement does not reflect perceptual experience, but only its post-perceptual interpretation.[8] However, if taken seriously, this leads to a shocking conclusion: experimental methods seeking to disambiguate perceptual sensitivity from response bias, have suggested that our reporting of the Muller-Lyer illusion reflects a response criterion that can be manipulated independently of perceptual sensitivity (Morgan et al. 1990; Witt et al. 2015). This suggests that while we judge the lines of the Muller-Lyer to visually appear different lengths, we do not experience them in this way! This provides the naïve realist with an empirically motivated means to reject, or at least question, P5, and thus, P3 of Mehta's argument. Beyond Mehta's assertion that E1 and E2 lack

[8] This does not require that we judge the lines to be different lengths (after all, we may *know* that they are not). It may simply involve us interpreting the lines as bearing relevant similarities to the way that lines, with different lengths, sometimes *look* (see: Martin 2010).

recognisable similarities, they will be dubious of his assumption that these similarities would be introspectively accessible.[9]

3. Moving Forward

Mehta's argument is ineffective because there is scope (and perhaps reason) to reject all its premises. E1 and E2 may not involve perception of the same object (*contra* P1); but, even if they did, this would not commit the naïve realist to their sharing phenomenal similarities (*contra* P2); and, even if it did, it would remain unclear why they should accept Mehta's introspective assessment of the situation (*contra* P3). Naïve realism – broadly construed – has nothing to fear from Mehta's wine case.

This is extremely negative. However, these concerns are worth voicing for two reasons. First, they are not particular to Mehta's argument. To give a further example of an argument with similar problems, take Ned Block's (2010). He proposes that certain effects of spatial attention are inconsistent with naïve realism since they can result in different experiences of the same object. But, as we can now see, this is up for grabs. As §2.1 explained, ascertaining the objects of perception is not straightforward – indeed, one might swiftly reject Block's assumption of a common object of perception in these studies by rejecting his (highly contentious) claim that the relevant effects of spatial attention are not 'selective'. Moreover, as we explained in §2.2, even if these experiences relate subjects to one or more common objects, these objects may perfectly well impact experience in different ways – indeed, one might expect this given that shifts of attention are presumably relevant to the epistemic force of the resulting experiences (see above).

[9] Alternative responses are available. If two experiences, involve two distinct objects, then these must differ in their phenomenology for the naïve realist. However, in principle, this does not imply that the difference between these will be recognizable for the subject, *even if* the subject possesses complete introspective access to the phenomenology of both. This is because, as French and Gomes (2019) point out, the difference in their phenomenology is not an aspect of either experience, but instead concerns the relation between these. While this does not directly address P5, it is plausible that the basic suggestion might be extended to do so. For, just as the phenomenological difference between these experiences is not a fact about the phenomenology of either experience, neither is any possible phenomenological similarity. So, at least in principle, one might possess complete introspective access to each experience, and yet fail to discern the phenomenal similarity between experiences through introspection.

Finally, *even if all of this were not so,* there is no reason why subjects' introspective assessment of the situation should be deemed a conclusive guide to perceptual phenomenology (see: §2.3) – indeed, we have seen that empirical work might be seen to support the suggestion that it is not (see also: Mack & Rock, 1998). So, in sum, there are a number of moving parts that are simply glossed over in Block's discussion (see also: Berger & Nanay, 2017; Caverdon-Taylor, 2018; Hume, 1975; Prinz, 2013).

Second, we think our observations do more than show these arguments to be unconvincing. We think they highlight the fact that naïve realism is unlikely to be undermined by arguments that target 'its' phenomenological predictions. This is because naïve realism is a very general view that admits of countless possible incarnations. To reiterate: naïve realisms can differ in their ontological commitments regarding the objects of perception (see §2.1); in the extent to which, or way in which, these objects contribute to, or determine, the phenomenal character of perception (see §2.2); and in the ways this phenomenal character contributes to, or affects, our judgements about experience (see §2.3). None of these dimensions of variation put pressure on the idea that a non-representational relation of acquaintance plays an indispensible role in fixing the phenomenal character of successful perception. Boldly stated, this is all that naïve realism commits us to.

Once noted, we find that naïve realism, broadly construed, is committed to very little when it comes to the apparent phenomenology of a given perceptual episode. Since the aforementioned dimensions of variation all contribute to the sincerely reported phenomenology of perceptual experience, properly assessing the phenomenological predictions of naïve realism in any given case will require agreement on how the thesis is best understood across *all* three of the dimensions we have discussed; i.e. agreement on an ontology of perceptual objects, agreement on how these fix or constrain phenomenal character, and an agreement on how all of this affects

perceptual judgement and report. Consensus on any one of these matters, let alone all three, seems a long way off.

This has implications for both friends and foes of naïve realism. Opponents of the view typically frame their arguments as if they are targeting a single *theory*. Indeed, Mehta advertises his wine case as providing a simple and straightforward refutation of naïve realism in all of its varieties (2016, p.317). Plainly, this misses the mark. As we have made clear, naïve realism is a very general view that admits of countless possible incarnations. For this reason, it would be more realistic for critics of Mehta's ilk to target, and undermine, specific versions of naïve realism, rather than naïve realism, broadly construed. Doing so would not be to admit defeat. Nor would it mark a retreat. If anything, it would put pressure on the naïve realist to develop nuanced and workable versions of their view – theses that could generate concrete predictions about particular cases that could then be met or undermined through careful argumentation. Were efforts of this sort shown unable to generate tenable versions of the view, this would seriously undermine naïve realism's credibility.

Of course, nuanced formulations of naïve realism already exist. Prominent exemplars include Soteriou's (2010) theorising on the perception of events, French's (2014) suggestion that perceptual experience involves subjective modifications of consciousness, Allen's work on colour perception (2016), Brewer's (2008) work on illusion, Campbell's (2002) work on the role of perceptual acquaintance in demonstrative reference, and Martin's accounts of sensory imagination (2002) and hallucination (2004). Each of these proposals makes concrete claims about the nature of conscious sense perception that could turn out to be wrong. Since views of this sort reflect the state of the art in naïve realist theorising, they provide ideal targets for critics in future work. The important point to bear in mind is simply that a rejection of any one of these views would not constitute a rejection of all. For instance, Phillips (2016) argues that Brewer's

account of illusion sits in tension with various empirical findings from vision science. However, he goes on to make an alternative proposal (see also: Martin 2010).

In §2.2 we began developing an appropriate target of our own. There, we suggested that a naïve realist, motivated by epistemic considerations, should predict phenomenological differences between experiences that ground knowledge of different propositions. This strikes us as a natural implication of the view. However, it is the sort of result that could turn out to be false upon careful examination. If it were, we believe that this would undermine central motivations for naïve realism (namely, the fact that successful perceptual experiences provide a secure source of knowledge about the world). The challenge it presents critics is to identify one or more cases in which the phenomenal character of two successful experiences is the same, but where these experiences differ in their epistemic force. Were this challenge to be met it would not falsify naïve realism, broadly construed. However, it would constrain the range of possibilities open to the naïve realist, forcing them to take a stand on controversial issues (e.g. specific metaphysical theses concerning the objects of perception or introspection) and call into question certain motivations for the view. The critic would have, at least, landed a blow.[10]

(6,286 words)

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