



Low-Level Properties in Perceptual Experience

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ABSTRACT

Whether perceptual experience represents high-level properties like causation and natural-kind in virtue of its phenomenology is an open question in philosophy of mind. While the question of high-level properties has sparked disagreement, there is widespread agreement that the sensory phenomenology of perceptual experience presents us with low-level properties like shape and color. This paper argues that the relationship between the sensory character of experience and the low-level properties represented therein is more complex than most assume. Careful consideration of mundane examples, like looking at a coin from an oblique angle, show that the low-level properties represented in experience *do not* necessarily figure in the sensory character of the experience. Furthermore, the sensible properties invoked when characterizing the sensory character of a perceptual experience are not necessarily included in the sensible properties represented in a perceptual experience. On this basis it is argued that perceptual experience has a disunified metaphysics, consisting in distinct sensory and cognitive components. The account is developed in relation to existing unified and disunified accounts, and discussed in terms of its implications for cognitive penetration, the reliability of introspection, the transparency of experience, and cognitive phenomenology.

KEYWORDS Perception; content; phenomenology

Introduction

Several ongoing debates in contemporary philosophy of mind have focused on which kinds of properties are presented in perceptual experience, and how they are presented therein. Some of these debates take place in epistemological contexts. For example, some argue that an expert in tree recognition has a different perceptual experience than a novice when visually regarding an elm. The content of the expert's perceptual experience somehow represents the natural-kind property pertaining to the type of tree she is looking at. It is on the basis of this different perceptual experience that the expert's belief about what she is seeing is justified, whereas the novice's is not.¹ Meanwhile, several philosophers of

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mind influenced by the phenomenological tradition have debated related issues in terms of which properties are 'phenomenologically manifest' in conscious experience.² Bayne (2009) distinguishes 'conservatives', who claim that only low-level properties such as shape and color are phenomenologically manifest in perceptual experience, from 'liberals', who claim (to varying degrees) that high-level properties such as causation and natural-kind are phenomenologically manifest in perceptual experience.³ Bayne and Montague (2011) use the same labels to designate those who disallow non-sensory properties from being phenomenologically manifest (conservatives) and those who allow for a variety of non-sensory phenomenal modalities, such as 'cognitive phenomenology' (liberals).

Both discourses have developed interesting questions and theories regarding how high-level properties like natural-kind could figure in the contents and phenomenology of perceptual experience. While questions about high-level properties are no doubt interesting, this paper argues that important difficulties remain regarding low-level properties like shape and color. Consider the visual experience of looking at a coin on a table from an oblique angle. How does the coin appear? Does it look elliptical, or circular? Or, consider the experience of looking out upon an expanse of freshly fallen snow. Does the snow look white, or slightly bluish?⁴ Is it possible for the coin to somehow look both circular and elliptical at the same time? Can the snow appear both white and bluish simultaneously? Disagreement about these kinds of examples indicates that discerning the structure, contents, and phenomenology of perceptual experience is not a matter of straightforward introspection.⁵ Rather, introspective reports prompted by reflection on these examples provide a starting point for theoretical inquiry into the metaphysics and phenomenology of perceptual experience. A satisfactory account of perceptual experience should be able to explain why different people provide different accounts of how things look.

This paper argues that the lesson to be learned from the coin and snow examples is that the low-level properties of which one is sensorily aware are not necessarily represented as being instantiated by anything. *Furthermore*, the low-level properties that are represented as being instantiated by something are not necessarily properties of which one is sensorily aware. In other words, perceptual experience has a *disunified* metaphysics. The *representational content* of a perceptual experience – i.e. that in virtue of which the experience can be assessed for accuracy – can come apart from its *sensory character* – i.e. what it is like sensorily for one to undergo the experience. Whereas unified views of perceptual experience claim that its representational content and sensory phenomenology do not come apart (either because its content determines its phenomenal character or because its phenomenal character determines its content), the disunified view advocated here argues that perceptual experience includes distinct yet related mental states, which collectively account for its property presenting and representational features.⁶ The interesting difference

between the disunified view I present here and existing disunified views lies in their respective treatments of low-level sensible properties. While many disunified views have addressed how high-level properties like natural-kind figure in the contents of perceptual experience, none, to my knowledge, have directly addressed the possibility of low-level sensible properties like shape and color being represented in experience *without* figuring in the sensory character of experience. Of particular concern here will be capturing the precise manner in which this disunified metaphysics is reflected in the phenomenology of perceptual experience.

I will proceed by contrasting how some prominent unified and disunified views deal with the coin and snow examples and arguing that none of them do so adequately. Though I find the disunified framework introduced by Bengson, Grube, and Korman (2011) promising in several ways, I argue that its core tenants cannot be jointly held. My discussion of the coin and snow examples and the different possibilities for dealing with them leads to a unique disunified view with implications for further issues in the philosophy of perception, including cognitive penetration, the reliability of introspection, the transparency of experience, and cognitive phenomenology.

1. Seeking Unity

One of the most prominent views that perceptual experience has a unified metaphysics is Siegel's (2010) account of the contents of visual experience. According to Siegel, *all* visual perceptual experiences include representational content in virtue of their phenomenology presenting properties to a subject of experience. That is, for a subject *S* to be presented with a property *F* *just is* for *F* to be presented to *S* as being instantiated by something. On this view, if one's perceptual experience includes a sensory phenomenology presenting certain shape and color properties, those shape and color properties are thereby represented as being instantiated by something in the world. For example, when one looks at a red cube, the visual phenomenology includes more than the raw presentation of the properties redness and cubeness. Rather, one's experience presents it as being the case that there is a red cube before her, and it does so in virtue of its visual phenomenology (Siegel 2010, 48). Siegel also argues for the even stronger position that in addition to low-level properties such as shape and color, the phenomenology of visual experience presents high-level properties like causation and natural-kind, and thus suffices for representational content including those properties. As stated above in the introduction, however, the focus of this paper is on how low-level properties like shape and color are represented in perceptual experience. Before we deal with whether the contents of perceptual experience include a plethora of high-level properties, we should at least be able to account for which and how low-level properties figure in its contents.

One way to criticize Siegel's unified view is through *ganzfeld* cases.⁷ These are cases in which one's visual experience includes a phenomenology of property presentation but does not seem to present these properties as being instantiated by anything. For example, consider the visual experience one has when one walks outside on a dark and cloudy night utterly devoid of any illumination (Bengson 2013, 801). One's visual field presents pitch black. This might be a case of property presentation without representational content insofar as one is certainly sensorily aware of a property – blackness – but one's experience is not as of anything's *being* black. You do not see blackness as being instantiated by anything.⁸ In other words, there seem to be cases of perceptual experience in which *S* is presented with *F*, but *F* is not presented as being instantiated by anything. Here, property presentation and representational content come apart.

Of course, Siegel can simply contend that these examples are not examples of perceptual experience at all. They are examples of visual sensation. She excludes 'marginal experiences such as pink glow and brain gray' from her thesis about content, and thus it is likely that she would similarly exclude *ganzfeld*-style cases (Siegel 2010, 26). In response, one might charge Siegel with an ad hoc or ambiguous characterization of the explanandum (Bengson 2013). While this charge may be warranted, I think the same point can be made against Siegel *without* resorting to *ganzfeld* cases. The coin and snow examples both illustrate how property presentation and representational content can come apart, and they clearly lie within the target class of normal cases of visual perceptual experience. Henceforward I will focus on the coin example for the sake of simplicity, though I think the same considerations hold, *mutatis mutandis*, for the snow example.

When one looks at a coin on a table from an oblique angle there is a clear sense in which it looks elliptical, but another plausible sense in which it looks circular.⁹ A sense-data theorist may hold that one is sensorily presented with ellipticality while a separate state of judgment or belief predicates circularity of the coin. On this view only ellipticality is sensorily manifest. Another view is that the coin looks circular. Even if one has an elliptical sensation, sensation is not perception and only the contents of perception are phenomenologically manifest.¹⁰ Still another view could hold that both ellipticality and circularity are phenomenologically manifest in the experience, albeit in different ways.¹¹

Siegel (2010) claims that the properties that are sensorily manifest in visual experience are thereby represented as being instantiated by something. As a *unified* view, a sense-data account is off the table, since on such an account perceptual experience would consist of distinct mental states of sensation and judgment. If she agrees that one is visually presented with ellipticality in the coin example, it would seem that she should claim that the representational content of one's experience is that something before one is elliptical. Of course, this does not seem right. One does not take the coin *to be* elliptical. Therefore, Siegel could claim that ellipticality is just a visual sensation, and that sensation is

not perception. The perceptual experience in this example should be characterized as one in which the coin is represented as being circular. If this is the case, however, it is unclear how circularity enters the content of the experience and how it is reflected in the phenomenology of the experience. Is circularity part of the *visual* phenomenology of the experience, and thus represented as being instantiated by something? If this is the claim, then it is difficult to understand how circularity is phenomenologically manifest in a *visual* manner while one is also having a *visual* sensation of ellipticality with respect to the coin.

In response to this concern, several recent 'representational' accounts of perception have maintained a unified conception of perceptual experience by positing multiple layers of representational content that correspond with the seemingly multi-faceted phenomenology of low-level properties.¹² In various ways, these accounts explain how *both* circularity and ellipticality are part of the representational content of the experience and thereby both sensorily manifest. Matthen (2010), for example, explains this by saying that visual experience represents more than just the properties of the objects of perception, but also of the *scene*. For example, when looking at a white wall under pinkish light, one's experience represents the wall as being white and the illumination conditions as being pinkish. In the coin example, the coin is represented as being circular while ellipticality is represented as a feature of one's specific bodily orientation with respect to the coin.¹³ Susanna Schellenberg (2008) offers a somewhat similar account, explaining the ellipticality manifest in the experience in terms of representational content. On her account, perception represents both the intrinsic properties of the coin (circularity) as well as its *situation-dependant* (SD) properties (ellipticality). SD properties are properties of the object that are a function of its intrinsic properties and the situational features inherent to any possible perceptual scenario. Ellipticality, therefore, is not a mind-dependent appearance property but a property of the coin itself insofar as circular objects necessarily appear that way from a point of view.

Both Matthen's and Schellenberg's views commendably preserve the unity of perceptual experience by subtly 'fine-graining' the representational content of experience, but both leave the relation between the sensory character and representational content of experience unclear. Matthen (2010, 245) claims that circularity and ellipticality are both *visually* sensorily manifest and *co-located* in the subject's visual field. But the accuracy of such a phenomenological description, in my view, trades on an equivocation about 'looks' and 'appears' ascriptions. The coin looks circular in that one represents it as being circular and is thus so disposed to report. The coin looks elliptical in that it could be perfectly occluded by an elliptical patch in one's visual field. When cashing out the former ascription phenomenologically, however, Matthen invokes a multi-modal phenomenology, including proprioceptive awareness, to explain the constancy of the visually manifest circularity. But it is unclear how visually manifest ellipticality combined with specific types of proprioceptively

manifest body positioning yields *visually* manifest circularity. A combination of visual data and proprioceptive data at the sub-personal level may very well be the way the *representational* layering in the experience is realized, but simply claiming that this therefore yields a distinctively visual phenomenal character that presents circularity begs the question. One could equally hold that one has an overall sense of the coin being circular, and that this sense is phenomenologically manifest somehow, while maintaining that ellipticality is the only property that is visually manifest, but this is no longer a unified account of the experience's representational content and *sensory-visual* character.

Schellenberg's (2008) discussion of how the multi-layered representational content (SD properties+intrinsic properties) is reflected in the phenomenology of perceptual experience is difficult to track. She claims she is 'agnostic' on the relationship between phenomenology and representational content, but also maintains 'that whatever stance is taken toward the way intrinsic properties are reflected in phenomenology should be taken towards the way situation-dependent properties are reflected in phenomenology' (2008, 69). She also notes, however, that 'For human perceivers, intrinsic properties are usually more salient than situation-dependent properties. Therefore, they are typically in the foreground of our perceptual phenomenology' (69) These two remarks entail that if either ellipticality or circularity is sensorily manifest then likewise for the other, yet each with distinctive degrees of phenomenal salience. Like Matthen, this leads to a phenomenological description whereby ellipticality and circularity are co-located in the subject's sensory-visual phenomenology. But once again I think this kind of phenomenological description is forced, and trades on an equivocation regarding what is 'visually available' or 'visually presented' to the subject. It is intuitively obvious to most perceivers that their awareness that the coin is circular is, somehow, the result of a visual experience. Thus, while it might seem plausible to some that they are 'visually aware' of both ellipticality and circularity, it is just as *implausible* to others that these properties are in a kind of sensory-visual 'superposition' (Kriegel 2007, 117).

Alternatively, one could simply bite the bullet on ellipticality being sensorily manifest at all. This is the route Kelly (2005) takes. On Kelly's view, in the engaged everyday attitude, one perceives the coin as circular based on her practical understanding and bodily comportment toward it. Circularity is manifest in the experience in virtue of functioning as a perceptual norm that guides one's motor skills in relation to the coin. It is possible for one to stop and reflect on the experience and come to see the coin as elliptical, but this would be a separate perceptual experience in which she ceases perceiving the coin as circular due to taking up a reflective or theoretical attitude. This is a unified view in that the properties one represents as being instantiated by the coin are the only properties phenomenologically manifest in the perceptual experience. That is, the circularity of the coin is phenomenologically manifest in the 'sense'

or 'understanding' one has of the coin, but this experiential awareness of the coin could be understood as non-sensory.

Of course, if this is what Kelly's view amounts to then this leads to the question of how one's experience of the coin as being circular counts as a *visual* experience at all. If the phenomenal character and representational content of the experience do not come apart (the unified view), and the phenomenal character of the coin experience that represents the coin as circular is a non-sensory phenomenal character, then what is the sensory-visual character of this experience? Does the experience simply not have a sensory character? If one grants that the experience has a sensory character, but that circularity does not figure in it, then one must characterize it some other way. A sensory character presenting ellipticality seems to be the most obvious way, but this only seems to lead us back to a disunified, whereby the sensory character comes apart from the representational content of the experience, which is precisely what unified accounts seek to avoid.

In order to retain a unified view of visual experience, whereby the properties of which one is sensorily aware are thereby represented as being instantiated by something, unified theories might opt for some form of cognitive penetration. Ellipticality cannot be sensorily manifest in an experience that represents a coin as being circular, for if it were one would represent the coin as being elliptical. Looking at a coin, however, is undeniably a *sensory* experience and must have some sensory phenomenology. Thus, circularity must be sensorily manifest in the experience. Those who insist that ellipticality is sensorily manifest in the experience must be mistaken, for on the unified account ellipticality could only be manifest through a separate reflective act. In the typical experience of the coin, circularity is represented and this representational activity penetrates the sensory character of the experience. The coin is represented as being circular and the sensory character of this experience presents circularity, not ellipticality.

While a comprehensive discussion of the issue of cognitive penetration is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that the existing literature does not focus on the issue of low-level properties in the *sensory character* of experience as it is being discussed here. Current debates about cognitive penetration tend to focus on how representation of high-level properties like natural kind and causation affects the *overall* phenomenal character of a perceptual episode (e.g. Siegel 2010). In other cases, claims that the sensory character of experience is affected by representational states often equivocates on 'looks' and 'appears' in the same manner as Matthen; such discussions pump our intuitions about how perceptual experience (as a *whole*, not specifically with regard to its *sensory character*) 'looks' or 'appears' differently in virtue of what one knows or one's expertise, and then explains these intuitions with appeals to sub-personal processing.¹⁴ My aim here, however, is to remain explicitly focused on the relationship between the *sensory* character (as opposed to its *overall* phenomenal character) and representational content of perceptual experience in order to

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do justice to the intuitions that spark disagreements about the example in the first place. Offering an account according to which the sensory character of perception remains 'phenomenologically encapsulated' is desirable insofar as it offers a way to make sense of the conflicting introspective reports that motivate the debate in the first place.

2. A Disunified Account

Understanding perceptual experience as having a disunified metaphysics offers an alternative to the unified accounts above, which seem to necessitate cognitive penetration. Indeed, avoiding cognitive penetration has been one of the motives driving recent disunified accounts of perceptual experience.¹⁵ These accounts seek to make sense of how different perceivers can have perceptual experiences that share a common sensory core, yet differ in their representational contents. Thus, a disunified account lets us make sense of how the expert and novice in tree recognition have perceptual experiences with a common sensory character yet different overall contents when regarding one and the same tree (Brogaard 2013a, 2013b; Reiland 2014). Likewise, a disunified account is promising for explaining the phenomenology of foreign versus native language experience. The sensory character of a native speaker's experience is identical to that of a foreigner's while their overall experiences differ in virtue of the different ways in which their experiences are conceptualized (Bengson, Grube, and Korman 2011, 180).

Bengson, Grube, and Korman's (2011) 'new framework for conceptualism' is an especially prominent recent account, which, they argue, holds great promise for future work in philosophy of perception, as it offers a means of resolving debates about illusion and hallucination, justification of perceptual beliefs, the possibility of unmediated perceptual contact with the world, and the way low-level and high-level properties are made evident in perceptual experience. (Henceforth, I will refer to Bengson, Grube, and Korman 2011 as 'BGK'.) The framework rests on the ontological distinction between two distinct yet tightly connected conscious mental states: 'sensory awareness', and 'perceptual experience' (BGK, 167). These states play different roles and perform different epistemic functions. The state of sensory awareness relates a subject to a property, relation, or individual, while the state of perceptual experience relates a subject to a propositional content (169). Awareness and experience are 'closely related, but importantly different, conscious mental states' (169). By the 'irreducibility thesis', awareness is not identical to and cannot be analyzed in terms of experience (169). By the 'sensory character thesis', the properties and relations of which one is sensorily aware determine what it is like sensorily for one (170). By the 'property awareness thesis', for any perceptual experience Φ , the subject of Φ is sensorily aware of *every* sensible property represented by Φ (172, my emphasis). BGK go on to introduce two more theses, the 'demonstrative thesis'

(174) and the 'reference determination thesis' (176), when addressing issues of demonstrative concepts in experience. Since my focus in this paper is on the phenomenology of sensible properties, I will restrict my discussion to the irreducibility thesis, the sensory character thesis, and the property awareness thesis.

5 At first pass, BGK's distinction between sensory awareness and perceptual experience may lead one to think that they would treat the coin example in a manner similar to Kelly (2005). Most of the time we perceptually experience the coin as circular and, by the property awareness thesis, we are thereby sensorily aware of circularity. Upon closer inspection or when taking up a reflective attitude, one could disassociate her perceptual experience as of a circular coin from the sensory awareness state that presents ellipticality. In this case one would not come to represent the coin as *being* elliptical, but she is nonetheless in a conscious mental state presenting ellipticality. One might object at this point that this misses the point of BGK's disunified framework. What is really going on in this example, the objector would claim, is that one is in a sensory awareness state presenting the property of ellipticality and a perceptual experience state representing the coin as being circular. After all, one of the motivating factors driving the framework is the idea that we can be in sensory awareness states without representing the properties those states present as being instantiated by anything. Recall the irreducibility thesis: sensory awareness cannot be analyzed in terms of the representational content of the experience.

20 The problem with this objection, however, has already been alluded to above: by BGK's property awareness thesis, the subject of Φ is *sensorily* aware of *every* sensible property represented by Φ (BGK, 172, my emphasis). Thus, if a proponent of the framework claims that one is representing the coin as being circular, and agrees that circularity is a sensible property, then she must claim that one is sensorily aware of circularity in the experience. Furthermore, by BGK's sensory character thesis, the sensory properties of which one is aware determine what it is like sensorily for her. Thus, if a proponent of the framework claims that one represents the coin as being circular, then by the property awareness thesis and the sensory character thesis she must claim that circularity figures in what it is *sensorily* like for her in this example. This amounts to a kind of cognitive penetration: the sensory character of the experience is (at least partially) determined by its representational content. But, as we have already pointed out, the irreducibility thesis seems to explicitly deny this.

35 Perhaps the proponent could claim that one is sensorily aware of both ellipticality and circularity, but that only circularity is represented in perceptual experience as being instantiated. But this claim is confusing given the property awareness thesis and the sensory character thesis. By those two theses, a proponent must be committed to one's being sensorily aware of circularity in the example. Now, however, if the proponent also tries to do justice to the intuitive phenomenological claim that ellipticality is also sensorily manifest in the experience, she is left with the confusing position that one is simultaneously

sensorily aware of circularity and ellipticality with respect to the same object. But as discussed in the previous section, this phenomenological description of the experiential episode is implausible. When looking at a coin on a table from an angle, one is not sensorily aware of circularity and ellipticality in a sort of phenomenal superposition.

Alternatively, the proponent of BGK's framework could deny that ellipticality is phenomenologically manifest at all. Since one represents the coin as being circular, and by the property awareness thesis she must be sensorily aware of any properties one represents in experience, then the only sensible shape property of which she is sensorily aware is circularity. But once again, this seems to violate their irreducibility thesis and introduce cognitive penetration. In other words, it reverses the order of explanation that BGK's framework suggests: the properties one represents as being instantiated should not be the *starting point* for analyzing the sensory character of the experience. Denying that circularity is sensorily manifest in the experience appears to be equally undesirable for BGK since it would require that one must not be representing the coin as being circular. Presumably, however, one of the primary motives driving the framework is doing justice to the idea that one's perceptual belief that the coin is circular, and not elliptical, is justified by her perceptual experience representing the coin as being circular. If this is the case, then by the property awareness thesis one must be sensorily aware of circularity, and by the sensory character thesis circularity must figure in what it is like sensorily for the subject of this experience.

All of this poses a dilemma for BGK's view: if one is perceptually experiencing the coin as being circular, then she must either be simultaneously sensorily aware of both ellipticality and circularity or only sensorily aware of circularity. Intuitive phenomenological reflection on the experience does not seem to support the former option, while the latter option sneaks cognitive penetration back into the picture. BGK (170, 180) remain agnostic on the existence and role of cognitive phenomenology, thus allowing for the possibility that ellipticality is sensorily phenomenologically manifest while circularity is phenomenologically manifest in a non-sensory way, perhaps cognitively phenomenologically manifest. Note that this does not amount to cognitive penetration since it allows for the strictly sensory character of one's experience to remain independent of whatever is going on cognitively, even if the perceiver's cognitive activity includes an additional phenomenology. In order to go this route, however, they would either have to drop the property awareness thesis, or modify it.

Recall BGK's property awareness thesis:

For any perceptual experience Φ , the subject of Φ is sensorily aware of every sensible property represented by Φ . (172)

As we have seen, this thesis is inconsistent with the rest of their framework. It cannot be maintained along with the sensory character thesis and the

irreducibility thesis. Furthermore, after reflection on the coin example, the thesis appears to be false. The coin example shows that there are quite normal cases of perceptual experience in which one is not *sensorily* aware of every sensible property represented in the experience. A modified property awareness thesis (MPA) could accommodate the manner in which both ellipticality and circularity are manifest in the coin example:

MPA: For any perceptual experience Φ , every sensible property represented by Φ is phenomenologically manifest to the subject of Φ *in some manner*.

One could hold MPA and retain the sensory character thesis and the irreducibility thesis, since the properties that determine the sensory character of one's experience would only be those properties phenomenologically manifest in a sensory manner. As the coin example shows, it is possible to have perceptual experiences in which one represents certain sensible properties as being instantiated without the sensory character of her experience involving those properties. MPA can handle color examples as well. In the blue snow example mentioned earlier, one could simply say that in this case the subject of the experience represents the snow as being white and thereby whiteness is phenomenologically manifest to her (albeit in a non-sensory way) while being sensorily aware of bluishness and thereby having an experience with a bluish sensory character. Or consider a common color constancy example: when I look at the surface of the table top over by my window in the later afternoon sun, I represent the table top as being uniformly brown and thus brownness is phenomenologically manifest in my experience, yet the sensory character of my experience does not actually present the particular shade of brownness that I represent the table as instantiating. I am sensorily aware of a variegated set of tan and mahogany hues, while perceptually experiencing the table as a uniform brown.

MPA, however, also appears to be too strong. After all, it does not seem difficult to come up with cases of perceivers representing a myriad of sensible properties as being instantiated without *all* of these properties being simultaneously phenomenologically manifest to the perceiver, even allowing for the possibility their being manifest in both sensory and non-sensory ways. In the coin example, it may not be necessary that circularity is phenomenologically manifest in the experience even though I am representing the coin as being circular. It could simply be the case that ellipticality is sensorily presented to me while I am nonetheless representing the coin as being circular in virtue of my COIN concept being tokened by a distinct cognitive (and non-phenomenal) state. Thus, I may be disposed to respond that the coin looks circular without circularity being phenomenologically manifest at all.

These considerations lead me to believe that BGK should simply drop the property awareness thesis. Their stated motivations for the property awareness thesis concern nonveridical experience and introspection. If one perceptually

experiences a sensible property as being instantiated, when in fact no worldly object is instantiating it, one must still be somehow aware of that property (BGK, 173). Furthermore, following intuitions regarding the transparency of experience, when one introspects on experience he attends to the properties objects are represented as having. One can only attend to properties of which one is aware, so there must be a connection between that which we represent and the properties of which we are aware – hence the property awareness thesis (BGK, 173). These motivations, however, do not require BGK to hold the property awareness thesis, especially given their explicit rejection of any causal constraint on which properties one is aware of and which properties one represents as being instantiated (BGK, 173). In the case of nonveridical perception, it could be the case that I am sensorily aware of some properties, which characterize what it is like sensorily for me, while I am also (mis)representing some properties as being instantiated by something. Just as in veridical cases, the properties of which I am sensorily aware could match the sensible properties I represent as being instantiated, or not. As for introspection, I agree that one typically attends to the properties represented as being instantiated, and that one cannot attend to properties of which one is not aware. This, however, does not require that *every* sensible property represented in virtue of a certain concept being tokened be phenomenologically manifest in the experience.

This last consideration regarding introspection requires further attention. As stated at the outset, introspective reports provide a starting point for inquiry into the structure of perceptual experience. And while my own analysis of the coin example leads me to believe that ellipticality is the only shape property that is sensorily manifest in the experience, the stark disagreement about the example may lead some to think that circularity is present in the experience *somehow*. Moreover, reports that the coin looks circular cannot be *simply* a matter of a perceiver's being disposed to respond this way in virtue of his COIN concept being operative. No, one might insist, something phenomenologically manifest *in* the experience itself is what leads people to report that the coin looks circular. I will spend the remainder of the paper attempting to do justice to this intuition while ultimately maintaining that circularity is not actually *sensorily* manifest in the experience. The intuition that it is, however, does show something important about perceptual experience. It shows that the phenomenology is much richer than the sensory character of the experience, and includes an additional phenomenal character pertaining to the operation of basic concepts that represent sensible properties. For even if there are cases in which one is not sensorily aware of *every* sensible property represented in experience, perhaps in virtue of the passive operation of a sortal concept like COIN, a satisfactory account of the coin example must explain how circularity is phenomenologically manifest in our experience of circular objects viewed from an angle, regardless of whether we possess the right sortal concept for recognizing the object. I will bring this point out by considering an interesting

account of how both circularity and ellipticality *could* be phenomenologically manifest, defended by Alva Nöe, and arguing that it ultimately overlooks the actual phenomenology of the coin experience due to a mischaracterization of how cognitive phenomenology could figure in perception.

5 3. Nöe's Account

Perhaps the circularity is manifest *in virtue of or through* the ellipticality's manifestation. Alva Nöe's (2004; 2005) 'actionist' or 'enactive' theory of perception can be understood as endorsing such a view. Nöe holds a unified view insofar as he claims that both circularity and ellipticality are phenomenologically manifest
10 in one and the same perceptual experience. These properties are not presented in virtue of two distinct mental *states*. Nöe's view, however, tends toward a kind of disunified account in that it is a dual *aspect* view of perceptual experience. On his view, there is no contradiction in 'an experience's presenting an object as circular but as looking elliptical' (Nöe 2005, 236). This is so because '[e]
15 xperience contains within it at least two aspects, or dimensions, to which we can turn our attention' (240). Whereas Kelly (2005) claims that the coin looks circular in virtue of circularity playing the role of a perceptual norm, Nöe (2005, 240) claims that 'I *encounter* [the coin's] roundness *in* encountering its elliptical apparent shape together with a practical understanding that the shape
20 depends on my spatial relation to the coin and would, therefore, be modified by movements'. While both Nöe and Kelly emphasize the importance of sensorimotor skills, the key difference between their views is Nöe's insistence that both ellipticality and circularity are manifest in one and the same experience.

Nöe (2005) treats the coin example as an instance of the broader category
25 of amodal perception. When looking at an apple one has an experience of a voluminous whole despite the fact that only a limited visual profile is immediately given (242). Moreover, on Nöe's account, one's sense of the whole is *visual*. Similarly, in the case of the coin one has a visual sense of the coin's circularity despite the fact that it is given as elliptical in some strict sense. The circularity
30 is present in the experience in a distinctively visual way, according to Nöe, 'in virtue of the precise character of the mediating sensorimotor relation [whereby] movements of the eye and head play a special role in modulating sensory stimulation' (242). Like the voluminousness of the apple, the circularity of the coin is 'present *as absent, but as available to perception through appropriate move-*
35 *ment*' (243). Phenomenologically, the sense of presence one has of the coin's circularity 'is an experience of it as *accessible* [...] mediated by sensorimotor relations with which you are familiar' (247).

While it is plausible that one's motor skills play an important role in determining what properties show up in experience, it is difficult to see how, exactly,
40 Nöe's claim gets us *sensorily manifest* circularity *in* the very same experience with the sensory character of ellipticality. This difficulty stems from the fact that

the phenomenologically manifest properties are necessarily occurrent properties in the stream of conscious experience, whereas skills are dispositional states (Horgan and Kriegel 2008, 364–366). The phenomenologically manifest nature of the circularity in the experience may very well dispose me in certain ways, but *qua* phenomenologically manifest property, the presence of circularity in the experience cannot *consist in* dispositions. Alternatively, the enactivist claim could be interpreted as meaning that the occurrent phenomenology of the experiences is a phenomenology *as of* being disposed – feelings of tendency or potentiality – but the phenomenologically manifest nature of *these* properties still does not get us the phenomenologically manifest circularity of the coin. If circularity is phenomenologically manifest in the experience, we cannot say that its nature as a manifest property consists in some dispositional states, which by definition have no phenomenology.

AQ7

Again, it is hard to see how Nöe's 'presence as absence' could yield occurrent phenomenologically manifest sensible properties with visual sensory character. One possibility could be that while one is visually aware of the coin's ellipticality, one's overall perceptual experience includes additional visual phenomenology in virtue of concurrent imaginative visualization of additional perspectives on the coin. Nothing Nöe says suggests this, however, and it is doubtful that he would endorse such a view. The concurrent imaginative activity would seem to constitute distinct non-perceptual mental states. Nöe's enactivism locates several essential properties of perceptual experience in the sensorimotor relations one bears to an environment, and imagination lacks these kinds of relations.

Nöe's insistence that circularity is phenomenologically manifest in the experience in a specifically *visual* way seems to be motivated by a desire to resist anything resembling a sense-data theory. 'The distinction between a thought-state and a perceptual one is clear enough,' he says, and 'you don't merely *judge*' that the coin is circular (2005, 242–243). This may be true, but careful attention to Nöe's account shows that there is more to his explanation of the visual presence of circularity than just the manifest ellipticality together with 'the precise character of the mediating sensorimotor relation' between the you and the coin (242). In addition to this relation is '*the perceiver's implicit understanding that these relations obtain*' (242). While this 'implicit understanding' or 'sense' that one has of the coin may be operative in the experience in virtue of sensorimotor skills that one develops in the course of learning to explore one's environment, it does not sound like an aspect of the experience that could yield a specifically visual phenomenology of circularity. I propose, rather, that the implicit understanding or sense one has of the coin's circularity is an aspect of the experience, but not one with a specifically visual phenomenology presenting circularity. In seeking to avoid a sense-data account, Nöe presents a straw-man of sorts with regard to how perceptual experience could have a cognitive aspect. Yes, one does not 'judge' that the coin is circular, but this is not the only manner that perception can have a cognitive component. This cognitive component does

AQ8

not yield visual phenomenology presenting circularity, but it yields something phenomenologically palpable that can help explain why people are so strongly disposed to report that the coin looks circular.

4. Operative Concepts in Perceptual Experience

5 When discussing BGK's framework above, I suggested that they could modify their property awareness thesis such that circularity could be cognitively phenomenologically manifest while ellipticality is sensorily manifest to one looking at a coin from an angle. While I am skeptical that this formulation accurately captures the phenomenology of the experience for *all* sensible properties represented therein, I think it points in the right direction when it comes to certain basic sensible properties like shape. There is a cognitive dimension to perceptual experience, and it is included in the phenomenology. Nöe's account moves in this direction, but his insistence that the coin example includes a specifically *sensory-visual* presentation of *circularity* does not hold up. There is an 'implicit understanding' or 'sense' operative in the experience, it is phenomenologically palatable, but it does not present circularity in a sensory-visual way. I think Nöe would be better off acknowledging that the 'implicit understanding' one has of the coin, which is central to his account, is a cognitive dimension of the phenomenology of perceptual experience. It need not be characterized as a *judgment* that the coin is circular. And while recent debates about cognitive phenomenology have led to disagreement about its very existence, I will proceed under the assumption that cognitive phenomenology exists for the sake of providing an account of its possible nature and relevance in perceptual experience.¹⁶

25 First of all, in claiming that cognitive phenomenology is a feature of one's perceptual experience of a coin's being round, I am not claiming that the phenomenal character therein is one of *actively* judging or predicating a property as being instantiated. The phenomenology of the circularity in the experience is both *passive* and *conceptual*.¹⁷ It is passive insofar as one's sense of circularity just happens, just arises in the course of the experience, and it not the result of actively judging. It is conceptual in a very basic sense of conceptual: one's sense of the circularity floats free of and remains constant amidst the ongoing flux of sensorily manifest ellipticality. This basic notion of conceptuality is compatible with the claim that non-rational animals possess concepts. The concept of circularity in virtue of which one represents the circularity of the coin is *operative* in the experience without being explicitly *exercised*. Perceptual phenomenology essentially includes the phenomenal character of actively functioning operative concepts. It is in virtue of these concepts that we have a phenomenologically palpable sense of the intrinsic sensible properties of objects in the absence of those properties being manifest in the sensory character of the experience. Thus, on the account being proposed here, the perceptual experience consists

of a sensory awareness state that yield a sensory-visual character that presents ellipticality as well as a representational state that tokens an operative concept in virtue of which one represents the intrinsic shape property of the coin (circularity).

5 The trick, for a disunified account like this, is explaining how the sensory awareness state is connected to the representational state. BGK claim that if I perceptually represent a sensory property as being instanced than I *must* be sensorily aware of it; that is, the properties of which I am sensorily aware determine *by way of identity* the sensory properties that figure in the representational content. I have argued that the determination relation here is too strong. On 10 the other hand, it is equally implausible to suppose that the sensory awareness state is completely unconnected to the representational state. On my account the sensory awareness state does, somehow, determine the perceptual state, but not by way of type-identity among the sensory properties tokened in the 15 two states (as BGK have it). Kelly's account gets something right in terms of there being a normative force, a 'perceptual optimum', implicit in the flux of sensory character, but is too strong in saying that the properties of which we are sensorily aware (an ongoing variety of ellipticality in this case) are simply phenomenologically absent.

20 In order to accurately capture the complex phenomenology here we need a disunified account that neither over-intellectualizes the representational state nor identifies which sensible properties it represents with the sensible properties that figure in the sensory awareness state. I propose that we understand the relation between these two states as one of *motivation*. The concept of motivation here is a technical concept developed by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.¹⁸ 25 Applied in this context, in the temporal unfolding of a perceptual episode the ongoing flux of sensory awareness *motivates* an operative concept that represents the object's intrinsic shape properties. Put differently: sensory awareness motivates perceptual representation. The properties of which one is sensorily aware do not determine *by way of identity* the properties one represents as being 30 instantiated by the object (BGK). The representational state is not so rigidly connected to the sensory awareness state. It floats free of the sensory state in an important sense – the operative concepts it tokens provide the phenomenologically palpable constancy amid the sensory flux. But the representational 35 state is still *perceptual* in that it is *grounded in* or *dependent on* the sensory state in an important sense – it is *motivated* by it.

This notion of motivation is meant to capture a relation that holds within the phenomenal field of experience between aspects of the field that can be 40 analytically parsed upon reflection but which, in the ongoing course of normal experience, are characterized by a 'felt unity'. A paradigmatic example of this phenomenologically palpable unity is evident in one's awareness of indication relations. Smoke on the horizon indicates fire, and the concept of motivation designates the phenomenal character constitutive of one's awareness of this

indication relation. As Husserl and Merleau-Ponty developed the concept, however, the phenomenology of motivation permeates perceptual life. Amodal completion effects are a function of the 'horizon' of *motivated* anticipations that are compatible with what immanently given in any discreet perceptual moment.¹⁹ That is, for any specific profile of an object that is presented in a discrete time slice of a perceptual episode, a horizon of further possible profiles is indicated – a 'web of immanent motivations' (Husserl 1989, 238).

AQ13
AQ14

In characterizing the phenomenal field, Merleau-Ponty (2013, 51) describes motivation as 'one of those "fluid" concepts that must be formulated if we want to return to phenomena'. It occupies a place between the equally rigid necessity of entailment and causality:

One phenomenon triggers another, not through some objective causality, such as the linking together the events of nature, but rather through the sense it offers – there is a sort of operative reason, or a *raison d'être* that orients the flow of phenomena without being explicitly posited in any of them. (Merleau-Ponty 2013, 51)

In other words, we do not *explicitly posit* the intrinsic shape or color properties of objects as they appear in an ongoing flux of sensory awareness; rather, our sense of these properties arises within the flux and becomes the operative sense of (at least some of) the object's intrinsic properties. Perceptual experience continuously passes from motivating to motivated, from indeterminacy to determinacy. We tend to dwell in the motivated (the circularity of the coin, the whiteness of the snow), but the motivating (ellipticality, bluishness) are nevertheless phenomenally manifest. Their phenomenal presence may become peripheral in the overall *perceptual* phenomenology of the experience, but they nevertheless continue to characterize the *sensory* character of the experience.

There is nothing necessary about a certain ongoing sensory flux of ellipticality motivating my sense of this object's circularity – rather, this flux of ellipticality motivates my sense of this object's circularity in virtue of my history of dealing with such objects, as a perceiver with a certain body and sensory apparatus in a certain kind of space. The phenomenologically palapable 'sense' of circularity can only be accounted for genetically – it is a sense for the way objects are that we *learn* through our dealings with the world. In this way our most basic concepts are 'wrung' from perceptual experience. The way we engage the world becomes guided by constancies that emerge in the flux of sensory awareness. Perceptual representation of intrinsic properties of objects is 'achieved' in the course of this genetic process. The flux of sensory awareness never goes away, but may become marginalized to the point where we can even find it difficult to admit that the coin looks elliptical. Circularity is not *sensorily manifest* in the experience even though my sense of the object as being circular is motivated by my sensory awareness. A consequence of this view is that cognition can be thought of as something that arises genetically from a continuous perceptual immersion in the world. Upon reflection we

can nevertheless distinguish distinct sensory and representational *states* within an overall perceptual experience even if the characteristic phenomenology in question is not so sharply separated.

5 This might seem like a strange picture of perceptual life. Our perceptual lives are spent dwelling in the intrinsic properties of objects – and those properties, *which are perceptually available to us*, are not sensorily manifest. Rather, perceptual phenomenology is dominated by our ‘sense’ of things. And this ‘sense’ of things may very well be determined by what is going on sensorily for us, but is far from *identical to* what is going on sensorily for us. Perceptual life is
10 ephemeral, full of ambiguity and indeterminacy.

Conclusion

I concur with the general picture presented by BGK’s framework: perception includes distinct but tightly connected states that collectively account for its sensory character and representational content. Indeed, I agree with them when
15 they claim that ‘sensory character is concept-independent’ (BGK, 180). But as I have attempted to show through considerations of mundane visual experiences like looking at a coin from an angle, the core tenants of their framework lead to a view that posits cognitive penetration of the sensory. Their irreducibility thesis, sensory character thesis, and property awareness thesis cannot be jointly held.
20 I suspect that their error lies in adhering to an assumption that seems increasingly common in philosophy of mind: ‘Everybody agrees that the events that give us access to low-level properties have a sensory phenomenology’ (Reiland 2014, 182). And of course, on the account I have proposed I agree with this. But perceptual phenomenology is not as straightforward as most would have it. The
25 low-level properties one represents as being instantiated are not determined by the sensory character of experience in a one-to-one manner. Rather, as the coin example and its kin show, the low-level properties sensorily presented in experience are not always (perhaps not even often) the low-level properties one represents as being instantiated. Nöe’s account is correct in that ellipticality is
30 manifest while we nonetheless have a kind of access to the coin’s circularity. But we do not need to think of this access as having a phenomenology of actively judging, nor as having a strictly sensory character. We have access to the coin’s circularity in virtue of a conceptual mental event, but this event does not have a sensory phenomenology. Sensory phenomenology is fragile, subject to a constant
35 flux of subtle variation. Perceptual phenomenology, on the contrary, is characterized by an element of stability, of constancy. This indicates that there is something operative in perceptual experience that floats free of its sensory character – what I have been describing here as the cognitive phenomenology of operative concepts in perceptual experience.

40 I take it that what I am discussing as ‘operative’ concepts of experience typically pertain to low-level properties like shape and color. These concepts

are rooted in the sensory character of experience insofar as they are the most basic points of perceptual constancy that emerge on the basis of a continuous history of perceptual interaction with the world. That is, through a genetic process certain forms of sensory phenomenology come to *motivate* an emergent ‘sense’ or ‘grasp’ of the basic intrinsic properties of objects. This emergent sense and its correlative operative concept are fit for epistemic duty insofar as it is the reliable product of a sensory process. Though the sensory character of experience may not, in and of itself, present us with the intrinsic properties of objects, it is still in virtue of our sensory immersion in the world that *perceptual experience* – with its characteristic phenomenology of the stability and constancy of operative concepts – comes to justify our beliefs and judgments about the way things are.

The (perhaps) surprising result of this account is that the low-level properties represented in experience *do not* necessarily figure in the sensory character of the experience. Furthermore, the sensible properties invoked when characterizing the sensory character of a perceptual experience are not necessarily included in the sensible properties represented in a perceptual experience. Hopefully this account helps us move beyond some of the table pounding in disputes about introspection, the transparency of experience, and the phenomenologically manifest. Disagreements about how the coin looks arise because the disputants are both looking for the same kinds of properties, but are looking in different places for them. It may be the case that transparency only holds for the sensory character of experience, or only for the representational state operative in experience, or perhaps for neither. Phenomenology, as Husserl originally conceived it, is not a matter of quick and easy introspection. It integrates careful introspection into an overall theoretical framework that informs one of what properties to look for in experience, where to look for them, and how to do so.

Notes

1. See e.g. Brogaard 2013a; Reiland 2014.
2. I borrow the term ‘phenomenologically manifest’ from Kriegel (2007), but nothing hangs on this specific terminology. Questions regarding what is phenomenologically manifest in experience could equally be phrased in terms of what is ‘phenomenally conscious’, what is ‘phenomenally present’, or what is ‘in the phenomenology’ of experience.
3. Following the usage by other authors, I use ‘low-level properties’ and ‘sensible properties’ synonymously in this paper.
4. This bluish-snow example is from Kriegel 2007, 117.
5. The literature on the reliability of introspection is vast. See Schwitzgebel 2011 for a systematic critique of the reliability of introspection. See Smithies 2013a for a direct reply to Schwitzgebel. See Smithies and Stoljar 2012 for recent discussion.
6. Recent disunified views include Bengson, Grube, and Korman 2011; Bengson 2013; Brogaard 2013a, 2013b; Lyons 2005; Millar 2011; Reiland 2014; Tucker

2010. Recent unified views include Bayne 2009; Crutchfield 2011; Fish 2013; Siegel 2010.

7. This is Bengson's (2013) strategy in his critique of Siegel.
8. This is contested, however, by those who argue that one's experience in this case represents an element of the *scene*, such as the illumination, as instantiating blackness (e.g. Matthen 2010). I address these views below. AQ3
9. I follow Kriegel's (2007) exposition of possible positions one could take on this example.
10. Peacocke (1983), Smith (2002), and Kelly (2005) hold different views with this common result.
11. Noë (2005) holds this view, which I discuss in section three below.
12. Now classic examples include Lycan 1996 and Peacocke 1992.
13. Brogaard (2012) holds a similar view, focusing on the role this content plays in guiding action.
14. For a good survey, see Briscoe 2015. AQ5
15. See e.g. Bengson, Grube, and Korman 2011; Bengson 2013; Brogaard 2013a, 2013b; Reiland 2014.
16. See Bayne and Montague 2011, Smithies 2013b, 2013c for overviews of the various issues at stake in such debates. See also Montague 2017 for a different emphasis on the role of cognitive phenomenology in perception. AQ9
17. Reiland (2014, 181) cashes out the 'quasi-sensory quasi-cognitive' nature of what Brogaard (2013a, 2013b) calls 'phenomenal seemings'. They are passive insofar as 'they just occur, in contrast to judgments which are *active* in that they are made as a result of deliberation and involve making up our mind' (Reiland 2014, 180). They are also conceptual, however, in that 'how things can seem to us is constrained and aided by what we can think about' (180). Reiland follows McDowell here, who seems to get at something similar 'with his distinction between conceptual capacities being *operative* in perceptual experience (passive) versus the *exercising* of conceptual capacities in judgment (active)' (McDowell 2009, 251 as cited by Reiland 2014, 185 fn. 11).
18. See Walsh 2013; forthcoming) for a detailed account of the role of motivation in Husserl's philosophy. See Walsh 2017 for the role of motivation in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. AQ10
19. Husserl 2014 §§47, 140. See Walsh (forthcoming) for discussion. AQ11 AQ12

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