**Hume’s Table, Peacocke’s Trees, The Tilted Penny, And The Reversed Seeing-In Account**

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**Abstract** In seeing a tilted penny, we are experientially aware of both its circularity and another shape, which I dub ‘β-ellipticality’. Some claim that our experiential awareness of the intrinsic shapes/sizes of everyday objects depends upon our experiential awareness of β-shapes/β-sizes. In contrast, I maintain that β-property experiences are the result of what Richard Wollheim calls ‘seeing-in’, but run in reverse: instead of seeinga three-dimensional object in a flat surface, we see a flat surface in a three-dimensional object. Using this new account, I re-examine the phenomenological directness of visual experience and undermine an argument for skepticism about β-property experiences.

**1. Visual Experiences Of β-Shapes And β-Sizes: A Review**

When we look at the world, our visual experiences make us aware of, among other things, the intrinsic shapesand intrinsic sizes of everyday physical objects. To introduce some terminology, I will say that we have an ‘experiential awareness’ of the shapes and sizes of these everyday physical objects.[[1]](#footnote-1) (I am not treating ‘experiential awareness’ as being a success verb; having an ‘experiential awareness’ of a shape or size does not entail that there is anything in your vicinity that actually has that shape or size.) To borrow Nagel’s (1974) expression, that there is ‘something that it’s like’ to be experientially aware of these shapes and sizes. To put it another way, phenomenal shapes and phenomenal sizesamong the phenomenal features that make up the phenomenal character of our visual experiences of everyday physical objects.

There are a number of challenging questions one could ask about the notion of ‘experiential awareness’ and the aforementioned phenomenal shapes and phenomenal sizes: What is the psychological mechanism by which we become experientially aware of the intrinsic shapes and sizes of everyday physical objects? What, precisely, are these phenomenal shapes and phenomenal sizes? Are they properties of external objects? Are they properties of experience? Etc. Although I will eventually take a stand on some of these important issues, they are not the primary topic of this paper. Instead, I am going to focus on the claim that we have an experiential awareness of shapes and sizes *in addition* to the intrinsic shapes and the intrinsic sizes of the everyday objects before our eyes. According to this claim, there is a doubleness of phenomenal shape and a doubleness of phenomenal size within the phenomenal character of our visual experiences.[[2]](#footnote-2) (Since, as I noted earlier, I’m not treating ‘experiential awareness’ as a success verb, I am not assuming that there must be something in the subject’s vicinity that has this additional shape or size.)

As an illustration of what I’m talking about, consider a situation described by Hume in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* that involves moving away from a table while continuing to look at its size and shape.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The table, which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it: but the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration. (p. 104)

Many philosophers would claim that, if we were placed in a situation like this, we would be experientially aware of two sizesas we move away from the table: we would be experientially aware of both a constant, unchanging sizeand of a diminishing size. In addition, we would also be experientially aware of two shapes as our viewing angle relative to the table changed over time: we would be experientially aware of both a rectangular shape andof a trapezoidal shape that changes over time. As a result, there would be a doubleness of phenomenal sizes, and a doubleness of phenomenal shapes, within the phenomenal character of our visual experience of the table.

Another example of doubleness of phenomenal size is found in a much-discussed case described by Christopher Peacocke (1983) that involves looking at two trees of the same size that are located at different locations along a road.

Your experience represents these objects as being of the same physical height and other dimensions… Yet there is also a sense in which the nearer tree occupies more of your visual field than the more distant tree. (p. 12)

As you might imagine, Peacocke’s claim that, in addition to being aware of the physical trees, we are also aware of regions of a ‘visual field’ is controversial.[[4]](#footnote-4) Many, however, would be happy to accept the more general claim that this visual experience involves a doubleness of phenomenal sizes; many would be happy to accept the claim that, if we were placed in this situation, we would be experientially aware of the trees as each being roughly the same size while also being experientially aware of the closer tree (or of something associated with the closer tree) as being larger than the farther tree.

A final illustration involves the notorious tilted penny. For our purposes, what’s important about this penny isn’t the (contentious) role that it played in supporting the sense-datum theory.[[5]](#footnote-5) Instead, what’s important about this case is that it involves an experiential awareness of a doubleness of shape. Tilt a penny, look at it, and consider the shape that you experience. In doing this, many would claim that you would be experientially aware of circularity and of ellipticality—both phenomenal shapes would be present within the phenomenal character of your experience.

 It will be convenient to have a name for the shapes and sizes, described above, that are seemingly distinct from the intrinsic shapes/sizes of the everyday objects. The choice of this name is not trivial. Calling them ‘appearance properties’, for instance, implies that they are mind-dependent properties. Calling them ‘perceiver-relative properties’, in turn, implies that they are relational properties obtaining between objects and perceivers. To avoid packing these or other unwanted connotations into the very name of these properties, I’ll adopt a completely neutral name and call them ‘β-shapes’ and ‘β-sizes’.

 Although the idea that visual experience involves an experiential doubleness of the sort described above has been popular among philosophers, there are dissenting opinions. Some, for instance, think that we do not experience β-shapes and β-sizes at all—they claim that there are no phenomenal shapes/sizes of this type within the phenomenal character of our visual experiences.[[6]](#footnote-6) At the other end of the spectrum are some defenders of the sense-datum theory who hold that we experience only β-shapes and β-sizes and that, on the basis of these experiences, we make inferences about the intrinsic shapes and sizes of the everyday physical objects that are before our eyes.[[7]](#footnote-7) And even among those who think that we have experiential awareness of both the intrinsic shapes/sizes of everyday objects and β-shapes/β-sizes, there are some who think that we cannot be simultaneously aware of both kinds of shapes/sizes.[[8]](#footnote-8)

 Despite these forms of dissent, I am going to simply assume, without argument, that the popular claim that there is an experiential doubleness of shape and size within visual experience is correct; I’m going to assume that the many philosophers drawn to this claim are not in the grip of a false picture of experience. The point of this paper is to unpack the nature of this experiential doubleness. In doing so, I want to focus upon a general trend in how philosophers have analyzed about this experiential doubleness: a trend that involves positing that our experiential awareness of the intrinsic shapes/sizes of everyday objects depends upon our experiential awareness of β-shapes and β-sizes.

There are a number of forms that this dependency could take and it can be difficult, sometimes, to decipher exactly what form (or forms) of dependence is operative within a given philosopher’s account of our visual experiences of β-shapes and β-sizes. To forestall any confusion on this score, let’s take a moment and quickly go over some of the forms that such a dependency could take. (This, in turn, will allow me to identify the particular form in which I’m interested.) One form is computational: it could be claimed that visual representations of the intrinsic shapes and sizes of everyday objects are the end product of a computational process that, in its earlier stages, makes use of representations of β-shapes and β-sizes (whatever the latter properties may be). Another form that the dependency could take is epistemological: it could be claimed that the justification for believing that an everyday object has a particular intrinsic shape or size stems from the perceptual justification we posses for thinking that it has a certain β-shape or β-size.[[9]](#footnote-9) In contrast to these first two forms, the kind of dependency that I want to focus upon is *phenomenological*: I want to focus upon the claim that the phenomenology associated with our experiential awareness of the intrinsic shapes/sizes of everyday objects depends upon the phenomenology associated with our experiential awareness of various β-shapes/β-sizes.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Let’s unpack the notion of ‘phenomenological dependence’ a bit more slowly.[[11]](#footnote-11) We can describe the phenomenal character of a visual experience as being made up of various ‘phenomenal features’—the phenomenal character of my visual experience of a red apple, for instance, is made up of a phenomenal color, a phenomenal shape, a phenomenal size, and other phenomenal features. The kind of phenomenological dependence that I’m talking about obtains between various phenomenal features within the phenomenal character of a visual experience: it holds between the types of phenomenal shapes (and between the types of phenomenal sizes) described above. Consider, for instance, the phenomenal character of an experience of looking at a tilted penny. The idea is that what it’s like to experience the intrinsic circularity of the penny is determined, at least in part, by what it’s like to experience β-ellipticality. The former phenomenal shape is the way it is, at least in part, because of how the latter phenomenal shape is.

A number of recent accounts endorse this claim of phenomenological dependency. Consider, for example, the Representationalist account of experiences of β-properties given by William Lycan (1996a, b, c). Lycan maintains that visual experiences are ‘layered’ in that they make representational claims about multiple objects: the everyday objects that typically populate our environment (tables, trees, pennies, etc.) as well as various flat (mind-independent) ‘colored shapes’.[[12]](#footnote-12) According to Lycan, these layers of representational content are what produce the experiential doubleness of shapes (and of sizes) within our visual experiences. In the case of Peacocke’s trees, for instance, some of the phenomenal shapes and sizes are the result of the representation of the intrinsic shapes and sizes of the trees, while others are the result of the representation of the shapes and sizes of the aforementioned ‘colored shapes’. Especially important, given our purposes, is Lycan’s claim that these layers of representational content *depend* upon one another:

We do visually represent the trees, and represent them as being the same size, etc., but we do this *by* representing colored shapes and relations between them. Some of the shapes—in particular those corresponding to the trees—are represented as being larger shapes than others, as occluding others, as so forth. (Lycan, 1996a, p. 152, his emphasis)

In virtue of Lycan’s Representationalism, this hierarchical relation between representational contents translates into a hierarchical relation between phenomenal properties. He’s asserting that what it’s like to experience (represent) the intrinsic sizes of the trees is determined, at least in part, by what it’s like to experience (represent) the β-sizes of two colored shapes; the former phenomenal sizes are the way they are, in part, because of how the latter phenomenal sizes are.

Lycan claims β-shapes and β-sizes are intrinsic (or monadic) properties of mind-independent ‘colored shapes’ and that phenomenal β-shapes and β-sizes, in turn, are determined by our visual representations of those properties. Alva Noë (2004), in contrast, maintains that β-shapes and β-sizes are relational properties: the β-shape of a tilted penny, for instance, is ‘the shape of the patch needed to occlude the object on a plane perpendicular to the line of sight’ (p. 83).[[13]](#footnote-13) Despite this difference, Noë occupies a position similar to Lycan’s when it comes to the phenomenological dependence between our experiential awareness of the intrinsic shapes and sizes of everyday objects and our experiential awareness of β-shapes and β-sizes.[[14]](#footnote-14) Consider, for instance, the following passage in which Noë (2004, p. 81) describes the role that phenomenal β-properties (which he calls ‘appearances’) play relative to our experiences of everyday objects.

Looks, sounds, feels—appearances generally—are perceptually basic. They are the basis of our perceptual understanding of the world. Perception has two aspects or moments: We find out about appearances, and in finding out about appearances we find out about (come into contact with) the world.

If we assume that Noë’s language of ‘finding out’ about something and ‘coming into contact’ with it are synonyms for having an experiential awareness of that thing, then it’s easy to read him as claiming that we experience everyday objects (and their properties) *by* experiencing their β-properties: your experiential awareness of the tilted penny’s circularity is the way it is, at least in part, in virtue of your experiential awareness of its β-ellipticality.

As a final example, let’s turn to the account of our visual experiences of β-properties offered by Benj Hellie (2006). In addition to representing the intrinsic features of external objects, Hellie maintains that visual experiences also represent ‘proximal qualities’. When you look at a tilted penny, for example, your experience represents the penny as circular (a distal property) while also representing proximal ellipticality.[[15]](#footnote-15) With regard to the relationship between these phenomenal shapes, Hellie invokes Richard Wollheim’s (1980, 2003) notion of ‘seeing-in’ and maintains that we see distal qualities *in* proximal qualities, in a manner similar to how, according to Wollheim, we see an object *in* a painting.

I think this appeal to seeing-in commits Hellie to the kind of phenomenological dependency that I identified in the positions of Lycan and Noë. To see why, we need to take a step back from Hellie and examine Wollheim’s notion of ‘seeing-in’ in more detail. Wollheim describes this as a *sui generis* experience involving a ‘phenomenological twofoldness’ where the subject simultaneously experiences both the canvas and the (depicted) object, but does so in a way that does not engender the illusion that the (depicted) object is actually before her eyes. What’s important about this, for our purposes, is that in experiences of seeing-in our phenomenal experience of the (depicted) object is constrained in certain ways by our phenomenal experience of the canvas. If, for example, you see a boat in a painting, you can’t, while still focusing upon the same region of colored marks on the canvas, suddenly make yourself see a womanin the painting instead. This is because your experiential awareness of various properties of the (depicted) boat rides piggyback upon your experiential awareness of various properties of the canvas. More specifically, your experiential awareness of shapes and sizes of colored blobs upon the canvas constrains your experiential awareness of shapes and sizes of things on the boat (and of the boat itself). Your experience of the shape of the hull of boat is the way it is, at least in part, because of what your experience of the shape of a colored blob on the canvas is like; if that blob had a radically different shape—if your experience of it were radically different—then you may not be able to still see a boat in that painting.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Under this reading of seeing-in, the phenomenal shapes and sizes present in our experience of the depicted object are they way they are, in part, because of what the phenomenal shapes and sizes of our experience of various regions of the canvas are like. Since Hellie is carrying Wollheim’s phenomenological characterization of seeing-in over into his account of our experiences of β-shapes and β-sizes, I think this means he is embracing the claim of phenomenological dependence.[[17]](#footnote-17) If, as Hellie claims, we experience the circularity of the penny by seeingit in β-ellipticality, then the experiential awareness of the latter should constrain the experiential awareness of the former in a manner similar to how the experiential awareness of features of the canvas constrains the experiential awareness of features of the object depicted by that canvas.

I’ve argued that the accounts of Lycan, Noë, and Hellie embrace the claim that there is dependence between various types of phenomenal shapes (and various types of phenomenal sizes) within our visual experiences. As I mentioned earlier, this idea is not universally held among philosophers who posit that our visual experiences involve an experiential doubleness of shapes/sizes. Despite this, I’m going to assume that Lycan, Noë, and Hellie are correct in acting as though there is a phenomenological dependency obtaining between the various types of phenomenal shapes (and various types of phenomenal sizes) within the phenomenal character of visual experience. But I don’t think they got the nature of this dependency right; although there is a dependency among the phenomenal shapes (and phenomenal sizes) of our experiences, I maintain that it’s *the reverse* of what their accounts say: my experiential awareness of β-shapes and β-sizes depends upon my experiential awareness of the intrinsic shapes and sizes of everyday objects.

In Schroer, 2008 I sketched an account of our experiences of β-properties where this phenomenological dependence was reversed relative to the way that Lycan, Noë, Hellie, and others typically analyze it. The core idea of this account was to treat our experiences of β-properties as being the result of ‘reversed seeing-in’: unlike Hellie, who maintains that we see the intrinsic shapes and sizes of everyday objects in their β-shapes and β-sizes, I maintained that we see β-shapes and β-sizes in the intrinsic shapes and sizes of everyday objects. I combined this idea with Kendall Walton’s (1990, 1992, 2002) account of the mechanism of seeing-in, which analyzes that notion in terms of an act of imagination. The resultant position analyzes the experience of β-shapes and β-sizes in terms of an act of imagination that is parasiticupon a visual experience of an everyday object and its intrinsic shape and size.

I know of only one other account that embraces this kind of ‘reversed’ phenomenological dependency: an account advanced by Robert Briscoe (2008) that argues that an experience of β-properties is the result of an act of imagination or ‘make-perceive’. In his original presentation of this idea, Briscoe had a relatively narrow focus: he was primarily concerned to cast doubt upon Alva Noë’s (2004) account of β-properties and upon Noë account of shape perception more generally. In my original presentation of the same basic approach, I also had a relatively narrow focus: I was focused on exploring similarities between the kind of phenomenological doubleness that is present when seeing an object in a painting (as Wollheim describes the phenomenon) and the kind of phenomenological doubleness of shape that is present when looking at a tilted penny. It’s time for a more general discussion of this account of our visual experiences of β-properties, an discussion that lays position out in more detail and shows how some of the things that make it unique relative to other theories also provide it with useful resources for tackling some of the important issues that have arisen in the recent literature on our visual experiences of β-properties.

**2. The Reversed Seeing-In Account Of Experiences Of β-Shapes and β-Sizes**

I think the phenomenal β-shapes and phenomenal β-sizes of our visual experiences are the way they are, at least in part, because of how other phenomenal shapes and phenomenal sizes of those experiences are. In this section, I lay out a theory that explains why the phenomenology of these experiences is the way that I claim that it is. As I mentioned earlier, this account invokes Wollheim’s notion of seeing-in. Unlike Wollheim, however, I don’t think that the phenomenological twofoldness of seeing-in is *sui generis* and unanalyzable. Instead, I follow the lead of Kendall Walton (1990, 1992, 2002) in maintaining that the phenomenological twofoldness of seeing-in is the result of an act of imagination.

An appeal to imagination in this context may seem questionable. When I have the experience of seeing a boat in a painting, for instance, it’s not like I first experience a painting and then close my eyes and subsequently imagine a boat. Nor do I see the painting and, while keeping my eyes open, simply imagine that there is also a boat somewhere before my eyes. Considerations such as these can lead to doubts about whether there is any useful analysis to be had in terms of using imagination to explain the phenomenology of seeing-in; as Anthony Savile puts the concern, ‘There is a world of difference between being brought to imagine something by seeing this mark or that and being brought to *see something in a picture* by seeing this mark or that’ (1986, p. 21, my emphasis).

In response to these concerns like these, Walton focuses upon a specific form of imagination: a communal (often spontaneous) act of imagination that is guided and given substance by a canvas. When seeing a boat in a painting, we imagine, from ‘the inside’, that our current visual examination of the canvas is a visual examination of a boat. Unlike the previously described acts of imagination, in this act of imagination our imagined visual examination of the boat rides piggyback upon an actual visual examination of the canvas. As a result, not only does the canvas prompt us to imagine a boat, our experience of the canvas also guides and gives substance to that act of imagination. The (experienced) blue regions of the painting, for instance, are imagined to be (experienced) regions of water. When our attention is drawn to a small, white region of the canvas, we imagine that our attention is being drawn to a sailboat upon the open water. When we have trouble discerning the particular details of that region of the canvas, we imagine that we are having trouble discerning the particular details of a sailboat far away in the distance. And so on.

Walton claims that the similarities between a visual examination of a painting and a visual examination of an actual boat—similarities both in what you are experientially aware of and in the processby which you become experientially aware of it—make this act of imagination ‘vivid’ in that they ‘allow(s) for the fictional performance of a large variety of visual actions by virtue of actually performing visual actions vis à vis the work’ (Walton 1990, p. 296).[[18]](#footnote-18) If it is vivid enough, the act of imagination will fuse with the visual experience of the painting and, as a result, you will experience both the painting and the boat within a single experience. More specifically, you will see the boat *in* the painting—you will undergo an experience that exhibits the phenomenological twofoldness described by Wollheim.[[19]](#footnote-19)

To give rise to the phenomenological twofoldness of seeing-in, the requisite act of imagination needs to be sufficiently vivid. I cannot, for instance, see my dog Fitz in a Jackson Pollock painting, for such a painting will not lend itself to supporting the kind of act of vivid imagination described above. (This is how Walton accommodates the claim, noted in the previous section, that our experience of the canvas constrains what we can see in it.) It is also important to note that when performing these vivid acts of imagination, we still continue to visually experience the canvas as a flat surface that is distinct from the (depicted) object.[[20]](#footnote-20) To put it another way, in cases of seeing-in it’s not as if the canvas disappears from the phenomenology of the subsequent act of imagination.[[21]](#footnote-21) Indeed, the act of imagination inherits some of its phenomenology from the phenomenology of one’s visual experience of the canvas: my visual experience of a white blob on the canvas plays a role, and is present in, my act of imagining that I am looking at a sailboat in the distance. This, in turn, explains the doublenessof phenomenal shapes/sizes present in experiences of seeing-in: some of these experienced shapes and sizes are experienced shapes and sizes of regions on the canvas that I am visually experiencing, while others are experienced shapes and sizes of the depicted object that I am imagining.

Earlier, I mentioned that Wollheim characterizes seeing-in as involving an experience where the (depicted) object is experienced in a way that does not lead the subject to suffer the illusion that it is actually before the eyes. There are a couple of ways that Walton-style account of seeing-in could provide an explanation for why the subject doesn’t suffer this illusion.[[22]](#footnote-22) Best that I can tell, Walton’s own explanation for why subjects don’t suffer this illusion is that they know they are (merely) imagining the (depicted) object.[[23]](#footnote-23) As Kulvicki (2014, p. 80) puts it, Walton seems to maintain that the process of imagination, or make-believe, is ‘self-conscious’.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Here’s an alternative explanation for why, under a Walton-style account, subjects don’t suffer the illusion that the (depicted) object is actually before the eyes. (I leave it to the reader to decide which of these explanations is preferable.) This explanation focuses on the experienced connectionbetween features of the canvas and features of the (depicted) object. Let’s return to the example of seeing a boat in a painting. As we’ve seen, your (imaginary) visual examination of various features of the boat is guided and given substance by your (actual) visual examination of various features of the canvas. This is why many of the phenomenal features associated with the boat (its phenomenal color, its phenomenal shape, its phenomenal size, etc.) seem connected to phenomenal features associated with regions of the canvas. In noticing this connection, you are noticing that your (imaginary) visual examination of the boat and its color, shape, size, etc. is derivative upon or facilitated by your (actual) visual examination of the shape, size, color, etc. of a region the canvas. This, in turn, is why you do not suffer the illusion that the sailboat you are experiencing is actually before your eyes.

In considering this second account of why subjects don’t suffer the illusion that the (depicted) object is actually before their eyes, it’s important to distinguish *the evidence* that one possesses for thinking that one’s (imaginary) visual examination of the (depicted) boat is derivative upon one’s (actual) visual examination of the canvas from the issue of whether one *epistemically notices* this evidence or not. The evidence is available (and, in principle, noticeable) whenever the relevant act of imagination takes place, for the act of imagination is what phenomenologically connects the (actual) visual examination of the canvas to the (imagined) visual examination of the boat. But whether the subject actually notices this phenomenological connection or not is a separate issue. Recall that Walton allows that sometimes the act of imagination is spontaneous. In a case like this, it’s not inconceivable that although the various types of phenomenal shapes present in an experience of seeing-in are phenomenologically connected to one another, the subject doesn’t take notice of this connection. In virtue of not noticing the connection, she could end up mistakenly believing that the depicted object it actually before her eyes. (Although, of course, she may have other, non-phenomenological reasons, for doubting this belief.)

Regardless of which of these explanations you accept, it seems that a Walton-style account can explain several significant features of the phenomenology of seeing-in: it can explain the doubleness of phenomenal shapes and phenomenal sizes within experiences of seeing-in; it can explain the nature of the connection (or dependency) between the relevant phenomenal shapes (and between the relevant phenomenal sizes); and it can explain, in one way or another, why, when subjects undergo experience with this kind of phenomenology, they do not suffer the illusion that the (depicted) object is actually before their eyes. Although other theories occasionally address some of these aspects of the phenomenology of seeing-in, none that I’m aware of provides such a straightforward explanation of all three.

To illustrate this last point, let’s briefly explore some other accounts of seeing-in while paying attention to what they say about the previously mentioned aspects of the phenomenology of this experience. It is a common strategy of visual psychologists to attempt to explain the experiential doubleness of shapes/sizes present in cases of seeing-in in virtue of the visual system trying to deal with retinal input that could be interpreted in multiple ways. Rainer Mausfeld (2003), for instance, claims that such doublenesses result from ‘conjoint representations’ that arise when a sensory input simultaneously triggers two or more antagonistically related representational primitives.[[25]](#footnote-25) Although Mausfeld says that these conjoint representations are ‘interlocked’ with one another in that they both exploit the same sensory input, there’s no indication that he thinks there is a dependence between the phenomenal shapes (or phenomenal sizes) within these experiences. Nor is there any discussion in his account that is relevant to the question of what it is about our experience of the (depicted) object that leads us to not suffer the illusion that it is actually before our eyes. As a result, Mausfeld’s account leaves significant elements of the phenomenology of seeing-in unexplained.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Along the same general lines as Mausfeld, Reinhard Niederée and Dieter Heyer (2003) claim that when confronted with ambiguous input, the visual system will sometimes preserve the ambiguity in its subsequent representations (as opposed to eliminating all ambiguity in favor of a single, consistent scene). Unlike Mausfeld, Niederée and Heyer assert that when the visual system preserves ambiguity in the kinds of cases we’re talking about, the result involves a phenomenological connection between the elements that give rise to an experiential doubleness—‘…the spatial and the planar aspects do not simply coexist in parallel but are related to one another. They are experienced as a perceptual unit’ (p. 82). What they don’t say, however, is that this relation involves a *dependence* of some phenomenal features upon other phenomenal features. Nor do they explain what it is about this relation, or about seeing-in more generally, that leads to the subject to not suffer the illusion that the (depicted) object is actually before the eyes. In this manner, their account also leaves significant aspects of the phenomenology of seeing-in unexplained.

As we’ve seen, the thing that does the lion’s share of the explanatory work in Walton’s account of the phenomenology of seeing-in is an act of imagination. Because of this, there is a sense in which seeing-in does not qualify as a ‘pure experience’ (given a narrow reading of ‘experience’ under which acts of imagination do not qualify as experiences).[[27]](#footnote-27) This does not strike me as anything to worry about. Whether the mental state Walton describes deserves, under some description, the name of ‘pure experience’ shouldn’t matter; instead, what should matter is whether his account does justice to the phenomenology of seeing-in. I believe it does.[[28]](#footnote-28)

With Walton’s account of the psychological mechanism of seeing-in in hand, let’s return to the key claim of my account of visual experiences of β-shapes/β-sizes: namely, that our experiential awareness of such β-properties depends upon our experiential awareness of everyday objects and their intrinsic shapes/sizes. I think that the psychological mechanism that Walton posits to explain the phenomenological twofoldness of seeing-in is also capable of explaining the kind of phenomenological dependence that I’m talking about. In ‘regular’ cases of seeing-in, you see a three-dimensional object in a flat, marked surface (the canvas) by imagining that your visual examination of that flat surface is a visual examination of a three-dimensional object. *Nothing prevents you, however, from doing the reverse*. Nothing prevents you from imagining, while looking at a three-dimensional object, that your visual examination of that three-dimensional object is a visual examination of some kind of flat surface, perpendicular to the line of sight, with an image (or marks) upon it. There are different ways that you might go about imagining this flat surface: you could imagine that your visual examination of a three-dimensional object is a visual examination of a *painting* that depicts the object you are currently looking at, a *photograph* of that object, a *mirror* reflecting that object, a *reflective surface* reflecting that object, or any number of other flat surfaces that, in some way or another, depict or represent the three-dimensional object in question. To keep things simple on this front, I’ll use ‘flat, marked surface’ in lieu of describing these more specific alternatives in what follows.[[29]](#footnote-29)

When you experience β-sizes and β-shapes, I think you are performing the act of imagination described above. In experiencing various β-sizes/β-shapes while looking at Hume’s table, Peacocke’s trees, or a tilted penny, you are seeing flat, marked surfaces ina table, two trees, or a tilted penny. For lack of a better name, I’ll call this the ‘reversed seeing-in account’. The first question to address, in evaluating this account, is whether it’s actually possible to ‘reverse’ the act of imagination that Walton describes as being at the heart of seeing-in. As we’ve seen, not every act of imagination is capable of giving rise to the phenomenological twofoldness of seeing-in; only those that involve vividly imagining of your visual examination of a canvas that it is a visual examination of the object depicted by that canvas will do so. So are the ‘reversed’ acts of imagination that I described above—acts where you imagine seeing a flat, marked surface in a three-dimensional object—vivid enough to generate a ‘reversed’ phenomenological twofoldness where our experiential awareness of various β-shapes/β-sizes depends upon our experiential awareness of the intrinsic shapes/sizes of everyday objects?

I think they are. Recall that the vividness of an experience of seeing an object in a painting is determined by the commonalities between the actual visual examination you are performing of the painting and the visual examination you would be performing if you were seeing the object depicted by that painting. The experience of seeing a boat in a canvas, for instance, is vivid in virtue of the commonalities between your actual visual examination of the painting and the visual examination you wouldbe performing if you were seeing a boat. Notice that the commonalities between these two visual examinations—one of a canvas, the other of a boat—would also make the act of imagining of an actual visual examination of a boat that it is a visual examination of a flat surface marked with a boat vivid. For just as you can imagine of your visual examination of the blue regions of the canvas that it is a visual examination of open water, you can also imagine of your visual examination of regions of open water that it is a visual examination of blue regions of a flat, marked surface.

The lesson from the previous example quickly generalizes: whenever it is possible to vividly imagine of one’s actual visual examination of a flat, marked surface that it is visual examination of some object, it will also be possible to vividly imagine of one’s actual visual examination of that object that it is a visual examination of the aforementioned flat, marked surface. With this in mind, let’s return one of the central cases of this paper: the tilted penny. If you can see a tilted penny in a canvas that is marked with an elliptical shape, then surely you can also see a flat surface marked with an elliptical shape in a tilted penny, for the things that make the first act of imagination sufficiently vivid to give rise to the state of seeing-in will also make the second act of imagination sufficiently vivid to give rise to the state of reversed seeing-in. The same holds true of Hume’s table and Peacocke’s trees.

Since I’m claiming the same psychological mechanism is at work in both our experiences of various β-shapes/β-sizes and our experiences of seeing-in, the reversed seeing-in account implies that there will be important similarities between the phenomenology of seeing an object in a painting and the phenomenology of experiencing various β-properties while looking at an everyday object. I will end this discussion of the reversed seeing-in account by pointing out some of these similarities and emphasizing how the mechanism of imagination, described by Walton, explains them.

In the case of ‘regular’ seeing-in, if you vividly imagine of your visual examination of a canvas marked with an ellipse that it is a visual examination of a tilted penny, this act of imagination will fuse with the experience of the canvas and, as a result, you will experience both the canvas marked with an ellipse and a tilted, circular penny. In short, there will be a doubleness of phenomenal shape. Similarly, in the case of ‘reversed’ seeing-in, if you vividly imagine of your visual examination of a tilted penny that it is a visual examination of a flat surface marked with an ellipse, this act of imagination will fuse with the experience of the tilted penny and, as a result, you will experience both the tilted, circular penny and a flat surface marked with an ellipse (or some comparable flat, marked surface). Once again, there will be doubleness of phenomenal shapes.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The reversed seeing-in account also maintains that there will be a *dependency* between phenomenal shapes/sizes associated with the relevant three-dimensional objects and phenomenal β-shapes/β-sizes. In the case of ‘regular’ seeing-in, this phenomenological dependency arises because your (imaginary) visual examination of shapes and sizes connected to the (depicted) object is guided and given substance by your (actual) visual examination of various shapes and sizes upon the canvas. Similarly, when you seeing ellipticality in a tilted penny, there will be a phenomenology dependency between phenomenal shapes because your (imaginary) visual examination of a flat surface marked with an elliptical image is guided and given substance by your (actual) visual examination of a tilted, circular penny. As a result, phenomenal β-ellipticality will seem connected to the phenomenal circularity associated with the penny within the phenomenal character of your experience.

Finally, in cases of ‘regular’ seeing-in, you don’t suffer the illusion that the (depicted) object is actually before the eyes because you epistemically notice the kind of phenomenological connection described above. (Or because the act of imagination is ‘self-conscious’.) Similarly, when you see an ellipse in the titled penny, you don’t suffer the illusion that the elliptical image is actually before your eyes, for the same reason.

**3. Some Advantages Of The Reversed Seeing-In Account Relative To Other Accounts**

Now that we’ve seen how reversed seeing-in account analyzes the phenomenal character of our visual experiences of β-shapes/β-sizes, I will identify some additional advantages of the account. As you’ll see, these advantages flow from things that make this account of our experiences of β-shapes/β-sizes unique relative to other, competing accounts.

**3.1 The Phenomenological Directness Of Visual Experience**

The claim that visual experience makes us directly aware of everyday physical objects has received a lot of attention in other arenas of philosophy of perception.[[31]](#footnote-31) Recently, this claim has started to receive some attention within the literature on our experiences of β-properties as well. In this context, the claim of directness is not the claim that our visual experience of everyday physical objects is psychologically unmediated; as I am using the term, our visual experience can be ‘directly’ of everyday objects even if the psychological process of experiencing those objects involves a variety of intermediary representational states. Rather, the claim is meant to be phenomenological in that it concerns ‘what it’s like’ to have visual experiences of everyday objects.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The best way to get a grasp on what the claim of phenomenological directness is saying is by considering its use as an objection to the sense-datum theory of perception. According to some indirect realist versions of that theory, your phenomenal awareness of the external physical world is mediated in that it depends upon your acquaintance with sense data. Many have felt that such an account is unfaithful to what our experiences of the external physical world are actually like; they maintain that a visual experience of an everyday physical object does not seem to be mediated by an experiential awareness of something else (i.e. a sense datum) that is distinctfrom that everyday external object. When I look at Hume’s table, for example, I do not seem ‘walled off’, phenomenologically speaking, from the table in virtue of being experientially aware of something else that is distinct from that table.

So described, the claim of phenomenological directness appears to be in conflict with the claim of phenomenological dependence embraced by Lycan, Noë, Hellie, and others. According to Lycan’s account, for example, your visual experience represents the rectangular table by representing a trapezoidal ‘colored shape’. According to phenomenological directness, however, this is unfaithful to the actual phenomenology of your experience: your experiential awareness of the table (and its intrinsic shape) does not seem to be mediated by an experiential awareness of a ‘colored shape’, a region of Peacocke’s (1983) ‘visual field’, a sense datum, or anything other object that is distinct from the table itself.[[33]](#footnote-33)

In response to the apparent conflict between the claims of phenomenological dependence and phenomenological directness, some have claimed it’s possible to hold onto both as long as β-properties are treated as being relational properties.[[34]](#footnote-34) If, for instance, the β-shape you experience when looking at Hume’s table is a relational property obtaining between you and the table, and not a monadic property of some object that is distinct from the table, then your experiential awareness of the table will not be ‘walled off’ by an experiential awareness of some other, distinct object. Even though your experiential awareness of the table’s (intrinsic) rectangular shape depends upon the experiential awareness of its β-shape, your phenomenological experience of the table, qua external object, still counts as being ‘direct’.

The obvious problem with this suggestion is that there is a stronger interpretation of the claim of phenomenological directness that is not compatible with such a move. The stronger interpretation maintains that one’s experiential awareness of an object (and its intrinsic shape and size) is phenomenologically direct if and only if it is neither mediated by an experiential awareness of *another object* nor mediated by an experiential awareness *of another kind of shape or size property*—i.e. a shape or size property besides the intrinsic shape and size of the everyday object in question.[[35]](#footnote-35) This strengthened statement about phenomenological directness cannot be accommodated by any account that maintains that our experiential awareness of the intrinsic shapes/sizes of external objects phenomenologically depends upon our experiential awareness of β-shapes/β-sizes.

The reversed seeing-in account, in contrast, has no problem accommodating the stronger version of the claim of phenomenological directness. According to that account, our experiential awareness of β-shapes/β-sizes is the result of an act of imagination that is guided and given substance by a visual examination of the intrinsic shapes and sizes of everyday physical objects. Although this act of imagination results in ‘fused’ visual experiences that involve an experiential awareness of more than just everyday objects, our experiential awareness of those everyday objects remains ‘phenomenologically direct’ *in the strongest possible sense of that term*. This is because our experiential awareness of these objects and their intrinsic shapes and sizes does not depend our experiential awareness of any flat, marked surfaces. Instead, the reverse is true: the phenomenal features associated with our experiential awareness of these (imagined) flat, marked surfaces depends upon the phenomenal features associated with our experiential awareness of everyday physical objects and their intrinsic sizes/shapes. As a result, there are not other objects, nor are there other properties, mediating our experiential awareness of everyday objects and their intrinsic shapes/sizes.

**3.2 Schwitzgebel’s Challenge To Realism About Experiences Of β-Shapes/β-Sizes**

At the heart of the reversed seeing-in account is the claim that our experiential awareness of β-shapes/β-sizes is the result of an act of imagination. This appeal to imagination gives the reversed seeing-in account a further advantage relative to other accounts of our visual experiences of β-shapes/sizes: it gives it the necessary resources to overcome a recent challenge leveled by Eric Schwitzgebel against all Realist accounts of experiences of β-properties. Allow me to explain.

Most of the philosophers I have been discussing assume that we have an experiential awareness of β-properties. I will call these philosophers ‘Realists’ about β-property experiences. Many Realists about β-property experiences are also Realists about β-properties themselves—they think that the properties that our β-properties-experiences seem to make us aware of really are instantiated before our eyes. My account is somewhat atypical in that it is Realist about β-property experiences while not being Realist about the β-properties themselves—we only imagine such properties, they are not actually present before the eyes.

In this subsection, I focus upon Realism about β-property experience, and not Realism about β-properties more generally. There are some who deny that they have such experiences. When looking at a tilted penny, for instance, A.D. Smith (2002) claims that—

Such a penny (usually) looks just the way it is: round and *tilted away from you*. (p. 172, his emphasis)

Along the same lines, J.L. Austin (1962) asks—

Why should we say that there is anything we see which is flat and vertical, though not ‘part of the surface’ of any material object? (p. 28)

For expositional purposes, I’ll call philosophers like these ‘Irrealists about β-property experiences’ or ‘Irrealists’, for short.

Arguments between Realists and Irrealists about β-property experiences typically quickly devolve into table pounding over whether our visual experiences make us experientially aware of such properties. In an important (and charming) piece, Eric Schwitzgebel (2006) bucks this trend by providing a substantial argument in favor of Irrealism. The argument, in a nutshell, is that no Realist account of β-property experiences can accommodate allthe reports that people are prone to make about the various β-properties that they think they experience.

Consider, for example, the β-ellipticality that Realists claim to experience when looking at a tilted penny. One natural explanation for why we experience a β-ellipse (and not some other determinate β-shape) while looking at the tilted penny is because an ellipse is the shape you would get if you projected an outline of that penny onto a perpendicular plane located between the subject and the penny. The problem with this account is that it is incapable of accommodating Realist reports about the various β-properties we seem to experience when looking at othereveryday objects. If, for instance, we look at a string of streetlights that are all equal distance from the eyes, the lights from the side should project larger shapes on the above-described perpendicular plane than those that are straight ahead.[[36]](#footnote-36) Most Realists, however, would not describe the β-size of these lights in these terms; instead, most would say that the β-sizes of the lights to the side are experienced as being the same size as the β-sizes of the lights located straight-ahead. Of course, a Realist could attempt to accommodate these reports by claiming that the β-size we experience is the result of a projection onto a curved surface roughly centered on the eye, for the size of the projected images from the lights off to the side on such a surface would be the same as those that are directly front.[[37]](#footnote-37) The curved surface, however, fails to explain the β-ellipticality that Realists claim to experience in the tilted penny experience.

Considerations such as these make it seem like no Realist theory will be capable of accommodating all the reports people are prone to make about their experiences of β-properties; after all, what characteristics could the relevant plane/surface have that would allow it to accommodate both sets of reports described above? From this Schwitzgebel concludes that, in fact, we are not experientially aware of β-properties when looking at everyday objects and that the temptation to think so is a result of ‘over-analogizing’ the representational content of our visual experiences to the media of our time: namely, paintings and snapshots.

The reason Schwitzgebel’s argument has bite is because Realist accounts tend to be relatively inflexible in terms of how the particulars of our experiences of β-sizes and of β-shapes are determined. The reversed seeing-in account is an exception to this rule in that it maintains that our experiences of determinate β-sizes/β-shapes are a result of an act of imagination. As it turns out, there is some freedom in terms of what we can (vividly) imagine in this regard. As an illustration of this freedom, try conducting the following experiment. Take out a penny, tilt it, and look at it. According to the reversed seeing-in account your experience of the tilted penny’s β-size is the result of vividly imagining of your visual examination of the tilted penny that it is a visual examination of a flat surface marked with an ellipse (or something comparable). Go ahead and try imagining this while looking at the penny. Now, in a second act of imagination, imagine that the flat, marked surface that you are examining is *significantly closer to your face*. (Don’t move the actual penny closer to your face. Just imagine that the flat, marked surface is closer to your face.) This second act of imagination should be (approximately) as vivid as the first act, for both of these (imagined) visual examinations are guided and given substance by the same shifts of attention that take place in your actual visual examination of the penny, by the same information about color that is provided by your actual visual examination of the penny, and so on.[[38]](#footnote-38) As a result, in both cases the act of imagination will fuse with your visual experience of the penny and you will experience both a tilted penny and a flat surface marked with an elliptical shape. But in the second act of imagination, the ellipse you experience will be *smaller* (and closer to your face) than it was the first act.

There is an additional layer of flexibility within the reversed seeing-in account—a layer that affects our experience of β-shape, and not just our experience of β-size. Suppose that the penny you are looking at is tilted at a 45-degree angle with the bottom edge closer to you and the top edge farther away. If you imagine that your visual examination of this penny is a visual examination of the image it projects on a *perpendicular* surface located somewhere between yourself and the penny, this act of imagination will fuse with the original experience and you will experience β-ellipticality. But you could also imagine that your visual examination of the penny is a visual examination of the image it projects on a surface that is *tilted* *at the same angle as the penny*. This second act of imagination will be (approximately) as vivid as the first act of imagination, for both acts of imagination are guided and given substance by the same shifts of attention that take place in your actual visual examination of the penny, by the same information that is extracted from the penny, etc.[[39]](#footnote-39) In both cases, then, your act of imagination will fuse with your visual experience of the penny and you will experience both a tilted penny and a flat, marked surface. But in the second case, the shape on the surface will be circular, not elliptical. This phenomenon generalizes: by imagining surfaces tilted at various angles, you can experience a variety of different β-shapes while looking at the tilted penny.

This flexibility within the reversed seeing-in account gives the Realist the elbowroom necessary to handle Schwitzgebel’s problem cases. When looking at a tilted penny, we imagine that our visual examination of the penny is a visual examination of a projection of the penny upon a flatsurface perpendicular to the line of sight. As a result of this vivid act of imagination fusing with our experience of the penny, we come to experience β-ellipticality. When looking at the streetlights, however, we imagine that our visual examination of those lights is a visual examination of a projection they make upon a spherical surface centered upon the eyes.[[40]](#footnote-40) As a result of this vivid act of imagination fusing with our experience of the streetlights, we come to experience a series of β-sizes, all of which are the same size. Problem solved.

At this point, a follow-up question may arise: given the aforementioned flexibility in the reversed seeing-in account, why is it that we *typically* end up imagining a projected image upon a perpendicular surface? To answer this question, I need only borrow an element of Schwitzgebel’s own account: what we imagine tends to be shaped, either consciously or unconsciously, by the media of our time. Living in the age of paintings and snapshot influences us to imagine (sometimes spontaneously) that our visual examinations of everyday objects are visual examinations of flat, marked surfaces. But, and this is the important part, we are *not limited* to imagining projections that everyday objects make upon flat planes.

**4. Conclusion**

The reversed seeing-in account is a new theory of our visual experiences of β-sizes and β-shapes. This theory has some substantial advantages relative to other competing theories Realist theories of such experiences. First, it offers a detailed and satisfying analysis of the phenomenology of our experiences of β-size and β-shapes. Second, in virtue of reversing the assumption that our experiential awareness of everyday objects (and their intrinsic sizes and shapes) is dependent upon our experiential awareness of β-size and β-shapes, the reversed seeing-in account occupies a desirable position with regard to the issue of the phenomenological directness of our visual experiences of everyday objects. Third, in virtue of maintaining that our experiential awareness of β-properties is the result of an act of imagination and that there is some flexibility in terms of what we can vividly imagine, the reversed seeing-in account also has the resources to handle Schwitzgebel’s recent Irrealist argument against the existence of experiences of β-properties. In virtue of these substantial (and relatively unique) advantages, the reversed seeing-in account should he viewed as a serious contender among Realist accounts of β-property experiences.

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2. Some wish to extend this idea to the case of color and claim that our experience of a colored object in unusual lighting conditions involves a doubleness of color or color-like properties. In this paper, however, I will focus exclusively on the experiential doubleness of shape and size; the case of color brings with it additional debates and controversies that I wish to avoid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I’m only using this passage from Hume to provide an example of the kind of experiential doubleness of shapes and sizes that is the topic of this paper. I will not be discussing how Hume uses this phenomenon to support the particular theory of perception that he favors. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For some criticisms of this claim, see Lycan, 1996a; Clark, 1996 and 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a sample of the many discussions of the tilted penny in the context of motivating the sense-datum theory, see Russell, 1912; Broad, 1925; Ayer, 1940. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See, for instance, J.L. Austin, 1962; A.D. Smith, 2002. In a later section of this paper*,* I’ll examine a recent argument from Eric Schwitzgebel (2006) in favor of this claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. I find it easy to read Russell, 1912 this way. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See, for instance, Kelly, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A different version of the epistemic dependence claim is advanced by Schellenberg (2008), who maintains that there is an ‘asymmetric epistemic dependence’ between representations of the intrinsic shapes/sizes of everyday objects and representations of β-properties in that defeating evidence against a representation of β-properties serves as defeating evidence against a representation of an object’s intrinsic shape/size, but not vice versa. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. I will leave the question of whether this phenomenological dependency results in, or is the result of, either a computational or an epistemological dependency for another day. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. I want to thank an anonymous referee for pressing me for additional information about the nature of the phenomenological dependence in question. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. According to Lycan, this second layer of content is typically false—when you look at the tilted penny, for example, there is not an actual mind-independent colored elliptical shape before your eyes. For a discussion of a case where this layer of content ends up being veridical, see Lycan’s (1996a) discussion of the peep-box. For another take on what’s happening in the case of the peep-box, see Clark, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For a similar proposal, see Armstrong, 1961, pp. 12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Unlike Lycan, Noë defends an ‘enactive’ account where our perception of an everyday object’s intrinsic shape and size is rooted in our implicit understanding of how its ‘appearances’ (its β-shapes/sizes, understood as relational properties) would change in accordance with our movement relative to that object. None of this important, however, given the current context. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. According to Hellie, you do not experience proximal ellipticality as being a property of the penny. In fact, he maintains that proximal properties are not experienced as being external or internal. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. I’m not alone in focusing on shapes and sizes in the context of explaining how a painting constrains what you can see in it. Robert Hopkins (1995), for instance, maintains that in order to see an object in a painting, one must see the object as resembling the painting (or the relevant colored region of it) in ‘outline shape’. This, in turn, means that the ‘outline shape’ of the relevant region of the canvas constrains what you can see in it. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. One interesting difference between Wollheim and Hellie is that under Hellie’s account, seeing the intrinsic shapes and sizes of everyday objects in β-shapes and β-sizes results in a situation where we will end up believing that those everyday objects are actually before our eyes. Wollheim, in contrast, maintains that when we see an object in a painting, we do not believe that the object is actually before our eyes. Although I think this difference is significant and diminishes the extent to which we can understand what Hellie is describing as being an instance of ‘seeing-in’, I will not pursue the complaint here. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. If this act of imagination is performed spontaneously, that will also increase its vividness. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In giving this example of a painting of a boat, I have acted as though the painting in question is naturalistic (or realistic). Walton (1990, pp. 315-328) discusses how other styles of painting may impact the vividness of the relevant act of imagination and thereby impact what the subject can see in those paintings. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Wollheim maintains that you can see the depicted object in front of or behind the canvas, as the case may be. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. In cases where the subject lacks any visual experience of the canvas as a canvas—i.e. cases involving a trompe l’oeil—there is no ‘seeing-in’ or phenomenological twofoldness present. In these cases, there would just be a phenomenal experience of the depicted object. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. I want to thank an anonymous referee for encouraging me to dig deeper on this issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See, for instance, the discussion in Walton, 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. One concern with this is that Walton also includes dreaming as a species of imagination. It seems unlikely that in dreaming we know that we are merely imagining things; it seems unlikely that dreaming is always ‘self-conscious’. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. These representational primitives, in turn, are what elicit the internal representation of the scene before the eyes. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Perhaps this is to be expected, for Mausfeld makes it clear in a footnote (ft.nt. 4, p. 57) that he believes that phenomenological observations should not occupy a place of prominence in theorizing about the psychological mechanism that gives rise to these kinds of experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The accounts of Mausfeld (2003) and of Niederée and Heyer (2003), in contrast, do seem to treat seeing-in as a ‘pure experience’ or a purely perceptual phenomenon. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For expositional simplicity, I will continue to call the mental state of seeing-in an ‘experience’. This means you should read ‘experience’ in the broad sense of meaning ‘conscious state’ and not in a more restricted sense that distinguishes experience from imagination. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. I want to thank an anonymous referee for bringing my attention to the diversity of options for what one might be imagining in these cases. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. What’s more, in cases of reversed seeing-in, one will experience the flat, marked canvas as being either in front of, or behind, the everyday object, just as Wollheim maintains that one can see the (depicted) object in front of, or behind, the canvas. I will revisit to the topic of where we experience the flat, marked surface to be in the next section. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. For particularly influential statements of the idea see Strawson, 1979; Harman, 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For more on the distinction between phenomenological and psychological directness, see Foster, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. According to Jackson’s (1977) well-known interpretation of ‘direct perception’, your visual awareness of an object is indirect if it obtains in virtue of seeing something else, including something that is a (proper) part of that very object. As a result, we cannot (under Jackson’s interpretation) be directly aware of three-dimensional objects because we experience such objects in virtue of being aware of a (proper) part of them: namely, their facing surfaces. The interpretation of phenomenological directness that I’m providing in the text, in contrast, allows that you could directly perceive a three-dimensional object as long as your doing so does not involve perceiving an object that is completely distinctfrom that object. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See, for instance, Noë, 2004, p. 85; Schellenberg, 2008, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The point about there being a stronger version of the claim is also made in Cohen, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. The rays of light coming from the lights off to the side would cross the plane obliquely and, as a result, should leave a larger image on that plane. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. For an example of a Realist who says something close to this, see Peacocke, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. If the first act of imagination arose spontaneously while the second act required a conscious intention to imagine, then that might make the second act a little less vivid than the first. But this shouldn’t matter much for the purposes of my argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. In fact, there is a reason for thinking that the second act of imagination will actually be more vividthan the first act, a reason having to do with your experience of the ‘relative depth’ of the edges of the penny. The fact that your actual visual examination of the penny is a visual examination of a surface whose bottom edge is closer to you than its top edgecan help guide and give substance to the act of imagining that you are visually examining a flat, marked surface whose bottom edge is closer to you than its top edge. In contrast, this information about relative depth must be ignored in the case where you imagine your visual examination of the penny is a visual examination of a flat, marked surface image that is perpendicular to the line of sight. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Another potential response to the streetlights case is to claim that we do not undergo any act of imagination and, as a result, only experience the intrinsic sizes of the lights themselves. (In this case, there would be no phenomenological connection between the properties of the streetlights and the properties of an (imagined) surface for the subject to epistemically note, for the act of imagination that creates this connection would be absent.) To put the point more generally: there is nothing in the reversed seeing-in account that mandates that we always undertake an act of imagination when visually examining everyday objects. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)