

# Awareness of Universals

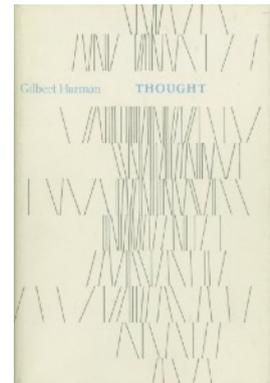
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To Appear in

*Thought: its Origin and Reach*  
*Essays in Honour of Mark Sainsbury*

## 1. Introduction

Gilbert Harman's (1973) *Thought* has one of the better covers you'll find on an academic book. Simple blue text in a respectable font, lines organised at once neatly and haphazardly. When you take a good look at it, you are aware of the lines and their orientations as well as the letters and their colour. Focusing on the colour, there is nothing immediately puzzling about my awareness. There is some blue ink on the page before me and my eyes are trained upon it. The full story isn't a simple one, but there is some causal relationship that holds between the instance of blue on the page and me. Awareness looks to be a relation between a subject and property instance or a coloured object in this case. I'm a material being and objects and property instances are the sorts of things that can enter into causal relations, so all is well, or well enough at any rate. But some philosophers have held that *uninstantiated universals* are amongst the objects of awareness. For many, this is incredible. Even if universals are located where their instances are, surely *uninstantiated* universals aren't around here and so aren't somewhere that I might train my eyes or lay my hands. How, then, could we be aware of them?



But the proponents of the incredible view insist that, in cases of hallucination, our experiential episodes still make us aware of *something* and *uninstantiated universals* are said to be good candidates for being those things of which we are aware. I agree with the incredible view, in a way. It depends what one thinks it takes to stand in the relation designated by 'awareness' to a universal. The present paper, drawing on insights from recent work by Mark Sainsbury, will spell out how I think a representationalist should explicate the incredible view. In some ways, I don't think I'll be offering anything one couldn't find in some of the proponents of the incredible view (by, for example, Fred Dretske or Michael Tye), but the view seems to beget confusion and objection, so it is worth revisiting. Moreover, those who have what I think of as the right view are sometimes the very source of the confusion and have put things in misleading ways, as we will see below. But the confusions can be avoided. As Dretske (1999) puts it, 'Can we really be aware of (uninstantiated) universals? Yes we can and, yes, we sometimes are.'<sup>1</sup> But don't mistake that for the idea that we can train our eyes on them or lay our hands on them.

## 2. The Incredibles

David Pitt (2017) helps sharpen the worry:

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<sup>1</sup> Dretske's view is filled out a bit more as follows: 'In hallucinating pink rats we are aware of something—the properties, pink and rat-shaped that something is represented as having—but we are not aware of any object that has these properties—a pink, rat-shaped, object. We are aware of pure universals, uninstantiated properties.' (Dretske 2003: 73)

**Sam:** Say, Abe; can you explain to me how the telephone works? I don't get it.

**Abe:** Sure. Imagine you've got a very, very big dog. It's so big, it can stand in Manhattan with its head in Brooklyn and its tail in the Bronx.

**Sam:** Uh huh?

**Abe:** So, when you talk to the head in Brooklyn, the tail wags in the Bronx.

**Sam:** Ah, okay; I see now. Very nice. But what about wireless? Can you explain to me how that works?

**Abe:** Simple. It's the same thing, only you don't have the dog.

Departing from Abe's unhelpful explanation of wireless, Pitt explains why awareness of uninstantiated universals should trouble us:

[...] uninstantiated blue and pink are not blue or pink, and neither otherworldly objects nor uninstantiated properties appear to us the way actual objects and instantiated properties do. Indeed, they don't appear at all. Neither merely possible baboons nor uninstantiated colours look like anything. We can't see them. The reductive representationalist says that in veridical experience objects appear to us in certain ways, but that these ways are properties of experienced objects, not our experience of them. But if the things that have the properties that appear to us are removed – either by simply eliminating them or by replacing them with things that don't have appearance properties – then the basis for a reductive account of the phenomenality of experience goes with them. Saying it's the same thing, only the dog is in another possible world, or doghood isn't instantiated, is just as bad as saying it's the same thing, only you don't have the dog. [...] If subjective sameness of experience is understood in terms of the ways things appear, and uninstantiated properties and non-actually-existing objects don't appear, and don't instantiate perceivable properties, then dreaming or hallucinating and perceiving can't be the same, minus the external object, any more than a mental process can be the same as a physical process, minus the matter, or wireless can be the same as [the] telephone, minus the dog. They are guilty of advancing an absurd paraphenomenal hypothesis.

Returning to Harman's book cover. If the way I am supposed to be aware of a universal is the same as the way I am aware of *this* instance of blue (or this trope or this blue object, if one prefers), then it is puzzling how that could be. One must admit that it's hard to resist the idea that I'm aware of the things around here - this bit of blue ink - in a causal way. But surely that can't be how I'm related to an uninstantiated property. Not only must it be some different relation (different from causation), but it is mysterious what relation it might be.<sup>2</sup>

One proponent of the incredible view, Michael Tye (2015), is unimpressed by this claim of mystery:

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<sup>2</sup> Pitt provides two worries. One has just been mentioned in the main text and will be my focus. The other concerns the fact that universals aren't themselves coloured, textured, scented, and so on. Despite a preference for representationalism, I think I can get myself in the mindset of a Naive Realist who holds that my blueish experience is partially constituted (and so partially explained) by the *blue* object before me that I see. But with that view in mind, how could a *non-blue* thing such as a universal contribute to the explanation in the case of hallucination? With Pitt's worry in mind, we might ask, 'Why not some other non-blue thing other than the universal Blue such as the number seven or the universal Justice?'. This worry is important for those tempted to suggest that the mind can be partially constituted by (rather than caused by) Universals. Following that path leaves one with a pressing mystery: how and why do things that lack sensible properties contribute to sensation?

In (non-veridical) hallucination, on my view, **I am confronted with a property that is not locally instantiated** even though I experience it as such. Some philosophers profess to be very puzzled as to how this is possible. I profess to be puzzled at their puzzlement. Suppose I hallucinate something red. In doing so, I am aware of the color red. This is a matter of my undergoing an experience that represents the color red – an experience, that is, of a type that, under Normal conditions, tracks red (in first approximation). There is, then, a complex relation obtaining between my token experience as I hallucinate (given that there are token experiences) and the color red. This is what grounds **my de re awareness of the property** even though there is no local instance of it. What is so puzzling about that? (Pp) [emphasis added]

On the sort of view Tye is offering, on past occasions (involving me in normal circumstances or perhaps involving my ancestors), someone was aware of red in a non-puzzling way. The most forthcoming non-puzzling story has them aware of an *instance* of red, a red trope, or a red object – clapping their eyes onto something with causal powers. Some mechanism then comes to be or traffic in a ‘stand in’ for such instances (a vehicle of representation), and so later representational processes can engage even in the absence of any red instances. That all sounds pretty good, but how has that helped one become (*de re!*) aware of a universal? To *confront* one, as Tye puts it. Turning to representation and naturalisation does indeed establish a viable relation between subjects and uninstantiated (around here) Universals – we represent them! – but it doesn’t immediately make Pitt’s worry any less worrisome. We have a grip on confronting instances and objects but if that is the way in which we are meant to be aware of universals, one’s grip is quickly lost. No one thinks that reading about Napoleon is a way to *confront* him. The problem comes from the confronting and not the representing.<sup>3</sup>

I agree with Tye when he writes, ‘Suppose I hallucinate something red. In doing so, I am aware of the color red. This is a matter of my undergoing an experience that represents the color red’. But I think a reader could be forgiven for thinking that Tye does indeed have something incredible in mind:

Along with (most) other representationalists, I am happy to say that, in the hallucinatory case, the perceiver is conscious of an un-instantiated property. This seems to me to be part of naïve common sense. Suppose that you had never seen any red things and then, one day, you hallucinated a red car. Did you not then **encounter** redness in your experience? Did you not then “get a good look” at redness (Hawthorne and Kovakovitch 2006), one that enabled you then and there to know what it is like to experience red? (p. 304)<sup>4</sup>

I’ll have more to say below about knowing what it is like, but, presently, Pitt is simply right. Redness isn’t the sort of thing one could *get a good look at*, so at the very best, there is a good idea shrouded in misleading language. According to many, it’s all simply absurd.

### 3. Act-Object Theories

Talk of *encountering* and of *de re* awareness makes it hard to read the proposals above in anything other than an act-object light. On an act-object understanding, it’s due to one’s

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<sup>3</sup> For others who express puzzlement, see Gow (2016), Papineau (2021), Schellenberg (2010), and Thompson (2008).

<sup>4</sup> Tye goes on to make explicit that he understands this in terms of representing, but with ‘encountering’ and ‘getting a good look at’ the damage is already done.

confrontation with properties that one undergoes the experience one does. And when facing the problem of hallucination, an appeal to properties looks helpful. As is well known, naive act-object theorists (that is, Naive Realists) run into trouble when objects go missing but phenomenology remains the same. But, one might think, why not seek out objects that *don't* go missing? Some familiar and tried paths have few adherents – sense data views and views that traffic in non-existent objects. Let's set these approaches aside. But aiming to take up the standpoint of someone like Dretske, we might now think something along the following lines: “Rather than exotic *objects*, why not a relation to *properties*? You already believe in properties, don't you? And probably properties conceived of as things that exist even when not instantiated. So use them!” With this directive in place, the act-object theory can apparently be saved by finding available entities to which one can be related. There is nothing strange about being aware of the property instance on the cover of Harman's book, so turn the crank one more time. If you already think uninstantiated properties are admissible members of your ontology, why not let them serve the role sense-data was once to play?

But Pitt's problem notwithstanding, isn't this an odd thing for a *representationalist* to be advocating? Are representationalists such as Tye and Dretske really, at bottom, such close cousins of Naive Realists?<sup>5</sup> Sense-data theorists *are* close cousins – like Naive Realists they hold that one's experience is in part constituted by the entities to which one is related. Red experiences are constituted in part by the red sense datum in just the way that the naive realist takes the redness of the tomato to be a constituent of the red experience one undergoes while looking at the tomato. Is representationalism just another tweak? Properties or propositions as objects of acquaintance rather than ordinary objects or sense data?

I don't think so. I'm certainly not advocating as much. The quotes above force one to wonder if Tye and Dretske are flirting with a genuine act-object theory, but they also say things that suggest they aren't act-object theorists.<sup>6</sup> After all, they are *representationalists*. According to that view, experiencing is, fundamentally, representing and not, fundamentally, meeting (here and now) with worldly entities such as tropes, ordinary objects, or sense data.<sup>7</sup> But representationalism is not an act-object theory. Mark Sainsbury (2018) captures the the idea upon which I wish to focus in his recent book on thought:

My view is that representations are what we think *with*, and normally not what we think *about*, just as our eyes are what we see with, and normally not what we see.  
(p.1)

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<sup>5</sup> See Gow (2018) for further discussion about this issue as well as adverbialism and transparency which will be relevant below.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Johnston (2004) is another advocate of the view that we are aware of uninstantiated universals in hallucination. He is very explicitly an act-object theorist. As is Forrest (2005).

<sup>7</sup> Representationalism is compatible with *direct* realism. When one sees an entity, one doesn't see it *by seeing* something else. Representations are recruited in seeing, but they aren't themselves seen or experienced. It's a bit like using your hands to pick something up. Picking things up doesn't get any more direct than that (you might use a robotic arm to pick things up indirectly). Good luck picking things up directly *without* using your hands. Representationalists have it that in order to meet things visually one must utilise representations, but not in any way that gets them *in* the way, that makes them a veil. Of course we don't think that using your hands puts them *in the way* when you directly pick up a cup.

Although Sainsbury is discussing thought, the central idea carries over to experience as well.

It has always seemed to me that representationalism is a closer cousin of adverbialism than it is of the act-object theories.<sup>8</sup> This is liable to get lost given that representationalism is (as usually conceived) a *relational* theory. One stands in a relation to a content, the view says. But the relation one stands in to a content isn't the sort the act-object theorists are offering – confrontation or being acquainted with. It would be a silly view that holds we confront, for example, *the proposition* that there is something red and round before me when undergoing a red-round experience in the way I might confront a red tomato. Rather than thinking of adverbialism (a non-relational view) on one side of a divide and all of the relational views on the other side of a divide, it makes more sense to put act-object theories on one side and what I will call 'characterising' views on the other side.

Adverbialists aims to individuate experiences without making recourse to a relation. The view provides ways of *characterising* experiences in terms of the *ways* one is experiencing rather than in terms of entities experienced. But, in an important way, representationalism does something similar. One doesn't perceive, experience, see (and so on) the proposition that is the content of the experience. Rather, propositions tell us something about the way one is experiencing. By making reference to a proposition, our attributions of propositional attitudes classify representational states in terms of how things are represented by the state as being.<sup>9</sup>

Standing in the relation designated by 'awareness' to universals should be thought about in a similar way: universals are referred to in the service of characterising a mental state rather than referred to in order to tell us which entity one is confronted with.<sup>10</sup>

This is the central idea of the present paper, so it worth spelling it out in further detail. To do so, it is helpful to consider another attitude first: desire. The standard view has it that desire is a propositional attitude. But this is not the view that desires are desires for representations or propositions. Mark Sainsbury again offers helpful remarks:

If you want a beer, it's not that you want a representation of a beer. But your desire does involve representing a beer. Representational theories are sometimes discredited on the grounds that they claim that our thoughts and fears are *about* representations. (p. 1)

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<sup>8</sup> See Kriegel (2008, 2011a, 2011b), Pendlebury (1998), and Zimmerman (2010) for further discussion.

<sup>9</sup> See Hanks (2015) for a helpful discussion of the role of propositions as classifiers of representation. See also Stalnaker (1984) who likens the role of propositions in belief attributions to the role of numbers in measurement. That sort of view is developed in detail in Matthews (2007). These approaches have in common what I believe to be an idea of central importance: that we make reference to entities such as propositions, concepts, and properties in mental attributions in order to classify our mental states and these entities are *not* those things we think of, fear, see, and so on (at least not in typical cases – see Grzankowski 2014).

<sup>10</sup> D'Ambrosio and Stoljar (manuscript) argue for something very much in the same vein. On their view, 'aware of', 'conscious of', and so on are intensional constructions which are associated with two logical forms in an event semantics. Like Forbes (2018), they distinguish between the object of an attitude (a 'theme' in event' semantics jargon) from a content which characterises an attitude. My thinking on these issues is indebted to D'Ambriso and Stoljar's paper as well as to many discussion with D'Ambriso about intensional verbs and adverbialism.

To take another example, suppose Victoria desires that she receive a new yoga mat. Of course there need be no proposition that Victoria thereby desires. Rather than being that which is desired, the proposition that she receive a new yoga mat and the proposition that I get a beer are connected to the satisfaction conditions of the respective desires. We might think that the proposition *sets*, *determines*, or simply *models* the satisfaction conditions – never mind for the moment how we work out the finer details. Of importance presently, the proposition isn't a thing desired. Rather, it serves to individuate a desire amongst the other desires in terms of the conditions under which it is satisfied. And this tells us something about the relation designated by 'desire':<sup>11</sup>

[[Desire]] = \_\_\_ is in a motivational state that is satisfied just in case \_\_\_ is true.

The first blank is filled in with a subject and the second with a proposition. But the proposition and subject do not stand in anything we could faithfully cast in the act-object light: act of desiring, object desired. The proposition serves to *characterise* the mind in terms of the satisfaction conditions of a motivational state.

Mark Sainsbury's 'Display Theory' of attitude attributions is very much in keeping with the idea of characterising mental states. He offers the following concerning sentences such as 'David is thinking about Pegasus':

Instead of the words being used in their normal committal way, as in extensional contexts, they are put on display **so as to reveal features of the subject's intentional states**. The complements contribute to the correctness or otherwise of the attribution in just the same way whether they refer or not. (148, emphasis added).<sup>12</sup>

So what about awareness? What could awareness of an uninstantiated property come to? In our more ordinary (albeit philosophical) locutions, we say things such as 'I am aware of red', 'I am aware of the colour red', or 'I am aware of redness'.<sup>13</sup> It's plausible that these object-position noun phrases refer to properties (and perhaps uninstantiated ones at that). But if our object-position noun phrases refer to universals, aren't we right back at the mysterious view we started with? For reasons just given concerning desire, we are not. The role of the universal is not that entity we meet in awareness – a thing with which we are acquainted. Rather, the universal plays a role similar to that played by the proposition in the case of Victoria's desire. One characterises episodes of awareness by making reference to an entity that can be (but needn't be) instantiated.

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<sup>11</sup> More carefully: the relation contributed to the truth-conditions of an attitude attribution of the form 'S desires that p'. I won't take a stand here on the semantic value of 'desire' that correctly features in a compositional semantics of the variety one might expect in the tradition of Montague.

<sup>12</sup> According to Sainsbury, "Our attitude attributions achieve informativeness not by referring to concepts but by displaying them" (149). Here we slightly part ways. On my view, we do refer to concepts, propositions, and properties on the right-hand side of familiar attitude attributions such as 'Stacie believes cricket is interesting' and 'David is thinking about Pegasus', but this in no way conflicts with the idea that in so referring to them they are being brought to our attention in the service of revealing features of the subject's intentional states. This approach has the advantage of side-stepping a need to explicate 'putting on display' in contrast to reference.

<sup>13</sup> See Johnston (2014) and Moltmann (2013) for reasons to think the exact decision here must be nuanced.

[[Aware of]] = \_\_\_ is undergoing an awareness-experience to the effect that \_\_\_ is instantiated.<sup>14, 15</sup>

One might now object: but surely we *do* use the locutions above to talk about the entities one *confronts* in awareness! 'I'm aware of red. Be it hallucination or not, I now confront redness! There it is before me.'

Point taken. I do think we sometimes (perhaps even typically) use awareness-talk in a way that implicates or entails confrontation with things. There look to be two different ways of talking here. Much in the way Grice (1989) views 'sees' and 'seems' in his 'Further Notes on Logic and Conversation' we appear to use 'aware' both in what I will call an 'experiential' way and in a 'confrontational' way. On my view, the experiential facts are primary,<sup>16</sup> but that in no way jeopardises confrontational uses. On the confrontational uses, we implicate an entity as cause or as a thing confronted but in experiential uses we do not:

**(Exp)** 'S is aware of redness' is true and felicitous iff  
S is undergoing an awareness-experience to the effect that redness is instantiated.

**Exp** is exactly what falls out of the characterising discussion just above. Imagine two neurosurgeons stimulating a patient's brain. One might say to the other, 'And now the patient is aware of redness'. There is, and indeed should not be, any implication that the patient now confronts something. Reference to the universal is used to report the qualitative state of the subject, differentiating it from, say, experiences as of blueness or greenness. But on the confrontational reading, although the universal remains in the story – for in true representational spirit, it is what captures the phenomenal common factor between seeing and hallucinating – an instance, trope, or coloured object enters the story as well:

**(Con)** 'Redness is such that S is aware of it' is true and felicitous iff  
There is an instance of redness and the instance is causing S to undergo an awareness-experience to the effect that it (redness) is instantiated.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> I won't try to settle the matter here but two forthcoming way for understanding 'awareness-experience' are in terms of functional role or in terms of phenomenology.

<sup>15</sup> Why not follow Sainsbury here and opt for concepts rather than properties? The reason is that awareness of the variety on which we are focused is a non-conceptual state. More on this below.

<sup>16</sup> Primary in the sense that the confrontational episodes have as a part exactly what one finds in the experiential episode. Confrontations are experiences properly connected to the world.

<sup>17</sup> In the present paper, I won't take up issues about wayward causes or veridical hallucinations.

I've put this in a 'wide-scoped' way<sup>18</sup> to highlight the reading at issue, but one needn't use such stilted, philosophereuse to offer a confrontational use: 'I'm aware of red' can work just as well in the right context.<sup>19</sup>

With this all in mind, it seems to me that we should simply deny the truth of the assertion 'I'm aware of red. Be it hallucination or not, I now confront redness!', in cases of hallucination. How could it be true when one is hallucinating? Well, it could be true if one were caused by a universal to undergo a red-experience. But universals aren't the right sorts of things to cause experiences. It's *seeming* to you that you confront something doesn't make it so.<sup>20</sup>

We are now in a position to revisit Tye, Dretske, and Pitt and to offer a diagnosis of their disagreement. **Exp** and **Con** help explain why the view that we are aware of uninstantiated universals is met with incredulity: readers and hearers seek a confrontational reading and apply it to a non-causal object. And they are right to find such an idea puzzling. When someone like Tye insists on '*de re* awareness' of universals and 'confrontation', it's easy to see how one might expect a confrontational reading to be at issue. On the one hand, the proponents of the incredible view quite explicitly wish to endorse representationalism and **Exp** provides an understanding of how universals feature in a representationalist approach to awareness. It's universals and individuals that the relation designated by

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<sup>18</sup> A scope ambiguity approach could certainly be pursued. See Yalcin (2015) for a development of the sort of compositional semantics that could accompany these truth and felicity conditions if one wanted to hard-wire them into the semantics. Yalcin aims to provide a compositional treatment of Kaplan-inspired truth-conditions for *de re* belief based on acquaintance that could be utilised by a Fregean who traffics in senses. A similar move, in structure anyway, would work in the present case. But it's not obvious that the issue here is one of scope. I thank Mark Textor for raising to salience worries about committing to scope movement in the examples under discussion and for reminding me of Grice on seeing and seeming.

<sup>19</sup> Positing an ambiguity in 'aware' – confrontational awareness and characterising awareness – is an unattractive route. Although not a foolproof test (see Viebahn 2018), it's telling that one could be in a 'mixed' case and use the verb only once. Imagine a case involving seeing some things while hallucinating others: 'I'm aware of redness and roundness as well as waves of bright purple.' Supposing there is a red round thing seen but purple waves hallucinated, an ambiguity should at least make space for a strained reading of the sentence (of the sort one finds with 'I ran a marathon and a company'), but I find no such reading.

<sup>20</sup> I wish to return to worries about indirectness (for those not concerned, this lengthy footnote can be passed over). It is worth warding off a confusion about how the mind makes contact with the world in awareness. One is liable to think that there is an instance of representing and the representation 'reaches out' to the world, connecting with the world when there really is an instance of the property characterising the representing. This is something like the way reference by definite description might be thought to work. One brings some properties to mind and, either via instantiation or a logical relation of satisfaction, one's mind reaches out and 'finds' the unique object. A view like this one certainly raises worries about indirectness. One thing is brought before the mind and the mind then latches onto *something else* in successful cases. But the model I advocate is more in keeping with ideas found in Donnellan (1974), Perry (2012), Sainsbury (2018), and especially Almog (2014). Creatures like us are able to create representations. We generate representations in various ways: spontaneously, intentionally, and we likely come born with some already in place. When a new representation is 'stamped out', it may or may not be 'loaded' with an object. If one stands in the right sort of causal relation to an entity when a representation is created, it comes to be semantically connected to, and so loaded with, that object. As Almog suggests, we might think here of 'ferrying' the object along, loading the object itself into the representation to carry it with us and to pass it along to others and to downstream processing. On a view like the one I'm advocating, this simply is the way we come to 'have objects in mind' or make contact with the external world. We have representations that can be semantically loaded with parts of the world but some representations are left empty. To get part of the world loaded in the mind, we need to make use of something loadable (a representation) and once we have it in place, we can carry it along with us to bring the world before the mind again when it is indeed loaded. There is nothing indirect about this (see fn. 6 above). In awareness in particular, one uses representational capacities when making contact with the world. One must genuinely make causal contact with an instance of a property in order to load a representation with it. The role of the universal in the theory I've advocated is to say something about the kind of representing one is doing.

‘awareness’ relates, just as the Incredibles would have us believe, but the relation is one of characterisation. With this idea properly understood, Pitt and others are shown to be too quick in dismissing awareness of universals. They see the only option as a confrontational one but as our neurosurgeons above suggest to us, confrontation needn’t be at issue. So, the characterising view allows us to see the good in the idea that we are aware of universals and does so in a way that coheres with representationalism more generally (as displayed in our discussion about desire) and does so without leading to the peculiar view that abstracta (which themselves are neither coloured nor causes) are confrontata.

#### **4. Fearing Propositions and Being Aware of Properties**

Above I drew an analogy with desire to highlight the way in which entities such as propositions characterise attitudes rather than serve as the object upon which an act is directed. In similar fashion, one might apply this idea to intensional transitive verbs (ITVs) such as ‘to fear’ or ‘to seek’. When Perseus fears Medusa, a relation obtains between Perseus and the concept Medusa or the property of being Medusa, but surely these aren’t the things Perseus fears. As above, the concept or property characterises Perseus’s fear. The answer to the question, ‘what does Perseus fear?’ is ‘that which falls under the concept, if anything does’ or ‘that which instantiates the property, if anything does’. Fear is characterised by the entity in question and so it is a relation, but it is not an act directed upon that object. One’s fear is about that which falls under the concept.

But now a worry emerges, a worry that threatens to call into question much of what was offered in section 3. The worry goes like this: ‘I’m willing to grant that just as one doesn’t desire a proposition in typical cases, Perseus doesn’t fear a concept, but I really can be aware of properties! So the view on offer seems to offer something Fregean or Montagovian in spirit where this isn’t wanted. In desire, ‘that p’ semantically contributes an intensional entity rather than a sentence or truth value and ‘Medusa’ provides a sense, a concept, or an intension rather than a creature, but you had better not say that about awareness! It’s true that properties are amongst the things of which we are aware’.<sup>21</sup>

It’s important for my view that I answer this worry. Moreover, working through it sheds further light on the characterising suggestion more generally.

Consider first the following bad inference:

1. Nathan fears Fido.
2. ‘Fido’ designates a property.<sup>22</sup>
3. So, Nathan fears a property.

Similarly bad is an inference concerning desire:

4. Victoria desires that she have a new yoga mat.
5. ‘That Victoria has a new yoga mat’ designates a proposition.
6. So, Victoria desires a proposition.

But when we turn to awareness, the inference isn’t a problem and this is what the objection under discussion turns on:

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<sup>21</sup> Thank you to Michael Tye and Ray Buchanan for pressing this concern.

<sup>22</sup> If you prefer, swap ‘property’ in 2 and 3 for ‘sense’, ‘concept’, ‘intension’, or so on.

7. Nathan is aware of redness
8. 'Redness' designates a property.
9. So, Nathan is aware of a property.

This suggests that unlike fearing and desiring, 'to be aware' isn't an intensional verb. This also looks to speak against the characterising view of awareness, since the motivation for the view in the case of fearing and desiring comes from a need to avoid the absurd consequences that people, in ordinary cases, fear properties and desire propositions. So my view looks to be in trouble.

This worry provides an opportunity to tease apart some important features of the above examples and to display the import of the characterising view. Not only can the above concern can be allayed, but seeing how sheds further light on the central idea.

If 'that p' designates the proposition that p, why doesn't 'S desires the proposition that p' follow from 'S desires that p'? This question has received a good bit of discussion<sup>23</sup> and it seems to me that the best answer is quite a simple one. There is propositional desiring and there is objectual desiring. It's an odd thing to desire a proposition the way you might desire the last éclair, but it's something one could desire (even if not rationally). But desiring a proposition is a different sort of thing from desiring that p. Propositional desire isn't desire *for* a proposition. Rather, having a propositional desires is to have a desire that is satisfied when the proposition is true. There are plenty of further details to work through, but, for task at hand, what's important is that there is a shift from a propositional desire attribution in 'S desires that p' to an objectual desire attribution in 'S desires the proposition that p' and so the inference in 4-6 fails. 'That p' and 'the proposition that p' do indeed designate the same entity but their grammatical differences (a complementiser phrase (CP) vs. a noun phrase (NP) on the right-hand side) trigger a verb shift.<sup>24</sup>

But we can't tell this story when it comes to fearing, seeking, and so on. If 'Fido' in a sentence such as 1 designates the property of being Fido,<sup>25</sup> why doesn't 'S fears the property of being Fido' follow from 'S fears Fido'? Notice that we cannot appeal to the story just provided for desiring propositions, for on the right-hand side of the verb we find an NP in both cases: fearing *Fido* and fearing *the property of being Fido*. A different story is needed. Rather than a verb shift, the bad inference is blocked by a shift in the entity designated on the right-hand side of the verb. 'Fido' normally refers to Fido, but when the term appears inside the scope of an intensional transitive verb, there is a type-shift: 'Fido' contributes 'the property of being Fido' to the proposition expressed by the ITV sentence. But type-shifts are systematic, so when we then move to the sentence 'S fears the property of being Fido', the NP contributes *the property of being the property of being Fido* to the proposition expressed by the sentence. So the inference in 1-3 fails (as desired) but not for the very same reason as in the example of desiring a proposition in 4-6.

Now to the crucial bit. Notice that nowhere in the above was an appeal made to the *characterising role* of the entities designated on the right-hand side of the attributions. Of importance, I see no reason to think that characterising entails *substitution failure*. The

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<sup>23</sup> See D'Ambrosio (2021), Grzankowski (2014, 2018), King (2002), Moffett (2003), Moltmann (2003), Nebel (2019), Prior (1971), and Zimmerman (1993, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> See King (2002) for development of this approach.

<sup>25</sup> See Moltmann (1997), Richard (2001), and Zimmerman (1993) for a development of this Montagovian idea. These theorists disagree in important ways but not ones that are relevant at present.

substitution failures observed above in 1-3 and 4-6 are accounted for in terms of verb shifts and reference shifts. But characterising remains an important part of the story. What the characterising view provides is a philosophical understanding of what it is to stand in an attitude relation to a property or a proposition. Take, for example, ‘S desires that p’:

[[S]] = S

[[that p]] = the proposition that p

[[desires]] = \_\_\_ is in a motivational state that is satisfied just in case \_\_\_ is true.<sup>26</sup>

The truth-conditions hence arrived are as follows:

‘S desires that p’ is T iff S is in a motivational state that is satisfied just in case the proposition that p is true.

In the case of a desire attribution, the proposition is referred to in order to characterise the desire in terms of the conditions under which it is satisfied. In the case of fear, the property referred to characterises one’s fear in terms of the entity that instantiates the property. The philosophical gloss allows us to say what it is to stand in the relation designated by [[desire]] to a proposition or by [[fear]] to a property and it does so in a way that demands no mysterious, quasi-causal relation to an abstract object. The relation is very much in the family of the relation one bears to numbers when one weights 160 pounds.

Here is another way to see the importance of the philosophical gloss offered by the characterising view. Re-visit the explanation above about why ‘S fears the property of being Fido’ doesn’t follow from ‘S fears Fido’. The claim was that in one case a property is referred to and in the other a property of that property is referred to. But isn’t one consequence as absurd as the other? “Fine,” one might say, “I can’t infer the manifestly absurd from the apparently acceptable, but on this view the apparently acceptable is covertly absurd: the idea that I fear a property of a property is as bad if not worse than fearing a property”.

But the characterising view shows why this worry is misguided. If [[fears]] contributed \_\_\_ fears \_\_\_ to the proposition expressed, we would arrive at the absurdity, but what the characterising view says is that [[fears]] contributes \_\_\_ is in a fear-state about that which instantiates \_\_\_. This leads to no absurdity. The characterising view earns its keep.

So what, then, of 7-9 repeated here:

7. Nathan is aware of redness.
8. ‘Redness’ designates a property.
9. So, Nathan is aware of a property.

Awareness, unlike fearing, is a non-conceptual state. The intensional effects in ITV sentences reflect the fine-grained representational nature of the states of which they are reports. One can fear Superman without fearing Clark Kent.<sup>27</sup> But when one is aware of the smell of petrichor, one is aware of the smell of rain on dry soil. So we should not expect the same *intensional* effects. Specifically, we should not expect the semantic contribution of ‘the property of being F’ to type-shift ‘up a level’ as it does when attaching to the

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<sup>26</sup> See footnote 11 for a reminder of how I’m thinking about square brackets.

<sup>27</sup> See Forbes (2000) for discussion and defence.

compositional contribution of 'fears'. And so, since 'redness' designates the same entity as 'the property of being red' one can indeed, given the non-conceptual nature of awareness, infer 'Nathan is aware of the property of being red' (and so 'Nathan is aware of a property') from 'Nathan is aware of redness'. The worry we started this section with is hence diffused, but one should still demand a philosophical gloss: 'What could it be to be aware of an abstract thing such as a property?' The characterising view provides an answer: S is undergoing an awareness experience to the effect that redness/the property of being red is instantiated. And, you'll recall, this is precisely what is needed when facing the incredulous stare of Pitt and others discussed earlier. Their worry is based on the idea that it is naturalistically implausible if not downright mysterious how one could stand in the relation of awareness to a colourless, abstract entity. But the correct reply is that [[aware of]] ≠ \_\_\_ aware of \_\_\_, rather [[aware of]] = \_\_\_ is undergoing an awareness experience to the effect that \_\_\_ is instantiated.

## 5. Worries from the Black and White Room

In this penultimate section, I wish to consider one more set of worries that I suspect will be forthcoming.

On the view on offer, there is nothing of which one is '*de re* aware' (that is, nothing one confronts) when one hallucinates. This, it may be worried, has the consequence that one is then not in a position to form a true demonstrative thought on the basis of hallucination. Mark Johnston (2004) thinks we *can* form true demonstrative thoughts in this way and this might look like a persuasive reason for adopting an act-object view even in the cases of hallucination. When we hallucinate, is there not something there for us to demonstrate?

But the data, it seems to me, is that one might indeed undergo an experience and one might indeed come to then form a demonstrative thought, but there is no good reason to suppose that these demonstratives are non-empty. That is to say, I see no reason to think that the demonstrations successfully refer. In a hallucination it *seems* to one that something is before one and in light of how things seem it is natural to introduce a demonstrative. But things aren't as they seem and there is nothing to demonstrate. '*This is bright and this is dull,*' one might say, as one hallucinates. But on the view I'm advocating, these thoughts are false because they have empty elements. But they don't thereby fail to be thoughts. Why exactly must we suppose they are *true*?

Here is a reason: One might note that Mary, in her black and white room, could come to *know* what red is like by hallucinating red. 'At long last, *this* is what it is like to experience red!' she might think to herself. Does this knowledge not strongly suggest that her demonstration is a success? Knowledge is factive after all.

But in this case, unlike the example above involving being bright and dull, it does not seem at all incumbent upon one to hold that Mary demonstrates red itself. (If your transparency intuitions are rapidly raising red flags, give me a moment.) Mary undergoes an experience and on that basis she comes to know an answer to the question 'what is it like to experience

red?'.<sup>28</sup> But this is consistent with her experience being a hallucination. When Mary thinks to herself, 'So *this* is what it's like to experience red', why not think that the demonstrative makes reference to her experiential episode? The attribution certainly looks to be making a comment on an experience.

One might still not be persuaded. A concern here is that experience is *transparent*. I agree that one cannot find, in addition to the apparently worldly one, an aspect of an experience to which one can shift attention – the mental paint coating the experience. Those who often quote Moore have the phenomenology right. But the only things we must take away from transparency are (i) that episodes of awareness have a *presentational phenomenology*<sup>29</sup> and (ii) that there are not *two* things to introspect upon.<sup>30</sup> The view I'm suggesting accommodates these lessons as follows: in episodes of awareness it seems to one that something external to one is presented and by introspecting one can make this presentational experience especially salient. Although introspection does not reveal a further aspect of our experiences themselves – we do not experience our experiences – we should take no issues with the idea that we can talk about and think about experiences: 'Some experiences are pleasant and others are painful'; 'The experience of red is novel for someone like Mary but an experience like *that* is run-of-the-mill for most of us'. Mary undergoes an experience as of red. She introspects her very hardest and finds nothing but *apparently* worldly redness – no extra (apparent) item is anywhere to be found. But we needn't then conclude that Mary's demonstrative answer to, 'What is it like to experience red?' must aim at the apparently worldly instance. Her introspection makes her red-experience salient (more salient, for example, than the feeling of the pebble in her shoe). Mary's experience puts her in a position to offer an answer to the question, 'what is it like to experience red?'. Mary, on the basis of her experience, can answer: 'This experience is really vivid', 'It's less interesting than I expected', 'Red experiences are my new favourite', 'Orange experiences are a lot like this experience I'm having now, which you tell me is an experience (as) of red'. What's required is that Mary undergo an experience as of red, but again I can't see why anything red needs to be around to be demonstrated, not even if the transparency intuition is correct. So (says I), we needn't worry about a revenge of the act-object view.

## 6. Conclusion

'Can we really be aware of (uninstantiated) universals? Yes we can and, yes, we sometimes are.' Dretske was right. But the relation we bear to universals is a characterising relation.

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<sup>28</sup> The objection might be more forceful if what Mary learns is what *red* is like rather than what it is like to *experience red*. I find it difficult to take seriously that when someone demonstrates, say, a colour, or someone helps you move your body when learning an athletic manoeuvre ('this is what skating on ice is like' while helping you dip down on one leg while kicking back the other leg while in your shoes), that they are, first and foremost, trying to tell you something about red or about ice. Rather, they are trying to elicit in you an experience and the interesting thing that you come to know is what *the experience* is like. You come to know about the experience – that is, come to have thoughts about it that are or constitute knowledge – by undergoing it. Stoljar's (2016) recent discussion of 'what it is like' lends support to this claim.

<sup>29</sup> See Farkas (2013) and Gow (2016, 2018) for further discussion.

<sup>30</sup> What I'm advocating does not entail that Mary *experiences* her experience. Rather, Mary undergoes an experience as of red and she forms the *judgement* that this is an experience as of red and that it has *this* phenomenology. The situation here is similar to forming the belief that the pain in my toe is aggravating or that the experience of smelling skunk is revolting. Neither of these judgements require that I experience an experience. Mary has a novel experience as of red and on the basis of it, she comes to know an answer to the question 'what is it like to experience red?'. To repeat, I struggle to see why the answer to this question must involve the successful demonstration of some red entity. It simply requires forming the judgment on the basis of a red experience. See Grzankowski and Tye (2019) for more on Mary's knowledge of an answer to the question 'What is it like to experience red?'.

Once this is appreciated, accusations of guilt of advancing an absurd paraphenomenal hypothesis fade away.<sup>31</sup>

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