

# Is Margaret Cavendish a naïve realist?

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## Abstract

Perception plays a central and wide-ranging role in the philosophy of Margaret Cavendish. In this paper, I argue that Cavendish holds a naïve realist theory of perception. The case draws on what Cavendish has to say about perceptual presentation, the role of sympathy in experience, the natures of hallucination and of illusion, and the individuation of kinds. While Cavendish takes perception to have representational content, I explain how this is consistent with naïve realism. In closing, I address challenges to the interpretation, one of which turns on whether Cavendish allows for action at a distance. I argue that she does.

All that I love is, like the night, outside,  
Good to be gazed at, looking as if it could  
With a simple gesture be brought inside my head  
Or in my heart. But my thoughts about it divide  
Me from my object.

(Elizabeth Jennings, "In the Night," 1953)

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In a notorious remark, Thomas Reid says of his predecessors:

They all suppose that we perceive not external objects immediately, and that the immediate objects of perception are only certain shadows of the external objects.

(1785, p. 117)

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One of Reid's stated targets is René Descartes, who writes:

Among my ideas, apart from the idea which gives me a representation of myself, [...] there are ideas which variously represent God, corporeal and inanimate things, angels, animals and finally other men like myself.

(2013 [1641], AT VII, 43)

As Descartes explains:

I am taking the word "idea" to refer to whatever is immediately perceived by the mind.

(2013 [1641], AT VII, 181)

Together, these remarks might seem straightforwardly to commit Descartes to an *indirect realist* theory of perception. According to it, when I have a veridical experience of the mug on my desk, for example, I immediately perceive an idea or mental representation of the mug and, in virtue of this, mediately perceive the mug.

Some dispute the accuracy of Reid's generalization, arguing that it misrepresents the theories of prominent figures of the early modern period, including Descartes (Cook, 1987; Lennon, 1974; Nadler, 1989; Yolton, 1994).<sup>1</sup> With respect to Descartes, they typically point out that he defines an idea as a "mode" of thought (2013 [1641], AT VII, 41), where "thought" is understood broadly to include sensory perception, and its "modes" are ways in which the thought is manifest or expressed. This might suggest that, for Descartes, my idea of the mug is a way or manner of perceiving the mug it represents. So, the idea is not, or at least need not be, what I perceive. Instead, the immediate object of perception—in Descartes' terms (2013 [1641], AT VII, 42), that which is "present objectively"—is just the mug. On this reading, Descartes is a *direct realist* about perception.

It is not my aim here to resolve this exegetical dispute concerning Descartes or, for that matter, any other figure that Reid mentions. Rather, it is to demonstrate that another, less canonical early modern philosopher is an exception to Reid's sweeping claim about "all the systems of perception that have been invented" (1785, p. 117), namely, Margaret Cavendish. I will argue, first, that Cavendish—from at least 1664—is a direct realist about perception. Having established that, I will then argue that Cavendish—again, in her mature work—is more specifically a *naïve realist* about perception.

Naïve realists maintain the following (Crane & French, 2021, §3.4.1; Genone, 2016, p. 7):

1. Having a veridical perceptual experience involves (at least in part) being directly presented with objects in the world.
2. The character of a veridical perceptual experience is (at least in part) fundamentally constituted by the objects presented.<sup>2</sup>

"Character" here includes how things are presented to a person in experience and the epistemic profile of that experience.

All naïve realists are direct realists. They hold that, when I have a perceptual experience of the mug, I stand in a relation of direct sensory acquaintance with the mug, as opposed to being indirectly acquainted with it via direct acquaintance with some mental intermediary, such as an idea. But not all direct realists are naïve realists. What is distinctive of naïve realism is the further suggestion that my perceptual acquaintance with the mug is (partially) constitutive of how the mug is presented to me in my experience or of the ways in which that experience warrants judgments concerning the mug and its features.

By way of contrast, consider *intentionalism*.<sup>3</sup> According to it, perceptual experience has representational content, and it is that content, rather than the relation of direct acquaintance, that fundamentally explains its character.

Indeed, for the intentionalist, the relation is itself to be understood in terms of the representational content of the experience. In short, the *perceptual* relation consists in an *intentional* relation.

The dispute sketched at the outset primarily concerns whether such figures as Descartes consider perception to be mediated by ideas. That is, those who challenge Reid's remark seek to show that the relevant early moderns hold the first of the two commitments that characterize naïve realism, not the second. Moreover, the positive view that scholars attribute in place of indirect realism is typically a version of intentionalism, as understood here. According to Steven Nadler, for example, Descartes's position is that "the representational feature of ideas [...] make things present to the mind" (2006, p. 93). So, if my interpretation of Cavendish as a naïve realist is correct, her theory of perception occupies a distinctive position within the period, one that is only relatively recently being taken seriously within contemporary philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

It is not my aim to defend naïve realism or Cavendish's version of it. The claim is an exegetical one, and one of special importance for Cavendish scholarship. Perception, as I will explain, plays a central role in Cavendish's philosophy.<sup>5</sup> So, to understand that philosophy, we need to understand her account of perception. Despite this, and despite an explosion of interest in Cavendish in the recent literature, the question of whether she is a naïve realist has received almost no attention.

David Cunning (2016) is an exception. He attributes to Cavendish a version of indirect realism.<sup>6</sup> In closing, I will engage with Cunning's interpretation and defend my claim that, for Cavendish, the perceived object is present to the perceiver in an unmediated fashion. If I only establish that Cavendish is a direct realist, that would be a significant result. But, again, I will also defend the more ambitious claim that Cavendish takes the object presented to play a role in constituting the perceptual experience, such that her realism is naïve as well as direct.

One might object to an undertaking of this sort on the grounds that it is misguided to try to map categories that guide contemporary theorizing onto the views of past philosophers whose inquiries were not structured in those terms. However, as the name suggests, naïve realism is typically presented as the everyday, pre-theoretical, pre-modern conception of perceptual experience, and the two commitments stated above are attempts to make explicit what that otherwise implicit, perhaps inchoate, conception involves (Martin, 2006). If naïve realism is indeed part of the manifest image, to borrow Wilfrid Sellars' (1962) phrase, it need not be anachronistic to attribute it to an early modern such as Cavendish.

Be that as it may, the mapping exercise should be judged by its results. My hope is that the interpretation of Cavendish as a naïve realist brings into relief features of her views that might otherwise be hidden and illuminates aspects of her philosophy that might otherwise be puzzling.

## 2 | BACKGROUND

I will start with an overview of Cavendish's general philosophical outlook, since it might be unfamiliar to the reader, and since elements of that outlook will be important later. The discussion in this section is not novel.<sup>7</sup> The broad outlines of Cavendish's philosophy are well understood, and there is considerable consensus as to her principal commitments. There is, of course, much debate as to how to fill in the details, to which I will contribute from Section 3.

For Cavendish, everything in nature is material. By the same token, immaterial entities play no role in explanations of natural phenomena:

There is no part of Nature, or natural Creature, which is not Matter, or Body, or made of Matter.  
(PL, p. 225)

Nature is purely corporeal or material, and there is nothing that belongs to, or is a part of Nature, which is not corporeal.

(OEP, p. 155)

While Cavendish sides with Thomas Hobbes on this point, in opposition to Descartes and Henry More, Cavendish rejects the conception of matter that she takes them all to share, namely, as inherently passive or inert. According to Cavendish, matter is active or “self-moving”:

All Matter is animate or self-moving.

(OEP, “An Argumental Discourse”)

The Infinite parts of Matter, are agreeable in their nature, as being all Material, and Self-moving.

(GNP, p. 16)

Cavendish reaches this view by process of elimination. Suppose that a body in nature moves or changes. What, Cavendish asks, could explain this? No immaterial entity could move a material object, since their natures are too different:

Material and immaterial are so quite opposite to each other, as it is impossible they should commix and work together, or act one upon the other.

(OEP, “An Argumental Discourse”)

Neither can a Spiritual substance move a corporeal, they being both of different natures.

(OEP, “Observations upon the Opinions of Ancient Philosophers”, p. 4)

So, only material things could be responsible for material change. However, Cavendish continues, no material object could move another. That would require the former to transfer its motion to the latter, which in turn would require motion to be capable of existing independently of matter, such that it might detach from one object and reattach to another. This, Cavendish says, is impossible:

There can be no abstraction made of motion from body, neither really, nor in the manner of our conception, for how can I conceive that which is not, nor cannot be in nature, that is, to conceive motion without body?

(PL, p. 97)

So, if a material thing moves or changes, it must move or change itself.<sup>8</sup>

A corollary of this line of thought is that material objects are only *occasional* causes (O'Neill 2013). For Cavendish, one object does not truly act upon or move another. Rather the motions of one object are the occasion—opportunity or circumstance—for another to move itself accordingly:

One body may occasion another body to move so or so, but not give it any motion.

(PL, p. 100)

All the parts of Nature, whensoever they move, move by their own motions; which proves, that no particular Creature or Effect of composed Nature, can act upon another, but that one can onely occasion another to move thus or thus.

(OEP, p. 27)

In addition to the capacity for motion, Cavendish claims, matter has the capacity for thought. All material things have both sensory and rational knowledge:

Knowledge lives in motion, as motion lives in matter.

(PF, p. 52)

Matter, Self-motion, Knowledge, and Perception, are all but one thing.

(OEP, p. 115)

In support of this, Cavendish offers an argument from design (see PL, p. 150; OEP, pp. 43–44, “Further Observations”, pp. 21–22; GNP, p. 7). Material things in nature tend, not only to move or change, but to do so in an orderly, systematic fashion. To explain this, Cavendish thinks, we must suppose that material things have knowledge—of themselves and of their surroundings:

If none but Man had reason, and none but Animals sense, the World could not be so exact, and so well in order as it is.

(PL, p. 44)

[It is] not probable that the infinite parts of Nature should move so variously, nay, so orderly and methodically as they do, without knowing what they do, or why, and whether they move.

(OEP, p. 159)

With Cavendish's background metaphysics in place, I turn to her theory of sensory perception.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.1 | Patterning

Given that Cavendish takes perception to be ubiquitous in nature and explanatory of the natural order, it is no surprise that she engages with a wide range of scholastic and early modern theories of perception. While they differ in detail, a common thread is that perception involves something—light, species, images, motion, and so forth—being “propagated,” “reflected,” or “transmitted” from the object of perception to the sensory organ. Cavendish makes many objections this idea—and so those theories that involve it—corresponding to the many ways it gets expressed. I will mention just three to set the stage for Cavendish's positive alternative and to draw on them later.<sup>10</sup>

One criticism is that, if visual perception were due to the reflection of light from the surface of the object, there would be no perceptual constancy.<sup>11</sup> My experience of the mug exhibits a certain stability over time, despite a constant flux in the light that bounces off it and reaches my eyes through interference in the intervening air. According to Cavendish, “Reflections cannot make such constant and exact patterns” (OEP, p. 218).

Another objection, recalling ideas from Section 2, is that the object of perception could transmit something—say, motion—to the perceiver only if it were to transmit matter along with it. But, if the object of perception were to transmit its material parts to the sensory organ, the former would decrease in mass while the latter increased. And that, Cavendish says, does not happen (PL, p. 82; OEP, p. 218).

The last criticism of the transmission model that I will mention is that, at least in the case of perceiving distal objects, it would take time for the motion (or whatever the object emits) to pass through the surrounding medium to the perceiver. But, Cavendish objects, perception does not involve this sort of time-lag. So, the model cannot explain how perception is “effected so suddenly” (PL, p. 60; also OEP, p. 173).

More generally, given Cavendish's theory of causation, perception cannot involve the object of perception acting on the perceiver via the sensory organs—directly or indirectly—since no object acts on another. Instead, for Cavendish, perception involves the matter of a person's sensory organ “patterning out”—copying or imitating—by its own motions the figure and motions of the object of perception on the occasion that the object is presented to it.<sup>12</sup>

The perception of seeing an exterior object, is nothing else but a patterning out of the figure of that same object by the sensitive figurative and perceptive motions.

(OEP, p. 63)

Regularly the animal perception of exterior objects, is made by its own sensitive, rational, corporeal and figurative motions; the sensitive patterning out the figure or action of an outward object in the sensitive organ.

(OEP, p. 177)

To return to the example, when I visually perceive the mug, its presence is the occasion for the sensitive matter in my visual apparatus to reconfigure itself in a way that patterns the visible configuration of the mug.

It is widely recognized that, for Cavendish, perceptual experience involves the spontaneous formation of patterns of external objects in this way. But scholarship to date tends to stop there, leaving unresolved the crucial issue of just what role Cavendish's patterns are supposed to play in perception. Are they the immediate objects of perception via which mugs and the like are mediately perceived? If not, how do they figure?

### 3 | THE SENSORY PRESENTATION OF OBJECTS

I will now make the case that Cavendish is a direct realist, postponing the further question of whether she is also naïve (in the non-pejorative sense) until the next section. According to the direct realist, recall, objects are directly present to the perceiver in perceptual experience. Cavendish frequently talks in exactly these terms (my emphases):<sup>13</sup>

The sensitive perceptions do all resemble each other, because all sensitive parts of matter are of one degree, as being sensible parts, onely there is a difference according to the figures of the objects *presented* to the senses.

(PL, p. 116)

Our eyes, if perfect, see things as they are *presented*.

(PL, p. 123)

Outward Objects, as I have told you before, do not make [i.e. only occasion] Sense and Reason, but Sense and Reason do perceive and judg of outward objects; For the Sun doth not make sight, nor doth sight make light; but sense and reason in a Man, or any other creature, do perceive and know there are such objects as Sun, and Light, or whatsoever objects are *presented* to them.

(PL, p. 183)

Not onely every several Touch, Taste, Smell, Sound or Sight, is a several knowledg by it self, but each of them has as many particular knowledges or perceptions as there are objects *presented* to them.

(OEP, p. 2)

The senses are amazed, and sometimes frighted at such objects as are unusual, or have never been *presented* to them before.

(OEP, p. 176)

In remarks such as these, Cavendish speaks of objects as present in perceptual experience, and there is no suggestion that their being so is anything but immediate.

Consider next:

For the most part the sensitive corporeal motions alter according as the objects are presented, or [=in other words] the perception patterns out.

(PL, p. 73)

Perception is only an action of [...] Patterning.

(OEP, p. 16)

The action of patterning, and the perception, are one and the same.

(OEP, p. 225)<sup>14</sup>

In the first quotation, Cavendish treats the presentation of the object as equivalent to the action of patterning. In the second and third, she treats the action of patterning as equivalent to perception. To apply this to the working example, the pattern that my sensory organ makes of the mug is the result of an action of patterning the mug. So, given the first equivalence, it is the result of the presentation of the mug. In turn, given the second equivalence, the pattern of the mug is the result of the perception of it. Cavendish makes this explicit in the following remark:

It is the perceptive motions of the eye, which pattern out an object as it is visibly presented to the corporeal motions in the eye; for according as the object is presented, the pattern is made, if the motions be regular.

(PL, pp. 510–511)

If a pattern is a consequence or upshot of perception, for Cavendish, it is not an object of it.

I take this textual evidence to show that Cavendish is a direct realist, and so that she accepts the first of the two commitments that characterize naïve realism. As noted in Section 1, Cunning takes there to be evidence to the contrary. Before engaging with Cunning's reading, I will argue that Cavendish also accepts the second of the two commitments, and so qualifies as a naïve realist. Some of the points I introduce in doing so will speak to Cunning's case when I return to it in Section 6.

## 4 | SENSORY PERCEPTION AS A SYMPATHETIC UNION

As noted in Section 1, the claim that perceptual experience involves the unmediated presence of objects to the perceiver is one that some opponents of naïve realism also make. Specifically, while they might understand that claim differently, it is one that intentionalists make. One might think that Cavendish is an intentionalist on the grounds that she takes perception to involve patterns. Patterns, as Cavendish makes clear, are representations:

To pattern out, is nothing else but to imitate, and to make a figure in its own substance or parts of Matter like another figure.

(PL, p. 420)

Elsewhere, Cavendish refers to sensory patterns as “pictures” of their objects (e.g., GNP, pp. 55–56). Imitations and pictures are items with representational content.

This is too quick. While some naïve realists deny that perception has representational content (Brewer, 2011; Travis, 2004), they need not (Cavedon-Taylor, 2015; Gomes, 2017; Logue, 2014; Schellenberg, 2014). A naïve realist can hold that perceptual experience involves representing objects as being a certain way, so long as they also hold that what fundamentally grounds the character of perceptual experience is the relation of direct acquaintance to those objects, not the way in which they are represented. In slogan form: Naïve realists put presentation before representation in the order of explanation.

So, to show that Cavendish is a naïve realist, I will show that she takes the representational content of perceptual experience to itself constitutively depend on the object of perception directly presented. And to show that, I turn to a notion which figures prominently in Cavendish's philosophy—sympathy.<sup>15</sup>

The notion of sympathy has its roots in Stoic and Platonic thought (Brouwer, 2015; Emilsson, 2015), though it is likely that Cavendish acquired it from other seventeenth century thinkers. The notion was widely employed and subject to critical scrutiny at the time, including in the work of Jan Baptist van Helmont, one of Cavendish's targets in *Philosophical Letters*, Kenelm Digby, a member of the Cavendish circle of intellectuals, and Walter Charleton, a friend and physician, also translator of van Helmont's writings.<sup>16</sup> Whatever the roots of the idea, Cavendish maintains that sympathy and its flipside antipathy are pervasive forces in nature:

All Figures or Creatures have an Operative Power, which Operation is made by Sympathetical and Antipathetical motions.

(PPOII, p. 70)

To get a handle on this, consider a case of sympathy in the current sense: My friend is sad. When I learn of this, I become sad for my friend as a result. Sympathy in the seventeenth century context is a generalization of this.

Mark Kalderon characterizes sympathy more fully as follows:

A case of formal assimilation is governed by the principle of sympathy when and only when one part of a unified manifold formally assimilates to a potentially noncontiguous part of that manifold because the parts, disposed as they are, are united in the manifold, in the way that they are. (2017, p. 74)

To bring this down to earth, consider again the everyday case: When faced with how my friend is feeling, I take on their sadness. In doing so, I do not take on their material parts—I do not absorb or consume my friend! Rather, my emotional life takes on the shape of theirs. So, it is a case of formal, not material, assimilation. Moreover, this occurs because my friend and I stand in a relationship—friendship—involving and sustained by certain dispositions on our parts, including a disposition to feel sad when the other does.

While Cavendish does not explicitly state in her mature work that perception involves sympathy of this sort,<sup>17</sup> her account meets Kalderon's description. First, for Cavendish, when I perceive the mug, my sensory apparatus takes on the figure of the mug, which is to say its form, but not its matter. As discussed in Section 2.1, Cavendish argues at length against the idea that perception involves material assimilation.

Second, for Cavendish, both the perceiver and perceived belong to a unified whole.<sup>18</sup> It is a further implication of Cavendish's argument from design that each material thing is a dependent part of one material substance, hence, that all material things share a common nature. If this were not so, Cavendish thinks, there would be no natural order:

There is not any thing in Nature, that has an absolute subsistence of it self [...] for no part of Nature can subsist single, and without reference and assistance of each other, or else every single part would not onely be a whole of it self, but be as a God without controle; and though one part is not another part, yet one part belongs to another part, and all parts to one whole, and that whole to all the parts,



which whole is one corporeal Nature.

(PL, p. 431; also OEP, p. 142, “Further observations,” pp. 22–23)

Cavendish explicitly relates this idea to that of sympathy when, having explained that “influence” is the work of sympathy, she writes:

Certainly, there is an Influence amongst all Creatures, for all Creatures being made of the Only and Infinite matter, and there being a Union in its nature, the Creatures of this Only matter must necessarily have an Influence upon each Other.

(PPOII, p. 70; also GNP, pp. 15–16)

Third, Cavendish's claim that the sensory organs pattern out their objects is restricted to those cases in which the organs behave “regularly” (PL, pp. 510–511; OEP, p. 177). For something to be regular, for Cavendish, is for it to act in accordance with the nature or function of members of its kind (Boyle, 2018; Detlefsen, 2007):

Every Creature, if regularly made, hath particular motions proper to its figure; for natural Matters wisdom makes distinctions by her distinct corporeal motions, giving every particular Creature their due Portion and Proportion, according to the nature of their figures, and to the rules of her actions.

(PL, p. 184)

So, for Cavendish, patterning, hence, perceptual experience, only occurs when and to the extent that the sensory organs work in the way they are naturally disposed to work by virtue of their configuration.<sup>19</sup>

In summary: On Cavendish's account, perceptual experience involves one part of nature activating its disposition to formally assimilate to another part of nature to which it is (thereby) related. So, perceptual experience is a sympathetic response.

How does this speak to whether Cavendish is a naïve realist? When a perceptual experience involves formal assimilation of the object in a sympathetic fashion, the character of the perceptual experience is “constitutively shaped” by its object, not just causally (Kalderon, 2017, pp. 23–29, 75–85). Consider again the case of sadness: My sadness is not a sympathetic response to my friend's if my friend is not sad, even if my emotional state represents them as such. Moreover, even if my friend is sad, and I represent them as such, my sadness is not a sympathetic response to theirs if it does not manifest one of the dispositions that characterize our friendship—say, if I were sad because I had lost a bet that my friend would be happy today. My sadness is sympathetic when, and because, it is shaped by my friend's and shaped through our friendship. In this way, my feeling of sympathy is individuated by its object.

In a similar fashion, for Cavendish, a perceptual experience is the patterning out of the object of perception—a shaping of sensitive matter—on the occasion that the object is presented to it. Moreover, the patterning is the manifestation of dispositions—the senses fulfilling their proper functions—that ground or are grounded by the perceptual relation. So, for Cavendish, the object of perception figures in the constitutive explanation of the perceptual experience, and the experience is individuated by it.

The upshot of this is that, while Cavendish takes perceptual experience to be representational, she also holds that its content (“pattern”) is constituted by—hence, explanatorily dependent on—the object of perception. As she puts it, “Perception requires objects” (OEP, “An Argumental Discourse”; also p. 55; GNP, p. 57). She thereby qualifies as a naïve realist.

This reading sheds light on an aspect of Cavendish's account of perception that commentators find puzzling. Again, Cavendish claims that perceptual experience involves the sensitive matter in a person's sensory organ patterning out an object on the occasion that that object is presented to it. But how can the sensitive matter pattern out an object unless it already and independently perceives that object?<sup>20</sup> It seems that there is

a tight circle here. Perception is understood in terms of patterning. But patterning is then understood in terms of perception.

Naïve realists typically take the relation of sensory presentation to be primitive (French, 2018, p. 150). This opens up the possibility that, if Cavendish is a naïve realist, she is not trying to explain the sensory presentation of objects by appeal to an independently intelligible notion of patterning. If anything, one would expect her to explain patterning by appeal to the relation of sensory presentation, which she then treats as primitive.<sup>21</sup>

## 5 | HALLUCINATION AND ILLUSION

I turn now to Cavendish's treatment of perceptual experiences—or, more cautiously, apparent perceptual experiences—that are non-veridical. I approach this topic via an objection to my reading, namely, that what Cavendish has to say about hallucination is inconsistent with naïve realism. I will show that, on the contrary, her account of hallucination is fully in line with naïve realism, as is her account of illusion.<sup>22</sup>

Naïve realists are generally held to be committed to denying that veridical and hallucinatory experiences are a “common kind” (Crane & French, 2021, §3.4.1; Genone, 2016, p. 5).<sup>23</sup> Of course, at some level of description, they are of the same kind—they are both experiences. The point is that, for the naïve realist, the fundamental explanation of veridical experience and hallucinatory experience differ. After all, if I hallucinate a mug, the character of my hallucination cannot be constituted by a relation of direct acquaintance with a mug, since there is none.

According to Susan James, Cavendish views veridical and hallucinatory experience as a common kind:

Since such non-veridical figures are sometimes qualitatively indistinguishable from veridical ones, an adequate theory of perception must [for Cavendish] not only account for both, but also account for both in the same way. (1999, p. 236)

And, James suggests, the way in which Cavendish accounts for both is in terms of patterning. What is common to the veridical and hallucinatory cases is a pattern that represents a common object. If naïve realists reject the sameness of kind claim, and Cavendish accepts it, then Cavendish is not a naïve realist, as characterized here.

As Kourken Michaelian points out (2009, p. 41), however, James's reading overlooks Cavendish's distinction between *patterning* and (mere) *figuring*. Like veridical perception, hallucination involves the sensitive matter producing figures; but, unlike veridical perception, it is not occasioned by an external object. Such figuring does not qualify as patterning. As a result, for Cavendish, hallucinatory experiences are not really perceptual experiences at all:

Perceptions properly so call'd, which are occasioned by Forreign parts; and to those I oppose voluntary actions, which are not occasioned, but made by rote; as for example, the perception of sight in Animals, when outward Objects present themselves to the Optick sense to be perceived, the perception of the Sentient is an occasioned perception; but whensoever, either in dreams, or in distempers, the sensitive motions of the same Organ, make such or such figures, without any presentation of exterior objects, then that action cannot properly be call'd an exterior perception; but it is a voluntary action of the sensitive motions in the organ of sight, not made after an outward pattern, but by rote, and of their own accord.

(OEP, “To the Reader”; see also OEP, p. 210; GNP, pp. 92–93; NP, p. 590)

For Cavendish, hallucinatory experiences are voluntary, not in the sense that they are subject to the will, but in the sense that they are not occasioned by external objects. This is a negative claim. Cavendish's positive account of hallucination is that they result from exercises of the sensory imagination, where “Fancies, Imaginations, &c. whether Sensitive, or Rational [...] do move by Rote, and not by Example” (GNP, p. 58).<sup>24</sup>

On Cavendish's account, then, hallucinatory experiences, in contrast to perceptual experiences, are not constitutively explained by a relation of sensory presentation, but by spontaneous acts of the imagination. So, just as one would expect of a naïve realist, Cavendish denies that hallucinations and perceptions are a common kind.

Cavendish's account of illusion is likewise consistent with naïve realism. She gives the example of "a man" on a ship who "thinks the shore moves from the ship" when "it is the ship that moves from the shore":

The cause of it is, That the perception in the eye perceives the distanced body [the shore], but not the motion of the distance or medium; for though the man may partly see the motion of the visible parts, yet he doth not see the parts or motion of the distance or medium, which is invisible, and not subject to the perception of sight.

(PL, p. 510)

Michaelian explains Cavendish's proposal here:

An illusion is analysed as incomplete (and hence misleading) perception. Since perception itself, for Cavendish, is always a matter of making somewhat imperfect copies, the account generates the desirable result that illusion is in a sense continuous with successful perception. (2009, p. 44)

For Cavendish, when such illusions occur, the perceptual experience is veridical, but it is partial. As a result, it encourages false judgments.<sup>25</sup> This view is in line with naïve realism. On the occasion that an object is presented to the perceiver, their sensitive matter patterns out a partial pattern of the object. So, the presentation of the object still figures in the constitutive explanation of the experience.

Elsewhere, as Deborah Boyle (2019, pp. 241–42) notes, Cavendish offers another way to understand illusions:

If the Sensitive motions in Sensitive passages be Irregular, then they make false Prints of true Objects.

(PPOII, p. 84; see also OEP, "Observations upon the Opinions of Some Ancient Philosophers," pp. 41–43)

The kind of case Cavendish has in mind is not one of hallucination, since an object is present and occasions the sensitive apparatus to pattern it out. Nevertheless, it is an illusion, since the pattern is (to some extent) non-veridical. This, Cavendish explains, is due to irregularity, that is, to malfunctioning perceptual faculties, for example, color blindness.

This account of non-veridical illusion is again consistent with naïve realism. The naïve realist maintains that the character of the perceptual experience is constituted *in part* by the direct presentation of its object. This allows that other factors, including the makeup and operation of the sensory organs, also play a role in determining the character of perceptual experience (Logue, 2012).

## 5.1 | Objection and reply

The discussion of non-veridical perception might lead to a further objection to my interpretation: Is it the act of patterning *as such* that explains the content of perceptual experience for Cavendish? Patterning is a species of figuring. The act of figuring suffices to bring about an experience with a certain representational content, whether or not it is occasioned by an external object. So, for Cavendish, it is really the act of figuring—common to the veridical and hallucinatory cases—that constitutively explains the content and character of perceptual experience.<sup>26</sup>

The first thing to say in response is that this need not be an objection to my reading of Cavendish so much as an objection to naïve realism itself.<sup>27</sup> And, in response to this sort of objection, it is standard to point out that the naïve realist need not deny that there is something common to the perceptual and hallucinatory cases, or that at some level there is some explanation that can be given for experience—veridical or hallucinatory—in terms of what is common to both. What the naïve realist insists is that the *fundamental* constitutive explanation of perceptual experience differs from that of hallucinatory experience, where the fundamental explanation of something is the one that reveals what fundamental kind it belongs to (Logue, 2014; Martin, 2004).

These observations support the interpretation of Cavendish as a naïve realist. There are two ways, on Cavendish's account, to explain why a perceptual experience has the content that it does. One appeals to the presentation of its object. This, as discussed in Section 3, requires that the sensitive matter be functioning properly or “regular.” The other explanation appeals only to the (mere) act of figuring. This is consistent with the sensitive matter malfunctioning, as it would be, Cavendish thinks, were it a case of hallucination. We can now ask which of these explanations is fundamental.

For Cavendish, again as discussed in Section 3, natural kinds are individuated by the functions proper to their members. She writes, “Nature's Wisdom orders and regulates her Corporeal Figurative Motions, into kinds” (GNP, p. 32). So, an explanation of perceptual experience that appeals to sensitive matter discharging its proper function will be more fundamental—more revealing of the fundamental kind to which it belongs—than one that does not. So, for Cavendish, the explanation of perceptual experience in terms of patterning a presented object is more fundamental than one in terms of (mere) figuring.

What matters is not whether this offers a convincing reply to a substantive objection to naïve realism but the interpretive question. While Cavendish allows that there is a common kind to which perceptions and hallucinations belong—figuring—she also holds that there is a kind to which perception belongs that hallucination does not—patterning. Given her views on how kinds are constituted and the role of regular motions in the activity of patterning, Cavendish is committed to viewing patterning as the fundamental kind to which perceptual experience belongs. That commitment is characteristic of naïve realism.

## 6 | CAVENDISH AS AN INDIRECT REALIST

Having made the case that Cavendish is a naïve realist, I will address two challenges that emerge from Cunning's work. As noted in Section 1, Cunning attributes to Cavendish an indirect theory of perception:

What it is to have a waking sensory perception of an object, for Cavendish, is to behold an image of the object and for the image to resemble the object. (2016, p. 36)

And later:

Bodies are out there, she assumes, but what we encounter in sense perception are images that are copies of these. Imaginary experience and waking experience are barely distinguishable [...] because the immediate objects of perception are the same in each. (2016, p. 264)

In support of this interpretation, Cunning cites the following:

The actions of Sleep, are the alterations of the Exterior Corporeal Motions, moving more interiorly, as it were inwardly, and voluntarily: As for example, The Optick Corporeal Motions, in Waking-actions, work, or move, according to the outward Object: but, in Sleeping-actions, they move by rote, or

without Examples; also, as I said, they move, as it were, inwardly.

(GNP, p. 90)

Dreaming is when they move in figures, making such figures as these objects, which have presented to them by the sensitive motions, which are onely pictures, or copies of the Original objects, which we call remembrance, for remembrance is nothing but a waking dream, and a dream is nothing but a sleeping remembrance.

(PPO, p. 113)<sup>28</sup>

In these passages, Cavendish says (a) that perception involves figures—hence, representations—occasioned by the presentation of an external object while (b) dreams—like hallucinations—occur when the sensitive matter produces corresponding figures in a spontaneous fashion. In Sections 4 and 5, respectively, I explained how (a) and (b) are consistent with naïve realism.

Cunning might argue that Cavendish holds other commitments that are incompatible with naïve realism. In another context, he claims that Cavendish denies action at a distance:

Cavendish assumes [...] that interaction is always by contact. [...] There might be apparent instances of action at a distance, but [...] any in which two distant bodies interact is a case in which there are contiguous bodies in between. (2016, p. 58)

How might this bear on whether Cavendish is a naïve realist? Sympathy, as understood here, just is a principle of action at a distance (Meyns, 2018). So, if Cunning is right, Cavendish cannot think of perception as a sympathetic response, as I claimed.<sup>29</sup>

In turn, Cunning's reading might suggest that, for Cavendish, the perception of distal objects cannot be occasioned directly by those objects, which would require action at a distance, but only indirectly via the actions of intervening objects. In the case of visual perception, the sensitive matter of the visual apparatus must indirectly pattern the distal object—say, a mug—by directly patterning its most proximate object—say, a parcel of air—which itself patterns the most proximate object with which it is in contact—another parcel of air or, at the end of the chain, the mug. Interestingly, Marcus Adams (2016) finds this view in the 1663 edition of PPO:

On Cavendish's view, visual perception occurs by means of a capacity where the sensitive matter patterns after the motions of air, and the air itself self-moves as it copies after the self-motions of the object. (2016, p. 197)

This represents an unorthodox version of indirect realism, according to which perceptual experience of distal objects is mediated, not by representations in the mind, but by representations in the intervening medium.<sup>30</sup>

Before turning to the question of action at a distance, I will address Adams's reading, which is based on the following passage:

The Motions of Outward objects Move and Figure the Air, being a Rare and Soft Agil Substance, to its own Likeness, and so long as those Figures or Motions last, those Figures and Motions are Sensible to the Senses, for the Senses Move according to the Motions of the Objects.

(PPOII, p. 302)

Cavendish does here seem to treat perception as mediated by patterns in the surrounding medium. But PPOII is a transitional text. As Adams notes (2016, n10), remarks of this sort do not appear in the subsequent edition, GNP

(1668), or in Cavendish's other philosophical works from this period, PL (1664) and OEP (1666). Indeed, in the very same passage, Cavendish endorses a version of the transmission view of perception—as resulting from “Rebounds of Sound” and “the Reflexion of Light”—which is a principal target of those works (see Section 2.1).

The following passage from Cavendish's later work might suggest that she did not revise her view:

The air patterns out the copy of the sound, and then the sensitive corporeal motions in the ear pattern again this copy from the air, and so do make the perception and sense of hearing.

(PL, p. 81)

But Cavendish is here talking about a special case—“Ecchoes”—which she explicitly contrasts with standard cases of auditory perception:

Not always the sensitive motions in the organs take their pattern from the original, but from copies.

(PL, p. 74)

The Ear may take the object of sound afar off, as well as at a near distance.

(PL, p. 76)

So, if Cavendish did hold an unorthodox indirect theory of perception in 1663, she had dropped it by 1664.

This is a challenge for Cunning's suggestion that Cavendish denies action at a distance, insofar as that denial would commit Cavendish to such a theory, one which is in tension with her objections to the transmission model of perception, for example, the time-lag objection. Be that as it may, I will now argue on independent grounds that Cavendish recognizes action at a distance.

## 6.1 | Action at a distance

There are numerous passages in which Cavendish explicitly states that there is such a thing as action at a distance:

An Influence is, when as the Sensitive and Rational matter and motions in divers or different or several Creatures and Figures, in divers or different or several Places, Times, Parts, or Particles, move or work Sympathetically to each other.

(PPOII, p. 70)

It is not necessary that perception must only be betwixt neighbouring or adjoining parts, for some parts may very well perceive each other at a distance.

(OEP, p. 206)

But they are out, that say, there can be no communication at a distance.

(PL, p. 182)

Sympathy and Antipathy work at a distance [...] by the agreeable or disagreeable corporal motions.

(PL, p. 402)

Some sorts of Human Perceptions require some distance between them and the Object: As for example, The Perception of Sight requires certain Distances, as also Magnitudes; whereas the Perception

of Touch requires a Joyning-Object, or Part.

(GNP, p. 53)

These remarks are hard to square with Cunning's reading. In support of it, he appeals to the following:

For in some subjects, Sympathy requires a certain distance; as for example, in Iron and the Loadstone; for if the Iron be too far off, the Loadstone cannot exercise its power, when as in other subjects, there is no need of any such certain distance, as betwixt the Needle and the North-pole, as also the Weapon-salve; for the Needle will turn it self towards the North, whether it be near or far off from the North-pole; and so, be the Weapon which inflicted the wound, never so far from the wounded Person, as they say, yet it will nevertheless do its effect: But yet there must withal be some conjunction with the blood; [for as your *Author* mentions, the Weapon shall be in vain anointed with the Unguent, unless it be made bloody, and the same blood be first dried on the same Weapon. Likewise the sounding of two eights when one is touched, must be done within a certain distance:] The same may be said of all Infectious and catching Diseases amongst Animals, where the Infection, be it the Infected Air, or a Poysonous Vapour, or any thing else, must needs touch the body, and enter either through the Mouth, or Nostrils, or Ears, or Pores of the body; for though the like Antipathies of Infectious Diseases, as of the Plague, may be in several places far distant and remote from each other at one and the same time, yet they cannot infect particular Creatures, or Animals, without coming near, or without the sense of Touch.

(PL, p. 290, material in square brackets omitted by Cuning)

The opening and closing remarks might seem to fit Cuning's interpretation: The loadstone cannot attract iron from afar, and the infected air requires contact with the body to infect it. However, when introducing this passage, Cavendish tells us that it serves to illustrate that there are diverse kinds of sympathy:

There are many sorts of Sympathyes and Antipathyes [...] made several manners or ways.

(PL, pp. 289-290; see also PPOII, p. 110)<sup>31</sup>

So, we should not expect Cavendish to be making a generalization about sympathy of the sort Cuning attributes to her, namely, that it always requires contact. Instead, Cavendish appears to be contrasting cases of influence that require contact—like that of infectious disease—with those that do not—like that of a compass. This makes sense of the summary statement with which Cavendish concludes:

Thus some Sympathy and Antipathy is made by a close conjunction, or corporeal uniting of parts, but not all.

(PL, p. 291)

Closer attention to the “Weapon-salve” example reinforces these points. Cavendish is invoking the idea—in widespread circulation at the time—that, by applying a salve to a weapon that inflicted a wound, the wound itself could be healed (Boyle, 2018, p. 218; Meyns, 2018, p. 63). The claim is that both the salve and the weapon must make contact with blood from the wound in order for the salve to heal it, but neither need be in contact with the wound itself. So, the case is one of action at a distance.

I suggest, then, that the passage Cuning cites shows that Cavendish accepts action at a distance. For Cavendish, when one object occasions another to act from a distance, there is something connecting them, specifically, their shared status as dependent parts of the organized body of nature to which they belong. However, contrary to

Cunning, that connection does not require that the actions transmit via intervening objects with which the occasional cause and occasioned effect make contact.

## 7 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have argued that Cavendish is a direct realist. In perceptual experience, the perceiver is immediately acquainted with the object of perception. Their relation to it is not, for Cavendish, mediated by the perception of internal or external proxies.

While Cavendish's talk of patterning might suggest that she holds an intentionalist theory, according to which the representational content of perceptual experience fundamentally explains its character, I have argued that such talk is consistent with naïve realism. On my reading, Cavendish thinks that it is the object presented in perceptual experience that fundamentally explains both its content and its character.

The case for that reading is a cumulative one. It makes best sense of and draws together a number of themes in Cavendish's remarks on perceptual experience—the role of sympathy, the reliance on the presentation relation, the accounts of hallucination and illusion, and the appeal to regularity. Taken in isolation, Cavendish's remarks on these topics may be consistent with alternative readings. But, taken together, they strongly support the suggestion that Cavendish is a naïve realist about perception.

This sets Cavendish apart from other, more familiar early modern theorists as standardly interpreted. Reid's claim, quoted at the outset, about the dominance of indirect theories of perception at that time is in dispute. But the direct realism that recent scholars find in the likes of Descartes is not of the naïve variety. So, if my interpretation is correct, Cavendish is unusual, if not unique, relative to the views of her contemporaries in her commitment to naïve realism.

I will finish with an indication of how my reading might bear on another challenge facing Cavendish scholars. In introducing naïve realism, I said that its proponents often take the direct presentation of an object in perceptual experience to explain, not just how things appear to the perceiving subject, but also the epistemic profile of that experience. I have yet to discuss this.

While Cavendish allows that there is both perceptual and non-perceptual knowledge, it is striking that she consistently talks of non-perceptual knowledge as a matter of opinion, guesswork, or conjecture, and as probabilistic (cp. Boyle, 2015, pp. 244–45). For example:

Opinions cannot be infallible truths, although they may seem probable; for how is it possible that a single finite Creature should know the numberless varieties and hidden actions of Nature?

(PL, p. 246)

If they know any thing of their interior parts, figures or motions, it is onely by guess or probable conclusions, taken from their exterior actions or figures.

(OEP, “An Argumental Discourse”)

In contrast, Cavendish *never* talks of perceptual knowledge in such circumspect terms. This differential treatment is explicit in these remarks:

Though there be many things in Nature that may be Conceived, and Demonstrated to Reason, at least, to have a Probability in Reason, but cannot be Demonstrated to the Senses, yet the Conceptions do oftener [...] deceive than the Senses do [...], for though the Senses may, and are often times Mistaken and Deluded, yet they are the most certain and surest Guides and Informers we have.

(SL, p. 78)



So, Cavendish posits an epistemic asymmetry. The attitude involved in non-perceptual knowledge is a hedged one, reflected in its probabilistic basis, while the attitude involved in perceptual knowledge is outright, presumably reflected in its non-probabilistic basis. What might explain this?

It is common for contemporary theorists to suggest that, if naïve realism is true, perception has a special epistemic authority.<sup>32</sup> Roughly: If perceptual experience is constitutively dependent on its object, it affords the subject infallible justification for judgments about that object and its features, justification otherwise unavailable. That is not to say that perceivers are always in a position to tell that they have the relevant justification or to take advantage of it, only that it is present.

Might the interpretation of Cavendish as a naïve realist makes sense of the privileged epistemic status that she accords to perceptual experience? I think so, but addressing this issue is a task I leave for future work.<sup>33</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For defense of Reid-style interpretations, see (Hoffman, 2002; Newman, 2008).
- <sup>2</sup> Some might question whether holding these views is sufficient—or, for that matter, necessary—to qualify as a naïve realist. While I take my use of the label to accord with established usage, I need not engage in terminological disputes. For present purposes, I can simply reformulate my claim as that Cavendish holds both views.
- <sup>3</sup> Also known as *representationalism* in contemporary philosophy of perception (e.g., Genone, 2016). However, in early modern scholarship it is common to use that term for a version of indirect realism (e.g., Cook, 1987; Hoffman, 2002). To avoid confusion, I will not use the label here.
- <sup>4</sup> For some “early” defenses, see (Campbell, 2002; Johnston, 2004; Martin, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2004; Noë, 2005; Travis, 2004).
- <sup>5</sup> Sometimes Cavendish uses “perception” broadly to include thoughts and imaginings (e.g., PL, p. 26). More often, Cavendish uses “perception” narrowly to refer to sensory (and rational) responses to external objects (e.g., GNP, p. 23). The focus here is on what Cavendish has to say about perception narrowly understood. For discussion of Cavendish’s terminology, see (Boyle, 2015, pp. 439–40).
- <sup>6</sup> As I explain in Section 6, Marcus Adams (2016) attributes to Cavendish a view that might be described as indirect, but he is hesitant to suggest that she retains it beyond 1663.
- <sup>7</sup> It is indebted to (Boyle, 2018; Broad, 2002, ch. 2; Cunning, 2016; Detlefsen, 2006; Hutton, 1997a, 1997b; James, 1999; O’Neill, 2001; Sarasohn, 2010).
- <sup>8</sup> Cavendish allows for change that involves one object transmitting both its motion *and* its matter to another (Cunning, 2016, pp. 160–66; James, 1999; O’Neill, 2001). However, for Cavendish, the receiving object in such cases must move itself in order to unite (“compose”) with the incoming material (OEP, “An Argumental Discourse”). So, change of this sort too requires self-motion.
- <sup>9</sup> According to Cavendish, “there is a double degree of Perception, Rational and Sensitive” (OEP, p. 157). I focus here on what she has to say about sensory perception.
- <sup>10</sup> For discussion of Cavendish’s criticisms of competing theories of perception, see (Adams, 2016; Boyle, 2019; Broad, 2002, ch. 2; James, 1999).
- <sup>11</sup> On this theme, see (Allen, 2019; Chamberlain, 2019).
- <sup>12</sup> In places, Cavendish restricts this claim to human or to animal perception and remains agnostic as to how perception might operate in other parts of nature (see GNP, p. 51).
- <sup>13</sup> Cavendish recognizes that perceptual experience may be mediated by images produced by optical instruments, for example, telescopes. Notoriously, she suggests that such images are distorting (OEP, pp. 8–10). For discussion, see (Clucas, 2022; James, 2018; Lascano, 2020; Sarasohn, 2010, ch. 7).
- <sup>14</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this remark.
- <sup>15</sup> For discussion of various roles sympathy plays in Cavendish’s work, see (Borcherding, 2021; Meyns, 2018).
- <sup>16</sup> For Digby’s and Charleton’s relationships with Cavendish, see (Whitaker, 2011, chs. 6, 8). On Digby and van Helmont on sympathy, see (Mercer, 2015). On Charleton, see (Boyle, 2018, p. 50). Cavendish reports that she read Thomas Stanley’s (1656) history

- of ancient philosophy (OEP, “Observations upon the Opinions of Some Ancient Philosophers”). While Cavendish likely absorbed Stoic and Platonic ideas from this study (O'Neill, 2013), the term “sympathy” does not appear there.
- <sup>17</sup> In “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” (1656), Cavendish’s mouthpiece says, “Chance can present those things (with Antipathies or Sympathies) to the senses” (NP, p. 439).
- <sup>18</sup> For discussion, see (Cunning, 2016, ch. 4; Detlefsen, 2006; Lascano, 2021; O'Neill, 2001; Peterman, 2019, pp. 492–97; Sarasohn, 2010, pp. 102–6).
- <sup>19</sup> Cuning (2016, ch. 4) argues that Cavendish does not allow for genuine irregularity—that things only appear to be irregular due to our limited information. However, it is consistent with Cuning’s interpretation that there are *ceteris paribus* laws governing certain domains, from which there are departures that preserve the overarching, exceptionless natural order. On this account, perceptual organs might behave irregularly in the sense that they do not conform to the relevant *ceteris paribus* laws. For discussion, see (Boyle, 2018; Detlefsen, 2007; McNulty, 2019; Walters, 2014, pp. 83–88).
- <sup>20</sup> On this issue, see (Boyle, 2019, p. 245; Clucas, 2014, p. 130; Detlefsen, 2007, p. 168; James, 1999, p. 235; O'Neill, 2001, p. xxxii).
- <sup>21</sup> In Section 3, I suggested that Cavendish takes patterning and sensory presentation to be one and the same. But, in general, when Cavendish says that two things are one, she does not mean to deny that one explains the other (Peterman, 2019, p. 474). For example, while “Motion and Matter are but one thing,” “motion depends upon matter” (OEP, pp. 48, 202).
- <sup>22</sup> Another relevant consideration is that Cavendish is a naïve realist about color (Allen, 2019; Chamberlain, 2019; West, 2021; see also Whiting, 2023). For Cavendish, colors are response-independent qualities of objects that are as they visually appear to be when the visual apparatus functions properly. While naïve realism about color does not entail naïve realism about perception, the two are complementary (Allen, 2016, pp. 10–14).
- <sup>23</sup> In other words, naïve realists are usually thought to be committed to *disjunctivism*, a view suggested by Hinton (1973) and Snowdon (1980). Disjunctivists are not committed to naïve realism (Fish, 2009a).
- <sup>24</sup> For a recent version of this view, see (Allen, 2015). For other naïve realist accounts of hallucination, see (Fish, 2009b, ch. 4; Kennedy, 2013; Logue, 2014; Sethi, 2020).
- <sup>25</sup> For contemporary views in this ballpark, see (Fish, 2009b, ch. 6; Genone, 2016). For other naïve realist accounts of illusion, see (Brewer, 2011, ch. 5; French & Phillips, 2020; Kalderon, 2011).
- <sup>26</sup> Compare: “Patterning [...] is a *kind* of figuring; so there is no genuine distinction between the two activities” (West, 2021, p. 465).
- <sup>27</sup> It is a version of the causal objection developed by Howard Robinson (1994).
- <sup>28</sup> While this passage occurs in a work from 1655, it reappears unchanged in the revised edition from 1663 (PPOII, p. 286). Cuning also quotes from PPO, p. 111 (repeated in PPOII, p. 269) and GNP, pp. 93–94. Since those passages make the same points in the same terms, I will not include them for separate discussion. Cuning also appeals to “A Dialogue Betwixt Wit and Beauty” (P&F) from 1653. I set this aside as my claims are restricted to Cavendish’s mature work.
- <sup>29</sup> That is not to say that Cuning must deny that Cavendish takes things to stand in sympathetic relations, only that he must understand sympathy for Cavendish differently.
- <sup>30</sup> One might point out that it is consistent with naïve realism that intervening objects play an underlying *causal* role in enabling perceptual experience: Causal indirectness does not entail phenomenological, epistemic, or intentional indirectness. That is true, but it is of no help in the present context. On the interpretation under consideration, each link in the chain from the object to the sensory apparatus patterns out—hence, perceives—the preceding.
- <sup>31</sup> A recurring theme in Cavendish’s work is that “Nature delights in variety” (PL, p. 416; OEP, p. 101; GNP, p. 166).
- <sup>32</sup> For versions of this idea, see (Johnston, 2006; Kalderon, 2017, ch. 6; Kennedy, 2010).
- <sup>33</sup> For feedback on earlier versions of this material, I am grateful to anonymous referees, my colleagues at the University of Southampton, and an audience at the inaugural conference of the British Society for the Theory of Knowledge at the University of Glasgow.

## WORKS CITED BY ABBREVIATIONS

- GNP. *Ground of Natural Philosophy Divided into Thirteen Parts: with an Appendix Containing Five parts: Written by the Duchess of Newcastle*. London: Printed by A. Maxwell, 1668.
- NP. *Natures Picture Drawn by Fancies Pencil to the Life being several Feigned Stories, Comical, Tragical, Tragi-Comical, Poetical, Romanical, Philosophical, Historical, and Moral: some in Verse, some in Prose, some Mixt, and some by Dialogues written by the Duchess of Newcastle*. London: Printed by A. Maxwell, 1671.

- OEP. *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy to which is Added The Description of a New Blazing World: Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princesse, the Duchess of Newcastle*. London: Printed by A. Maxwell, 1666.
- PF. *Philosophicall Fancies. Written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Newcastle*. London: Printed by Tho: Roycroft, for J. Martin, and J. Allestrye, at the Bell in St. Pauls Church-yard, 1653.
- PL. *Philosophical Letters, or, Modest Reflections upon Some Opinions in Natural Philosophy Maintained by Several Famous and Learned Authors of this Age, Expressed by Way of Letters: by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle*. London, 1664.
- P&F. *Poems, and Fancies Written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Margaret Newcastle*. London: Printed by T.R. for J. Martin, and J. Allestrye, 1653.
- PPO. *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions Written by Her Excellency the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle*. London: Printed for J. Martin and J. Allestrye. 1655.
- PPOII. *Philosophical and Physical Opinions Written by The Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle*. London: Printed by William Wilson, 1663. Available at: <https://cavendish-ppo.ku.edu/texts/philosophical-and-physical-opinions/>
- SL. *CCXI Sociable Letters Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle*. London: Printed by William Wilson, 1664.

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