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RECENT WORK ON NAÏVE REALISM

James Genone

1. INTRODUCTION

Naïve realism, often overlooked among philosophical theories of perception, has in recent years attracted a surge of interest. Broadly speaking, the central commitment of naïve realism is that mind-independent objects are essential to the fundamental analysis of perceptual experience. Since the claims of naïve realism concern the essential metaphysical structure of conscious perception, its truth or falsity is of central importance to a wide range of topics, including the explanation of semantic reference and representational content, the nature of phenomenal consciousness, and the basis of perceptual justification and knowledge. Defenders of the view have claimed that it provides the best overall account of these and other issues. Those who reject naïve realism frequently do so on the grounds that it cannot provide an adequate account of illusions or hallucinations, or on the basis of the idea that a fundamental analysis of *all* mental phenomena can be given in terms of internal psychological or neural properties. One of the greatest difficulties surrounding discussions of naïve realism, however, has been lack of clarity concerning exactly what affirming or denying it entails.

In particular, it is sometimes unclear how naïve realism is related to the claim that perceptual experience is in some sense direct or unmediated, and also to what extent the view is compatible with another widely discussed thesis in the philosophy of perception, the claim that perceptual experiences are states with representational content. Indeed, considerable attention during the past decade has focused on debates between defenders of naïve realism and those who endorse the representationalist approach. One result of these discussions is that that some theorists have begun to explore mixed views involving features of both naïve realism and representationalism.

My aim in what follows will be to discuss how recent work on these issues helps to clarify both the central commitments of naïve realism, as well as its relation to representationalist theories of perception. Along the way, I will attempt to shed light on the different ways in which each approach tries to address the various theoretical challenges facing a philosophical theory of perception, and also to assess the prospects for views that attempts to combine features of each approach.

2. DIRECT REALISM, REPRESENTATIONALISM, AND NAÏVE REALISM

Understanding the explanatory goals and claims of contemporary naïve realism requires differentiating it from a number of related but importantly distinct claims. Naïve Realism is sometimes thought to be synonymous with 'direct realism' or 'common sense realism'. This stems at least in part from the fact that claims associated with these different titles frequently overlap with respect to their aims and motivations. Nevertheless, this terminological ambiguity can be a source of confusion. As we will see, although some of the motivations for naïve realism are based on natural ideas about how perceptual experience ordinarily strikes us, there is nothing commonsensical or naïve about naïve realism itself, and in fact some of its consequences are fairly counterintuitive.

Conflating naïve realism and direct realism is even more misleading. It suggests that the primary issue that debates about naïve realism are concerned with is whether the cognitive relation we bear to mind-independent objects when we perceive them is direct, or instead is mediated in some sense.

Sense-datum theorists, for example, have held that the immediate objects of perceptual awareness are sense-data existing in the mind, and that we only perceive mind-independent objects in virtue of perceiving sense-data.[1] As we will see, however, acceptance of the claim that perceptual awareness is unmediated is something that naïve realists share with competing views. Understanding the distinction between direct and naïve realism is therefore essential to clarifying the role of the latter in current debates about perception. Since direct realism has a somewhat complicated history, a fairly detailed examination of its claims will be required. After accomplishing this, I will illustrate how representationalist and naïve realist theories of perception have provided different ways of developing the idea that perceptual experience provides us with direct awareness of objects.

2.1 Direct Realism

As the name suggests, direct realism involves a commitment both to the existence of mind-independent objects of perception, and to the idea that we are directly aware of them in perceptual experience. The idea of mind-independent objects of perception should be given a quite broad interpretation in this context: rainbows, shadows, holograms, complex states of affairs, as well as temporally extended events (such as explosions) are possible objects of perception, in addition to medium-sized concrete objects such as trees or tables.

The notion of experiential awareness that the view is concerned with contrasts with unconscious perception of the sort that might guide instinctive behavior, or be present in a case of blindsight (a condition in which a perceiver reports no conscious awareness of objects or properties in a particular region of his or her visual field, but nevertheless can reliably report on features of objects, such as direction of movement, in the blind field).[2] The role of consciousness in perception and other psychological states is controversial in contemporary philosophy and cognitive science, with little agreement regarding what role, if any, consciousness plays in our mental lives. Direct realists typically hold that consciousness is essential for perception to provide an epistemological basis for knowledge, understanding, and intentional action. If this claim turned out to be false, much of the attraction of the view would disappear. Since contemporary debates in the philosophy of perception typically assume that consciousness is not epiphenomenal, I will set this issue aside for present purposes.[3] The idea that perceptual awareness is direct is the most obscure aspect of the view, and requires a more detailed examination.

Although the notion of direct awareness is difficult to specify, there are clear contrast cases: watching an event on live television is a paradigm example of indirect awareness. Common sense tells us that ordinary perceptual experience is *not* like watching television: as I sit here typing this essay, I see my computer on the desk in front of me, not some sort of mediating image of it. To deny direct realism is to claim that in this completely ordinary case of perceptual experience, what I see directly before me is something other than an ordinary physical object, or perhaps that I do not directly see anything at all.

Importantly, direct realism does not claim that perceptual experience *always* provides us with direct awareness of physical objects (visual experiences of afterimages and phosphenes would seem to be among the many possible exceptions), or that it involves no mediation whatsoever. It is well established that experience of the surrounding environment depends on considerable processing of sensory information by the brain. Given that causal mediation by neural processing is not something that must itself be perceived in order to enjoy perceptual experiences, however, it does not mediate

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[1] See Jackson 1977 and Robinson 1994. Descartes and the British Empiricists held a similar view.

[2] See Stoereg and Cowey 1997 and Weiskrantz 2009 for overviews of empirical research on blindsight, and Holt 2003 for discussion of the philosophical implications of this condition.

[3] For discussion, see Pockett, Banks, and Gallagher 2009.

our experience of physical objects in any sense that a direct realist would reject. Instead, what direct realism affirms is that perceptual experience of physical reality does not depend on perceiving a mediating mental reality.

Direct perceptual awareness is sometimes explicated in terms of the idea that direct awareness is non-inferential.[4] On this approach, belief formation is a component of having a perceptual experience, but one's perceptual beliefs are not based on any implicit or explicit reasoning. Hence, the awareness one has of how things are on the basis of perceptual experience is not inferred from one's other beliefs or knowledge. This approach to defining direct perception is problematic, however, because 'awareness' is ambiguous between at least two different notions: one can become aware of something in virtue of coming to possess beliefs or knowledge, such as when one learns a certain fact by reading the newspaper, or one may gain sensory awareness of something by having a conscious experience of it that results from sensory stimulation. While perceptual experience may also result in beliefs or knowledge, perceptual awareness is distinctive precisely because of its sensory origin, and defining it in terms of inference (or lack thereof) obscures the distinction between perception and propositional knowledge. To put the point another way: the question of what one is perceptually aware of is independent of the beliefs one is disposed to form.[5]

Instead, we can define direct perception in terms of the notion of dependence, as suggested above: an object is perceived directly if and only if perceiving it does not depend on perceiving some other object. If perceiving an object depended on perceiving something else, this would mediate one's awareness of the object in a fairly straightforward way, as the television example mentioned above makes clear.[6] [7]

To summarize: direct realism claims that at least some perceptual experiences involve sensory awareness of mind-independent objects that does not depend on awareness of any other objects of perception. With this in mind, it is possible to understand the intuitive motivation for the view, which focuses primarily on the phenomenology and epistemic role of perceptual experience.

As suggested above, a primary appeal of direct realism is common sense, which is meant to reflect the phenomenology of ordinary perceptual experience. Prior to philosophical reflection, one can quite easily distinguish conceptually between perceptual consciousness and other conscious sensory states such as imagination or dreaming. Perceptual experience, in contrast to these other states, at least *seems* to involve direct awareness of the surrounding environment in a wide range of cases.[8] Common sense could be mistaken, of course, and some philosophers and psychologists have

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[4] See, for example, Armstrong 1961.

[5] See Jackson 1977, pp. 7-11. For further considerations against the inferential interpretation, see Snowdon 1992, pp. 53-55.

[6] See Jackson 1977, pp. 15-19 for a similar definition in terms of the 'in virtue of' relation. Jackson concluded on the basis of this approach that given that we perceive objects in virtue of perceiving parts of them (e.g., their facing surfaces, in the case of vision), we never directly perceive objects themselves (ibid., pp. 19-20). In order to avoid this highly counterintuitive idea as an immediate consequence of defining direct perception, and capture the common-sense idea behind direct realism, parts of objects should not themselves be considered 'objects of perception'. For a detailed discussion of perceiving objects and their parts, see Clarke 1965.

[7] Paul Snowdon, in a highly illuminating essay, proposes an alternative formulation of what is involved in direct perception: 'x [directly] perceives y iff x stands, in virtue of x's perceptual experience, in such a relation to y that, if x could make demonstrative judgments, then it would be possible for x to make the true demonstrative judgment "That is y"' (Snowdon 1992, p. 56). As Snowdon points out, however (p. 58), demonstrative judgments can be made in cases of both direct and indirect perception (e.g. demonstrative judgments about an individual in a photograph). To solve this problem, Snowdon suggests that in cases of direct perception, the relevant demonstrative judgments must be 'non-dependent', where, it seems to me, the relevant notion of dependence is equivalent to the idea discussed in the main text.

[8] This is most apparent in cases involving vision and touch. Even in more complex cases involving audition, where the direct objects of perception are arguably sounds, rather than the objects and events that produce them (see O'Callaghan 2007 for discussion), what seems to be directly perceived is still arguably mind-independent. Gustation and olfaction

proposed theories according to which mind-independent reality is never directly accessible to us in perception. Nevertheless, in advance of considering such arguments, the view that perceptual awareness is unmediated would seem to be a natural starting point for reflection on perceptual experience.[9]

A second, somewhat more theoretical motivation for direct realist views is epistemological: if our awareness of mind-independent physical reality is mediated by awareness of something internal to the mind (sense-data, mental images, or the like), we would seem to be epistemically isolated from physical reality itself, and perhaps lack adequate evidence of its existence.[10] Indirect realism introduces a 'veil of perception' between us and reality: even if mind-independent objects do in fact cause our perceptual experiences, our justification for forming beliefs about the surrounding environment would appear to be seriously compromised. This line of argument is not decisive, of course, and a variety of arguments in epistemology for both coherence theories and externalist theories of justification and knowledge (such as reliabilism) may undermine it. Nevertheless, many philosophers have considered the threat of skepticism to provide strong motivation for direct realism.[11]

While these considerations may seem initially compelling, many further details about direct realism remain to be clarified. In particular, as described so far, it is entirely unclear how the view can account for cases of illusion and hallucination, and concern about these cases is a large part of what has historically motivated many philosophers to reject direct realism in favor of indirect realism or phenomenalism.

The possibility of illusions seems to provide poor motivation for rejecting direct realism entirely, given that illusions are typically thought to involve successfully perceiving an object, though experiencing it as possessing properties it lacks. While direct realism requires some explanation of what goes wrong in cases of illusion, claiming that such cases demonstrate that the immediate objects of perception are mental objects has struck many philosophers as an overreaction.[12] Some have thought, however, that the possibility of total hallucination, which involves no awareness of mind-independent reality, presents a more challenging problem for the view. If total hallucinations are caused by the same proximal neural stimulation as an indiscriminable ordinary veridical experience, then a commitment to the principle that the same proximate cause issues in the same immediate effect suggests that we should treat such hallucinations as the same kinds of mental states as veridical experiences.[13] If we accept the casual sufficiency of a given type of neural activity for a particular type of experience, then since no mind-independent objects of awareness are present to the mind in a case of total hallucination, an opponent of direct realism could argue that whatever explanation is given of the hallucination can also be given for the ordinary case. Given that this explanation will not appeal to awareness of mind-independent objects, then parallel reasoning suggests that direct awareness of such objects is not part of the explanation of ordinary experience either.

Partly in response to this line of reasoning, some philosophers have pursued a *disjunctive* theory of perceptual experience. First introduced by Michael Hinton, and later developed in various ways

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present further complexities associated with perception of what are traditionally thought of as *secondary qualities*. Since direct realism is by no means committed to the claim that *all* perceptual awareness of the world is direct, these cases do not raise particular difficulties for the view.

[9] Cf. Strawson 1979, pp. 41-47.

[10] Famously, Berkeley employed this sort of consideration in arguing against Locke's indirect realism and in favor of phenomenalism (see Berkeley 1710/2009, and Locke 1689/1975).

[11] See, for example, Huemer 2001, Searle 1983, Ch. 2.

[12] See Ayer 1940 and Austin 1960 for classic discussions of these issues.

[13] See Robinson 1994, p. 151 for discussion and defense of this argument.

by Paul Snowdon, John McDowell, and more recently Michael Martin, disjunctivists hold that veridical and hallucinatory (and possibly also illusory) perceptual experiences do not fall under the same fundamental psychological kind.[14] Disjunctivism has been formulated in a variety of different ways[15], but for present purposes, the central commitment of a disjunctivist response to the causal argument from hallucination is that considerations beyond proximal neural stimulation are relevant to making fundamental categorizations of types of mental states. From this it follows that a given experience may either be a case of veridical perception, or a case of total hallucination, where the fact that the perceiving subject cannot tell the two experiences apart does not imply that they have the same essential nature. While there is much more to be said regarding the development of the disjunctivist approach, some of which will be discussed below, the availability of this view provides defenders of direct realism with resources for addressing concerns about total hallucination.

2.2 Representationalism

Even if considerations regarding illusion and hallucination fail to motivate the rejection of direct realism, it remains an explanatory burden on defenders of the view to provide a way of accounting for supposedly erroneous perceptual experiences in relation to veridical experience.[16] By far the most widely accepted theory that addresses these issues is *representationalism* (also sometimes called 'intentionalism' or 'the content view'). Representationalist theories of perceptual experience are partly aimed at addressing the concerns about direct realism that illusions and hallucinations raise, while avoiding any commitment to sense-data or mental images as mediating objects of perception.

The central idea behind representationalist views is that perceptual experiences can be analyzed as having intentionality. In an early and influential statement of the view, John Searle writes:

> [V]isual experience is as much *directed at* or *of* objects and states of affairs in the world as any of the other paradigm Intentional states … such as belief, fear, or desire. And the argument for this conclusion is simply that the visual experience has conditions of satisfaction in exactly the same sense that beliefs and desires have conditions of satisfaction.[17]

The idea here is that perceptual experiences represent the surrounding environment as being a certain way, and the way the world is represented as being in a given experience (i.e., its representational content) determines the experience's conditions of satisfaction, or more specifically, its accuracy conditions. If the world is the way the experience represents it as being, then the experiences is veridical, otherwise it is a case of at least partial illusion or hallucination. To use Searle's example, if my current perceptual experience is such that there seems to be a yellow station wagon before me, then the experience is veridical just in case there really is a yellow station wagon before me.[18] The key feature of the representationalist approach is that the relevant notion of representation is a semantic one: the fact that an experience represents the world by having accuracy conditions doesn't imply that the experience involves awareness of *a* representation, such as a sense-datum or mental image, which would be a mediating object of awareness for the perceiver.

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[14] See Hinton 1967 and 1973, Snowdon 1981, McDowell 1982, and Martin 2002, 2004, 2006.

[15] For excellent overviews, see Logue forthcoming and Soteriou 2014.

[16] For a defense of direct realism that takes arguments concerning illusion and hallucination quite seriously, see Smith 2002.

[17] Searle 1983, p. 39.

[18] More precisely, the experience is veridical provided that the station wagon is causally responsible for my experience of it, such that changes undergone by the perceived object would result in relevant changes in my experience. For discussion of deviant cases of veridical hallucination, see Searle 1983, pp. 47-50, Lewis 1980, and Noë 2003.

Representationalists deny the claim made by sense-datum theorists that when one has an experience as of an object having a certain property, one thereby perceives some object that actually has that property. As Searle puts it, in the case of hallucinating the presence of a car, 'in the car line of business, I see nothing.'[19]

Among contemporary philosophers of mind, representationalism has been the most widely adopted approach to analyzing perceptual experience[20], and until quite recently, the view has simply been assumed by many philosophers to be the correct framework for theorizing about perception, with debates focusing primarily on the nature of perceptual content or the relation between perceptual content and the phenomenal character of experience.[21] Although few representationalists have provided explicit arguments for adopting the view[22], a primary reason for accepting it, as suggested above, is to account for illusory or hallucinatory experiences without invoking sense-data or other mediating mental objects.[23] In this respect, representationalism is consistent with direct realism, and can be thought of as one way of developing its central claims. Some philosophers have thought, however, that representationalism does not go far enough in elaborating the motivations that lie behind direct realism, and this bring us, finally, to naïve realism.

2.3 Naive Realism

We are now in a good position to understand the central commitments of contemporary naïve realism. Direct realism is motivated by the idea that the mind-independent world is immediately available to us in perceptual experience, and naïve realists think that in order give this idea its due, further claims must be adopted. In particular, arguments for naïve realism suggest that only by providing mind-independent objects with a fundamental role in characterizing the nature of perceptual experience can the phenomenological and epistemological insights of direct realism be sustained.

A good starting point for characterizing naïve realism is provided by Michael Martin, who writes that naïve realism 'claims that our sense experience of the world is, at least in part, non-representational. Some of the objects of perception—the concrete individuals, their properties, the events these partake in—are constituents of the experience.'[24] This means that the objects one perceives will partly individuate a given experience: a perceiver could not be having an experience of the very same type if the experience did not involve the relevant objects.

The idea that objects and properties are constitutive of perceptual experience is sometimes spelled out in terms of the claim that perceptual awareness is relational in nature, and involves *acquaintance* with perceived objects.[25] The idea of acquaintance, which derives from Bertrand Russell's (1910/1911) distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, suggests an epistemic relation to the world that is more primitive and explanatorily basic than that afforded by propositional knowledge, and upon which propositional knowledge of the world is based.[26] The

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[19] Searle 1983, p. 38.

[20] See, for example, Block 2003, Burge 1991, 2005, Byrne 2001, 2009, Chalmers 2004, Dretske 1995, Fodor 1987, Harman 1990, Pautz 2009, Peacocke 1993, Schellenberg 2011, Siegel 2010a, 2010b, and Tye 1995.

[21] See Crane 2006, Siegel 2010a, and Siewert 2011 for useful overviews of these debates.

[22] For some exceptions see Pautz 2009, Schellenberg 2011, and Siegel 2010b.

[23] This is particularly clear when it comes to representationalists who emphasize the ability of their view to accommodate the notion that perceptual experience is *phenomenally transparent*, which is the way some philosophers have described the idea that in perceptual experience, we are typically not aware of the experience itself. I will return to this topic in section 4.3 below.

[24] Martin 2002, p. 39.

[25] See e.g. Campbell 2009. Note that sense-datum theories have also thought of perceptual experience as involving an acquaintance relation to objects, but the relevant objects in this case exist only in the mind.

[26] See Hasan and Fumerton 2014 for an overview of philosophical work on knowledge by acquaintance.

idea that perceptual experience is relational is not limited to naïve realism, however, because by attributing representational content to perception, representationalists think of experience as involving an intentional relation to a representational content (specified by a proposition, or some other abstract item such as a set of possible worlds) which characterizes the accuracy conditions of the experience. What distinguishes the naïve realist approach from representationalism is that the relevant relation is one of sensory awareness rather than an intentional relation.

Another way to understand the distinctive outlook of naïve realism is to see it as defining perceptual experience in terms of experiences that necessarily involve perceiving. Perception is typically taken to be a success state, in which the perceiver achieves awareness of mind-independent objects, in contrast to sensory states such as dreaming or total hallucination, which do not involve perceiving any objects. While some philosophers classify these latter states as instances of perceptual experience in virtue of their phenomenological similarity to successful perception, the naïve realist stipulates that the only experiences that are properly considered perceptual are those that necessarily involve sensory awareness of mind-independent objects. This terminological stipulation is significant because it clarifies the naïve realist's contention that sensory states that involve awareness of mind-independent objects and properties are metaphysically distinct from those that do not. Naïve realism therefore entails a disjunctivist approach to the relation between perceptual experience and total hallucination, and while there are other reasons one might wish to endorse disjunctivism[27], upholding naïve realism provides a primary motivation.

Some philosophers have defined naïve realism as the view that *veridical* experience fundamentally involves perceiving mind-independent objects.[28] This formulation goes against a claim made by many naïve realists, which will be discussed further below, that perception is not evaluable for accuracy, and hence that classifying it as veridical, (or non-veridical) involves a category mistake. Since, as we will see, naïve realists have offered theories of illusion according to which it can also be explained as necessarily involving awareness of objects and properties, it seems more correct to say that naïve realism is a theory of all experiences that can be correctly classified as perceptual, not just veridical ones.

To summarize: naïve realism holds that perceptual experiences are necessarily constituted by relations of conscious sensory awareness to mind-independent objects and properties. In claiming that relations of awareness to objects and properties are part of the fundamental metaphysical nature of perceptual experience, naïve realists hold that such relations are sufficient to account for the main explanatory challenges facing a theory of perception, in particular the phenomenology and epistemic role of experience. In contrast to the direct realist's claim that perceptual experience *sometimes* involves unmediated awareness of mind-independent objects, naïve realism claims that objects in the surrounding environment, as well as their properties, are essential to the underlying metaphysical nature of conscious experience that is genuinely perceptual. So while naïve realism entails direct realism, the reverse entailment does not hold, since direct realism is consistent with the denial of the claim that perceptual awareness necessarily involves a sensory relation to objects.

The situation regarding the compatibility of representationalism and naïve realism is considerably more complicated. As we have seen, both agree with the basic idea behind direct realism, and reject the claim that perceptual experience is mediated by sensory awareness of mental objects. What remains to be seen is how these approaches utilize their respective resources to

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[27] See Logue forthcoming for a helpful discussion of reasons why representationalists who reject naïve realism may nevertheless wish to accept some form of disjunctivism.

[28] Cf. Logue 2013, pp. 107-8, and see also Kennedy 2009. Logue (2014) suggests that the distinction between normal perceptual experiences and illusions or hallucinations could be reformulated in terms other than those which entail that experiences can be accurate or inaccurate, and it seems to me that many naïve realists would prefer such a formulation.

address the main explananda of a theory of perception, and to what extent these approaches can be fruitfully combined.

3. Are Naïve Realism and Representationalism Compatible?

Debates between naïve realists and representationalists have tended to focus on three central issues that any theory of perceptual experience must address: the nature of perceptual phenomenology, the explanation of illusions and hallucination, and the epistemic role of experience. Before considering how these issues figures in contemporary debates, however, it is worth considering how the formulations of these views as discussed so far reflect on their compatibility.

As we have seen, naïve realism claims that objects and properties are constitutive of perceptual experience, and on the face of it, this is something that representationalists would want to deny. After all, the idea that perceptual experience involves semantically representing objects and properties does not require that any particular object or property that a given experience represents actually be present in the perceiver's environment, and this is an important feature of the representationalist account of illusion and hallucination. The basic idea behind the representationalist approach to perceptual error is that it involves representing the surrounding environment inaccurately. There are, however, a number of different ways that objects and properties could play an essential role in characterizing perceptual experience. For example, some representationalists have claimed that perceptual experiences have representational contents that are constituted by objects and properties, following Bertrand Russell's (1903) conception of propositions.[29] Others have claimed that perceptual contents are singular, such that perceived objects and properties partly determine the accuracy conditions of a given experience.[30] So these views, at least, are compatible with the idea that mind-independent objects and properties have an important role to play in the characterization of perceptual experience. The role that they play, however, consists in specifying the accuracy conditions of an experience in order to account for the idea that perception is typically of *particular* objects: according to these views, in the case of a perceptual experience of one of a pair of twins, for example, the identity of the perceived individual will enter into the representational content of the experience, and determine the circumstances under which it is veridical. Representationalists who accept a role for objects and properties in determining the accuracy conditions of an experience do not, however, thereby accept that they are constitutive of perceptual awareness.

Importantly, even on representationalist accounts according to which perceived objects and properties play a role in characterizing perceptual experience, it is the attribution of representational content that does the primary explanatory work. Consider, for example, Susanna Schellenberg's (2011) account of the phenomenal similarity of a veridical perception and an indiscriminable hallucination. According to Schellenberg, perceptual contents are composed of *de re* modes of presentation. If one has a normal experience of a red tomato, the content of experience involves modes of presentation for the tomato and the property of being red, and the *de re* elements pick out the perceived object and property, such that a fully specified accuracy condition for the experience involves that very object and property instance perceived. In the case of an indiscriminable hallucination, the same modes of presentation constitute the content of the experience, but the content would be 'gappy' and as a result would fail to refer to anything in the perceiver's environment. According to Schellenberg's account, the content considered independently of the *de re* element is what accounts for the phenomenal indiscriminability of the two experiences, and the idea

[29] See, for example, Speaks 2009.

[30] See Burge 1991 and Schellenberg 2011.

that the content falsely represents the environment is what explains the nature of the hallucinatory case.[31]

In contrast to this approach, naïve realists claim that the constitutive role that mind-independent objects and properties play in the structure of perceptual experience provides ways of fully accounting for the main explananda for a theory of perception mentioned above: perceptual phenomenology, perceptual error, and the epistemic role of perception. We can, therefore, label those who think that these explananda can be explained entirely in naïve realist terms as 'austere naïve realists', and correspondingly those who address them entirely in terms of representational content as 'austere representationalists'. This leaves room for a hybrid approach, according to which both relations of sensory awareness to objects and properties and attributions of representational content are considered essential to a complete theory of perceptual experience.[32] The question facing any attempt to combine the two approaches is whether drawing on both will lead to conflicting or redundant explanations. While I will not be able to discuss this complex question in detail here, I want to mention some reasons why austere versions of naïve realism present an important alternative to a mixed approach, which I will suggest turns out to be more of a variant of representationalism than a genuine middle ground between the two austere views.

To begin with, when naïve realists claim that perceived objects and their properties are constitutive of perceptual experience, one of their explanatory aims is to account for the phenomenology of experience as being explained by objects and properties in the mind-independent world.[33] This idea goes against most mainstream views about that nature of consciousness associated with representationalist theories of perception. Although there is disagreement among representationalists regarding whether the phenomenology of experience supervenes on or is reducible to representational content (or vice-versa), there is a broad consensus that there is a tight connection between the two notions, since an experience's accuracy conditions will track the way things appear to a perceiving subject.[34] What differentiates naïve realism from these approaches is a commitment to the idea that the phenomenology of perceptual experience can be explained without appeal to representational content. Some have claimed that a view which locates the explanation of

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[31] See Schellenberg 2011, sec. 4.

[32] For related discussion, see Logue 2014 and Schellenberg 2011. This way of classifying approaches to analyzing perceptual experience leaves out views that explain aspects of experience, in particular its phenomenology, in terms of internal sensory phenomena such as raw sensations, sense-data, or qualia. In addition to the defenders of sense-datum approaches cited above, see Block 1996 and Peacocke 1983 for an approach that appeals to both qualia and representational content. Classifying theories of perceptual experience in terms of their appeal to either awareness of mind-independent objects, representational contents, pure sensations, or some combination of these, is suggested in Martin 2002.

[33] See Brewer 2011, Campbell 2002, Ch. 6, Fish 2009, Ch. 1, Kennedy 2009, Martin 2004, and Noë 2005.

[34] There have been at least two main proposals regarding the relationship between representational content and phenomenal character (see Chalmers 2004 for discussion): on some views (Peacocke 1983, Block 1996), phenomenal character is an independent dimension of experience that cannot be explained in terms of representational content, or which is in fact the basis of representational content (Horgan and Tienson 2002, Siewert 1998). Other views (Dretske 1995, Tye 1995) hold that phenomenal character can be reduced to representational content, as the latter will be sufficient for the former, though some (Byrne 2001, Crane 2003, Chalmers 2004) hold non-reductive or supervenience versions of the sufficiency claim. All of these views are consistent with representationalism as I have formulated it here, since whatever the explanatory priority of the two notions may be, each view holds that there is a close connection between them. Views of the first kind, such as that of Peacocke (1983) which claim that phenomenal character cannot be explained in terms of representational content do so at least in part because they take the qualitative aspects of experience to be more fine-grained that representational contents. Although these fine-grained properties of experience are not characterized by the representational content of the experience, at the level of grain at which accuracy conditions are specified, they will track the phenomenology of the experience. In other words, changes in the phenomenal character that are sufficiently coarse will be correlated with changes in representational content.

perceptual phenomenology in the surrounding environment has considerable theoretical advantages over competing accounts, such as providing a more accurate characterization of the way perceptual experience naturally strikes us (Kennedy 2009), offering the possibility of closing the explanatory gap between phenomenal consciousness and the physical world (Campbell 2006, Fish 2009), or explaining the epistemic role of perceptual experience (Logue 2012).

This difference between representationalism and naïve realism regarding the explanation of phenomenology is also reflected in the way each view approaches the topic of perceptual illusions. The idea of an illusion is of an experience where an object appears to have a property it lacks. How things appear to a perceiving subject, however, is another way of talking about an experience's phenomenology. So when a theory of perception offers an account of illusions, it is in part endeavoring to explain the variance between an experience's phenomenology and perceived reality. Representationalism, as we have already seen, claims that the way things appear in a given perceptual experience is reflected in the representational content of the experience, which specifies its accuracy conditions. According to representationalism, a given veridical experience and an indiscriminable illusory one will have the same accuracy conditions, and hence the same phenomenology.

For a naïve realist, on the other hand, perceptual phenomenology is constituted by the mind-independent world, so the way things appear to a perceiving subject is determined by the objects and properties that are perceived. For many naïve realists, this implies that there is no question of a mismatch between appearance and reality, and hence no such thing as perceptual illusions. We have already seen that naïve realism rejects that idea that total hallucinations should be explained in the same terms as ordinary perceptual experiences, and although much more remains to be said regarding naïve realism's rejection of perceptual error across the board, it is clear that many defenders of the view part ways with representationalism in this regard.[35]

Nevertheless, even if one accepted that the phenomenology of perceptual experience is constituted by mind-independent objects and properties, might there not be some further role for attributions of representational content to perceptual experience? Perhaps an ordinary perceptual experience and an indiscriminable total hallucination could be said to have the same representational content despite differing with respect to what constitutes their phenomenology. An account of this sort could possibly provide an explanation of the commonalities between perceptual experience and total hallucination. Another motivation for combining representationalism and naïve realism could be to account for epistemic relations holding between perceptual experience and cognitive states such as episodic memories or perceptual beliefs.

In the final section of this essay, I will explore ways in which naïve realism can address these explanatory goals without attributing representational content to perceptual experience. In the meantime, it is important to note that on the face of it, there is considerable theoretical tension involved in invoking representational content to explain some aspects of perceptual experience, while at the same time maintaining that the fundamental metaphysical nature of conscious perception is constituted by awareness of mind-independent objects and properties. If representational content is attributed to perceptual experience in order to explain some theoretically significant aspect of experience, such as its phenomenology or the possibility of illusion, then the fact that it has accuracy conditions corresponding to the way things appear to the perceiving subject will entail at least the possibility of a mismatch between what the perceiver experiences and the

[35] The quote from Martin cited above suggests that he is open to a version of naïve realism that accepts attributions of representational content to perceptual experience, perhaps in part for the purpose of accounting for illusion. Logue (2014) defends a version of naïve realism that accepts the idea that there are non-veridical perceptual experiences. For naïve realist accounts of illusion without appeal to representational content, see Brewer 2011, Fish 2009, Genone 2014, Kalderon 2011, Noë 2005, and Travis 2002. This approach will be discussed in more detail in section 5.2.

objects and properties perceived. Denying the truth of this latter claim is one of the distinctive strategies of contemporary naïve realism, which allows it to fulfill its explanatory aims. If a representationalist were to grant that contents could be attributed to perceptual experience without the possibility of inaccuracy (e.g. Siegel 2010, sec. 2.5), it is not clear what theoretical interest this claim would hold. An austere naïve realist could admit that it is possible to identify a proposition that specifies the objects and properties the subject of given experience perceives, without granting that doing so would have any explanatory value. If we take it for granted that representationalism is the view that attributions of representational content have *some* explanatory role to play in a theory of perception, then such a view will be incompatible with austere naïve realism.

For this reason, a genuinely mixed approach would seem to be a version of representationalism, one that includes an important role for awareness of mind-independent objects and properties in the characterization of some perceptual experiences, but which, as we will see, ignores some of strongest motivations for naïve realism. For the remainder of this essay, I will treat austere naïve realism as the version of the view best suited to provide a genuine alternative to representationalist approaches, and explore the motivations and challenges it faces.

4. Arguments for Naïve Realism

In the preceding sections, I have suggested that naïve realism inherits the phenomenological and epistemological motivations of direct realism, and claims that in order to secure any theoretical advantages over competing views with respect to these issues, mind-independent objects and their properties must be understood as necessarily constitutive of perceptual experience. Moreover, some naïve realists have argued that competing representationalist views are fundamentally mistaken. While there have a been a number arguments in the recent literature along these lines, I will focus on three of the most influential types: arguments from the explanatory role of experience, arguments against perceptual content, and arguments that naïve realism provides the best account of perceptual phenomenology.[36]

4.1 The explanatory role of experience

One of the most widely discussed arguments in favor of naïve realism, initially put forward by John Campbell (2002, Ch. 6)[37], concerns the role of perceptual experience in explaining our grasp of concepts of mind-independent objects. Why does perceptual experience play this explanatory role? In a case in which a subject is able to make reliable perceptually-based judgments about an object that is not consciously perceived, such as a blindsighted subject of the sort mentioned above, Campbell argues that the subject has no grasp whatsoever of the object he or she is attributing properties to. What the cases of blindsight suggest is that conscious perception is what provides the possibility of representing particular objects demonstratively in thought.

According to this line of thought, if perceptual experience itself already involves representing the relevant objects, there would need to be some further account of our basis for employing demonstrative concepts. Campbell argues that representationalism presupposes such an account, and is incompatible with the idea that perceptual experience itself is what explains our grasp of demonstrative concepts. Campbell writes, '…if you think of experience as intentional, as merely one among many ways of grasping thoughts, you cannot allow it this explanatory role'.[38] Unlike

[36] For further arguments in favor of naïve realism, see Logue 2012 and Martin 2002.
[37] For related arguments, see Brewer 2011, Ch. 4 and Johnston 2006.
[38] Campbell 2002, p. 135.

representationalism, naïve realism can account for the explanatory role of experience by making relations of sensory awareness to objects fundamental to perceptual experience. Campbell's argument draws attention to the idea that perceptual experience is more primitive and explanatorily basic relative to cognitive states such as belief, imagination, and memory, and suggests that representationalism is not compatible with the foundational role that perception plays in our cognitive lives.

Representationalists resistant to Campbell's argument have questioned both its reliance on intuitions about cases of blindsight, and whether or not reliabilism might offer a way of accounting for our grasp of demonstrative concepts. On the first point, one could argue that although the blindsighted subject does not consciously recognize that he or she perceives a given object, the deficit might consist in lacking such awareness, rather than in lacking the basis for demonstrative judgments. In other words, perhaps what cases of blindsight show is that it is possible to grasp demonstrative concepts of objects without consciously experiencing them. The second point is that such concepts could be rationally employed if the blindsighted subject's perceptual connection to the object reliably produced true beliefs about its properties.[39]

In response to these objections, a defender of the argument from the explanatory role of experience may note that blindsighted subjects only make attributions of properties to objects at the prompting of the experimenter, and report these attributions as mere guesses. This is in contrast to normally sighted subjects, who can use their grasp of demonstrative concepts of objects to make spontaneous inferences about the object. Without prompting, blindsighted subjects would possess no knowledge of objects in the blind field, and this suggests that conscious experience does in fact play a special role in providing the basis for grasping demonstrative concepts of objects.

4.2 Against Perceptual Content

A second argument in favor of naïve realism proceeds by rejecting representationalism. Since few contemporary philosophers defend alternatives to naïve realism and representationalism, such as the sense-datum theory of perception, a successful argument that representationalism is false would provide considerable support for naïve realism. In an influential essay, Charles Travis (2004) has argued that by attributing accuracy conditions to perceptual experience, representationalism is committed to the idea that there is a determinate way the world must be in order for a given experience to be entirely accurate: 'If perception represented things as thus and so, there would have to be, for any instance of it, a way things were according to it'.[40] Given that representational content is meant to capture the way things appear to a perceiver, then it specifies a way the world must be in order for things to be the way they appear in the experience.

According to Travis, this claim is simply mistaken: that fact that an object appears a certain way is compatible with a wide range of actual states of affairs. If an object appears such that I might judge it to be red, for example, this could be because the object actually is red, because the object is white but is illuminated by red lighting, or because I am wearing red tinted contact lenses. Travis's claim is that the judgments one might be inclined to make about an object given its appearance do not show that there is any way the world must be in order for the experience to be accurate, though the judgment itself will have accuracy conditions. In other words, while perceptual judgments may be erroneous, perceptual experiences themselves are not, for they simply provide us with appearances that are compatible with the world being any number of different ways. If Travis is

[39] See Siegel 2004 for discussion of these objections. For further critical discussion of Campbell's argument, see Pautz 2011.

[40] Travis 2004, p. 76.

correct that the way things appear in an experience does not specify accuracy conditions, then the central claim of representationalism will be undermined.

A common response to this argument is to claim that a view that does not attribute accuracy conditions to experience is not capable of providing an explanation of illusions.[41] Although Travis briefly gestures at how such an account might work, more detailed efforts have been put forward by others and will be discussed below (section 5.2). It is interesting to note that these responses to Travis's argument are reminiscent of arguments against direct realism based on illusory experiences. By pressing on cases of illusion in order to underwrite attributions of representational content to perception, representationalists suggest that what is essential perceptual experience, even in ordinary cases, is only as much as might be afforded in an instance of illusion. In other words, the way things actually are in the surrounding environment is not essential to the analysis of perceptual experience, even when the experience is not in any way misleading, for the representational content that characterizes such an experience is the very same as would characterize an indiscriminable illusion. This suggests that while representationalists do not posit awareness of mental objects in analyzing perceptual experience, they don't consider awareness of how the world is to be part of its fundamental analysis either.

4.3 Perceptual Phenomenology

The final argument in favor of naïve realism that I will discuss claims that the view offers the best account of a central feature of perceptual phenomenology, and provides advantages over accounts that are typically associated with representationalism. As we have seen, part of the shared motivation for representationalism and naïve realism is meant to be the observation that experience does not typically strike us as involving awareness of mind-dependent objects or properties such as sense-data. As many representationalists have claimed, perceptual experience is 'transparent' or 'diaphanous': when we focus attention on our experience, we are typically aware of objects and properties in the surrounding environment, not the experience itself.[42]

Some naïve realists have claimed, however, that the phenomenon of transparency fits poorly with representationalist approaches to the phenomenology of perception, and more generally that naïve realism provides a better account of perceptual phenomenology.[43] To begin with, it is necessary to adopt a neutral formulation of what is meant by 'perceptual phenomenology', namely, the phenomena consciously encountered in perception. This characterization is distinct from the gloss usually provided when discussing *phenomenal character*, in terms of 'what experience is like'. What experience is like is a property of experience, so adopting this notion to describe the subject matter of reflection on perceptual consciousness imposes theoretically loaded constraints on the account of perceptual phenomenology. Since the term 'phenomenal character' is so closely associated with this idea, I will instead rely on the more neutral description of perceptual phenomenology just provided.

As discussed above, according to standard representationalist views, mind-independent objects and properties are not constitutive of perceptual experience, so when one has a total hallucination, one is having the very same type of experience one has in a case of veridical perception. This suggests that for a representationalist, the phenomenological presence of objects highlighted by the transparency phenomenon is a property that can be part of an experience even when a subject fails to perceive any mind-independent objects. Therefore, according to representationalism, the

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[41] See Byrne 2011, sec. IV and Siegel 2010, Ch. 2.

[42] See Moore (1903), who introduced this terminology, and Harman 1990, who provides an argument for representationalism based on transparency. See also Martin 2002 and Stoljar 2004 for further discussion.

[43] See especially Kennedy 2009, whose discussion of this topic I follow here, but also Campbell 2002, Fish 2009, and Logue 2012b for further arguments that naïve realism affords explanatory advantages when it comes to perceptual phenomenology.

phenomenology associated with awareness of mind-independent objects is not accounted for by the presence of such objects themselves, but rather by properties of experience (such as qualia or representational content) that are independent of awareness of objects.

According to naïve realism, however, given that perceptual experience really does provide unmediated awareness of mind-independent objects and properties, the fact that it strikes us as so doing is best explained by the presence of the objects and their properties, not by a property of experience. In other words, claiming that the phenomenology associated with transparency is a property of experience is at odds with the phenomenon itself, which purports to involve the immediate presence of mind-independent objects. What this line of thinking suggests is that the notion of phenomenal character, construed as the property of what experience is like, is descriptively flawed when it comes to characterizing the phenomenology of perception. According to naïve realism, the fact that mind-independent objects and properties are experienced as immediately present is explained by the fact that they are constitutive of perceptual experience. This implies that at least some aspects of perceptual phenomenology are not adequately described in terms of the traditional notion of phenomenal character.

A natural objection to the naïve realist account of transparency is that the representationalist is right to claim that the phenomenology associated with transparency is present just as much in cases of total hallucination as it is in ordinary perception.[44] If this is correct, then representationalism affords the advantage of a unified account of the phenomenology of veridical and hallucinatory experiences. This criticism fails to appreciate the problem naïve realism aims to address with its account of perceptual phenomenology, however. Although the representationalist can provide a unified account of the phenomenology of ordinary perception and hallucination, it cannot adhere to the idea that the seeming presence of objects and properties in cases of ordinary perception is accounted for by the objects and properties themselves. Moreover, as we will see below, naïve realists have offered accounts to address the indiscriminability of total hallucinations from veridical perception. If perceptual phenomenology in ordinary cases is better described in terms of the presence of mind-independent objects and properties than in terms of properties of experience, the fact that representationalism provides a unified account of veridical and hallucinatory cases is not obviously an advantage for the view.

5. Challenges for Naïve Realism

In the previous section, I outlined some of the arguments philosophers have proposed in favor of naïve realism and against competing representationalist views. In this section, I will survey the main explanatory challenges facing naïve realist views, as well as some recent efforts to address them. In particular, I will discuss how naïve realists can provide fine-grained characterizations of perceptual experience, how they can account for supposed cases of perceptual error, how the view coheres with contemporary cognitive science, and what explanation it might provide of epistemic relations between perceptual experience and belief.

5.1 Characterizing Experience

An initial concern about naïve realism is that it does not provide an adequately fine-grained characterization of perceptual experience. Some naïve realists have emphasized the idea that perceptual experience provides a relation to objects, but have had little to say about perception of properties. Even when properties are included as being constitutive of perceptual awareness,

[44] See Pautz 2010.

specifying which objects and properties a perceiver is aware of does not by itself account for different ways in which two perceivers might experience the same set of objects and properties.

Naïve realists have responded to this problem in a variety of ways. John Campbell (2009) has proposed that experience involves a three-place relation between a subject, object, and point of view. The addition of the perceiver's perspective to the specification of perceptual experiences helps to explain potential differences between distinct experiences of the same set of objects and properties. Alva Noë (2005) has argued a perceiver's implicit understanding of how the appearance of an object changes relative to the perceiver's perspective is constitutive of perceptual experience of an object, and can account for differences in experience between subjects. I have suggested elsewhere (Genone 2014) that which objects and properties a perceiver attends to will determine the phenomenology of a given experience. Taken together, these proposals provide the resources for understanding how naïve realism can explain not just which objects and properties a perceiver experiences, but also how they are experienced.

5.2 Perceptual Error

The topic of illusions and hallucinations has been one of the most widely discussed issues in recent work on naïve realism. As we have seen, naïve realists inherit from direct realism a concern that the view cannot account for these supposed cases of perceptual error. Since total hallucinations differ from illusory experiences in virtue of the fact that they don't involve perceptual awareness of mind-independent objects, naïve realists are committed to the disjunctivist approach mentioned above, which classifies perceptual experiences as being a different kind of mental state that total hallucinations.

Defenders of disjunctivism take different approaches to explaining the potential indiscriminability of hallucinations from ordinary perceptual experiences: some have proposed positive accounts, where what is involved in hallucinating is psychologically distinct from ordinary perception.[45] On this approach, hallucinations could be explained in terms of sense-data or representational content, without this implying the normal perceptual experiences should be given the same account. Others have suggested that these positive proposals screen off the naïve realist account of ordinary perceptual experiences: whatever is invoked to explain the phenomenology of hallucinatory experiences could be attributed to the ordinary experiences as well, and considerations of simplicity and theoretical unity provide motivation for seeking a common account of both kinds of cases. In light of these concerns, some disjunctivists have offered accounts according to which total hallucinations can only be analyzed as being indiscriminable from ordinary perceptual experiences.[46] Such views have been criticized on the grounds that they do not provide an adequate account of indiscriminability, and some have claimed that positive versions of disjunctivism can be sustained so long as whatever psychological properties are invoked in order to explain hallucinatory cases are not considered fundamental to the explanation of ordinary perception, but rather hold in virtue of the perceiver's perceptual awareness of the environment.[47]

Naïve realists have also proposed theories of illusory experiences, which involve objects appearing to have properties they in fact lack. Unlike hallucinations, illusions are typically understood as involving sensory awareness of objects and at least some of their properties, so according to naïve realism they count as genuine perceptual experiences. Since most naïve realists reject that idea that perceptual experiences are representational states with accuracy conditions, however, they are also committed to rejecting the idea that there is any error involved in illusory

[45] See Johnston 2004 and Logue 2012.
[46] See Fish 2009 and Martin 2004.
[47] See Siegel 2008 for the first criticism, and Logue 2012a for elaboration of the second idea.

experiences. The natural claim for the naïve realist to adopt is that errors associated with illusory perception consists in false beliefs formed on the basis of an experience, not in errors attributable to perception itself. It then remains for the naïve realist to explain why perceptual experience is sometimes misleading, and prompts perceivers to form false beliefs. The strategy that some have pursued involves thinking of appearances as partly or entirely mind-independent properties of objects in the surrounding environment. According to this approach, a perceiver's familiarity with the ways an object can appear in various conditions will determine whether or not a given appearance is misleading for the perceiver when it comes to forming beliefs about the object, or can instead serve as the basis for knowledge.[48]

The availability of the accounts just described suggests that it is mistaken to reject naïve realism on the basis of the idea that because of its rejection of perceptual content, naïve realism cannot provide any account of illusion or hallucination. Although these accounts deserve further scrutiny, and will surely require revision and development, naïve realism cannot simply be dismissed as lacking the resources to deal with these cases.

5.3 Cognitive Science

In empirical work on perception, the notion of representation is frequently employed in describing the brain processes that are the basis of perceptual experiences. The fact that cognitive scientists who study perception conceive of the operations of the perceptual system as representational has led some philosophers to suppose that representationalism must thereby be the correct philosophical theory of perception. Tyler Burge, for example, writes: 'There is no getting around the fact that basic kinds in perceptual psychology are intentional or representational. Commitment to representations (and representational contents) as marking perceptual abilities is deeply embedded in the theory's objectives, methods, and explanations.'[49] Burge goes on to criticize naïve realist accounts as incompatible with this supposed datum, and therefore false. Burge's argument presupposes, however, that that the notion of representation employed in the cognitive science of perception is the same as that at work in representationalist theories of perception in philosophy. Arguably, however, the two senses of representation are importantly distinct.

In particular, empirical accounts of perception are focused on modeling sensory information processing as it serves as input to inference and behavior. Insofar as these models focus on the accuracy or inaccuracy of information relative to the goals of the perceptual system, perceiving is naturally modeled as representational on such theories. Empirical theories of perception are typically not focused on conscious experience, however, and frequently do not address the role of consciousness in allowing perception to play a role in explaining thought and behavior.[50] Experiential states are, on the other hand, what are at issue for philosophical theories of perception. The representational content of experience, understood in terms of accuracy conditions, is a way of characterizing what must be the case in order for how things seem to the subject to correspond with how things are in the surrounding environment. Representationalism presupposes the idea that there is a conscious subject for whom things seem to be a particular way in experience, and this is a supposition that is not part of the cognitive science model of perceptual representation.

Even if there is, as many philosophers find plausible, at least a supervenience relation between conscious mental states and brain states, the fact that conscious perceptual states supervene on brain states that are treated as representational from the standpoint of empirical theories need not imply

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[48] See Genone 2014, Noë 2005, and Travis 2004 for defense of this approach, and Antony 2011, Brewer 2011, and Kalderon 2011 for related naïve realist accounts of illusion. See Martin 2010 for a detailed naïve realist theory of appearances.

[49] Burge 2005, pp. 19-20.

[50] Cf. Palmer 1999, p. 618.

that experiential states must also be treated as representational. Instead, different levels of psychological explanation might be articulated using models with distinct descriptive and explanatory resources. If these considerations are correct, they suggest that naïve realism is not incompatible with talk of perceptual representation in the cognitive sciences. Rather, the sense in which the notion of representation is used in empirical work—for describing the relationship between unconscious information processing states of perceptual systems and stimulation from the distal environment—is different from that employed by representationalist theories of perceptual experience. The aim of representationalism is to give an account of, among other things, how perceptual experience can be misleading. Representationalism proposes, as we have seen, that experiences have representational content which characterizes how things seem to the experiencing subject, and which describes accuracy conditions for the experience. Contra Burge, whether or not this is the right account of conscious perception is not something that can be inferred from how sub-personal perceptual states are characterized, even if one admits that the former supervene on the latter.[51]

5.4 Perceptual Epistemology

A final challenge that naïve realists must confront concerns the epistemic relations between perception and belief. This issue arises in light of concerns about what Wilfred Sellars called 'the Myth of the Given', which have more recently been discussed in the context of debates about immediate justification.[52] The problem for naïve realism is that epistemic justification is frequently thought to be governed by the principle that in order for something to serve as a reason for belief, it must be the sort of thing on which an inference can be based. Inferential relations are typically thought to hold between propositions, so in order for perceptual experience to provide reasons for belief, it would seem to be required that perceptual experiences possess propositional content. Given that naïve realism denies that perceptual experience possesses any representational content, propositional or otherwise, the view requires some explanation of why the constraint just described is false, and how the view can explain the epistemic relations that hold between perception and belief.

There are at least two possible responses that could be made on behalf of naïve realism. The first would be to embrace some form of reliabilism, which holds that beliefs are justified in virtue of being caused in ways that are appropriately truth conducive.[53] Since defenders of reliabilism frequently reject the idea that awareness of one's reasons for belief is a requirement on epistemic justification and knowledge, however, reliabilism and naïve realism run at cross purposes, given that part of the motivation for naïve realism is the idea that conscious awareness of objects and their properties provides the basis for perceptual knowledge.

As an alternative to accepting reliabilism, naïve realists may attempt to develop an account of how perceptual experience, understood as a relation of sensory awareness to objects and properties, might provide a principled basis for forming empirical beliefs. In particular, naïve realists need to explain how transitions between perceptual experience and belief can be understood as non-arbitrary and subject to psychological and epistemic norms, such as coherence, relevance, and avoiding

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[51] For a more detailed criticism of Burge's objection to naïve realism, see Campbell 2010. See also Campbell 2002, Ch. 6 for discussion of the role of unconscious perceptual information processing in theories of conscious perception. For an important further objection to naïve realism based on empirical considerations dealing with color perception, which considerations of space prevent me from discussing here, see Pautz 2013.

[52] See Sellars 1956 and McDowell 1994 for discussion of the Myth of the Given, and Pryor 2005 for the topic of immediate justification.

[53] See Goldman 2011 for an overview of reliabilist theories.

contradiction. This is a topic with respect to which considerable further work needs to be done in order for naïve realism to be sustained.

6. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have considered how contemporary naïve realism proposes a distinctive way of fulfilling the motivations behind direct realism, one that offers an alternative to representationalist approaches to perception. We have seen that while direct realists claim that perceptual experience provides, in at least some cases, unmediated awareness of mind-independent objects and properties, naïve realism goes further by claiming that perceptual experience constitutively involves awareness of such objects and properties. While this approach to analyzing the fundamental structure of perceptual experience provides some theoretical advantages when it comes to accounting for the explanatory role of experience and perceptual phenomenology, naïve realism also faces considerable challenges when it comes to addressing topics such as the nature of illusions and hallucinations or the epistemic relations that hold between perception and belief.

During the past decade, naïve realists have begun developing accounts designed to address these challenges, and arguments aimed at undermining competing representationalist approaches. Nevertheless, considerable further work remains to be done, and much of it is tied to foundational issues in the theories of consciousness and epistemic justification that are challenging in their own right. What recent work on this topic demonstrates is that naïve realism deserves to be taken seriously as a theory of perceptual experience, and that addressing its arguments and motivations has the potential to shed new light on many traditional problems in epistemology and the philosophy of mind.

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