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Everything is clear: All perceptual experiences are transparent

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Abstract

The idea that perceptual experience is transparent is generally used by naïve realists and externalist representationalists to promote an externalist account of the metaphysics of perceptual experience. It is claimed that the phenomenal character of our perceptual experience can be explained solely with reference to the externally located objects and properties which (for the representationalist) we represent, or which (for the naïve realist) partly constitute our experience. Internalist qualia theorists deny this and claim that the phenomenal character of our perceptual experience is internally constituted. However, my concern in this paper is not with the metaphysical debate but with transparency as a *phenomenological* feature of perceptual experience. Qualia theorists have presented a number of examples of perceptual experiences which, they claim, do not even *seem* to be transparent; these experiences involve objects or properties which seem to be internally realized. I argue, contrary to the qualia theorist's claim, that the phenomenal character of perceptual experience can in fact be characterized solely with reference to externally located objects and properties, and the sense in which some features of our perceptual experiences do not seem external is due to cognitive, not perceptual, phenomenology.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

According to the transparency claim, when we introspect our perceptual experiences, we do not seem to be aware of qualities of our experience. We seem only to be aware of externally located objects and properties.¹ Gilbert Harman provides us with one of the most frequently quoted examples of the transparency claim:

When Eloise sees a tree before her, the colors she experiences are all experienced as features of the tree and its surroundings. None of them are experienced as intrinsic features of her experience. Nor does she experience any features of anything as intrinsic features of her experiences ... Look at a tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict that you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree (Harman, 1990, p. 39)

In other work, I have argued that we must distinguish between (what I call) *phenomenological transparency*, and *metaphysical transparency* (Gow, 2016). To claim that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent is to claim that *it seems to us* that we are only aware of externally located objects and properties during our perceptual experiences. To claim that perceptual experience is metaphysically transparent is to claim that we *are in fact* only aware of externally located objects and properties during our perceptual experiences. Most philosophers who appeal to transparency have the metaphysical notion in mind, since they want to promote a particular metaphysical framework. There are two positions in the philosophy of perception which make use of transparency in this way: naïve realism, which is the view that perceptual experiences are partly constituted by external objects and properties (Brewer, 2006; Campbell, 2002; Martin, 2002); and externalist representationalism, which is the view that the phenomenal character of our perceptual experiences does not depend on internal “qualitative” properties (qualia) but rather on the externally located properties which are represented during perceptual experience (Dretske, 1995, 1996, 2000; Lycan, 1996; Tye, 1995, 2000, 2014).²

I argued that the two ways of understanding transparency are standardly conflated, although once we prise them apart, two important facts become clear: first, that introspection can only reveal whether or not perceptual experience is *phenomenologically* transparent; second, that the phenomenological transparency claim has no bearing on the metaphysical transparency claim. That is, there is no successful way of arguing from the phenomenological transparency of perceptual experience to metaphysical transparency. Nor is it possible to prove that perceptual experience is not metaphysically transparent by showing that it is not phenomenologically transparent. Consequently, if the qualia theorist's only objective is to refute externalism about the metaphysics of perceptual experience, then there is no reason for them to deny phenomenological transparency. The idea that everything one is aware of in perceptual experience *seems* to be externally located is entirely compatible with a metaphysical picture according to which perceptual experience is, in fact, wholly internally constituted.

Whatever the qualia theorists' motivations, their claim that perceptual experience is not phenomenologically transparent is independently interesting, and so in this paper, I want to take a step back from questions about the metaphysics of perceptual experience and consider how we should best characterize its phenomenology. We generally think of perceptual experience as having a presentational phenomenology. That is, perception, unlike thought, seems to present us with mind-independent objects and properties in a distinctively direct and immediate way. Objects seem to be “right there” in front of one. Indeed, it is the lack of presentational phenomenology that most sharply distinguishes imaginative experiences from perceptual experiences. Perception's presentational phenomenology is essential to its functional characterization as the means by which we experience ourselves as creatures existing in a mind-independent world. If it turns out that the qualia theorist is right, and perceptual experience seems to involve an awareness of *internal* objects or properties, then our functional characterization will require major revision.

Fortunately, I think that it is possible to show that the qualia theorist is wrong about perceptual experience. I will argue that everything we are aware of in our perceptual experience seems to be externally located, which is to say that all perceptual experiences are phenomenologically transparent. My argument against the qualia theorist is novel since I hold that the claim that certain objects and properties do not seem to be externally located is *true*, it's just not

true of *perceptual* experience. I argue that the sense in which some experiences do not seem to involve externally located objects and properties is cognitive, not perceptual.³ In the next section, I will describe a model of our overall experiential state which includes not only perceptual experience but also a kind of cognitive experience: *intellectual seemings*. I claim that perceptual phenomenology can indeed be characterized solely with reference to (apparently) externally located objects and properties and that the sense in which some of our experiences involve objects and properties which do not seem to be externally located is due to an intellectual seeming.⁴ In Section 3, I will motivate this alternative model by applying it to the qualia theorist's alleged counter-examples to perceptual transparency to demonstrate that it better accounts for the experiences in question. As a result, perceptual experience is shown to be phenomenologically transparent.

2 | INTELLECTUAL SEEMINGS

Perceptual experiences dominate our waking lives. However, our experiential state at any one time will also include proprioceptive phenomenology, mood phenomenology, emotion phenomenology, and cognitive phenomenology.⁵ The kind of non-perceptual phenomenology which is relevant for my purpose in this paper is cognitive phenomenology (see Bayne & Montague, 2011; Pitt, 2004; Strawson, 1994), and so I will put aside the other forms of non-perceptual phenomenology. The category of cognitive phenomenology also admits of more fine-grained distinctions—in the same way that believing that *p*, thinking about *p*, hoping that *p*, and so on are different mental states, what it is like to believe that *p* is different from what it is like to think about *p*, which is different from what it is like to hope that *p* (Jorba, 2016). The kind of cognitive experiences which will prove to be useful in dealing with the qualia theorist's alleged counter-examples to phenomenological transparency are *intellectual seemings*.

Now, *intellectual seemings* will be familiar to epistemologists because of the important role they have been called on to play in certain theories of justification. (Those who subscribe to phenomenal conservatism, for example, believe that seemings, including intellectual seemings, have a sort of automatic, prima facie justification. They can therefore be appealed to in foundationalist accounts of knowledge and justification.) I should point out here that I do not intend to enter into the epistemologist's debate at all. I am interested solely in the distinctive type of cognitive phenomenology intellectual seemings exemplify, and the contribution I will argue they make to our overall experiential state. Whether they play an interesting role in the process of knowledge acquisition is something I can remain entirely neutral on.

Since I am interested in intellectual seemings for their contribution to how our experiences are for us, it would be a good idea to try to get clear about their phenomenology. To begin with, intellectual seemings have a belief-like or judgment-like phenomenology, and the same direction of fit as beliefs and judgments. They are directed at the world and represent the world as being a particular way. In fact, the content of the intellectual seemings which are relevant to the experiences I will be discussing, will, for the most part, coincide with the content of the experiencing subject's beliefs. However, it is possible for the content of our intellectual seemings to differ from the content of our beliefs, and for this reason, we should be careful to keep the two notions apart. Some construe intellectual seemings as inclinations to believe (Sosa, 1998, Swinburne, 2001). However, I am persuaded by arguments given by Michael Huemer against this version of the view⁶ and think that intellectual seemings are best understood as being experiences with propositional content, and a characteristic belief-like or judgment-like phenomenology (see Bealer, 2000; Cullison, 2010; Huemer, 2007; Skene, 2013; Tucker, 2010).⁷ Somogy Varga offers the following helpful description:

Different from the inclination to believe P, or the belief that P, a seeming that P refers to a state with a certain phenomenal character that "recommends" or "assures" us that its propositional content is true (Tucker, 2010). Seeming states ... have a distinctive phenomenal "forcefulness" (Huemer, 2001), "assertiveness" (Tucker, 2010), "attraction to assent" (Sosa, 2007) and "feel of truth" (Tollhurst, 1998). (Varga, 2017, p. 377)

Of course, it is all very well to describe intellectual seemings by pointing to certain features they have and comparing them with other similar mental states, but the best way of clarifying the kinds of experiences I have in mind is to give some examples which everyone should be able to identify from their own first-person experience. The first set of

intellectual seemings to consider are those which constitute “folk physics.” These intellectual seemings are important, because they demonstrate not only the belief-like or judgment-like phenomenology of intellectual seemings but also the fact that intellectual seemings are not beliefs or judgments. After all, most of folk physics is at odds with our actual beliefs. For example, I am sure that most of us believe that ordinary material objects are composed mostly of the empty space between constantly moving atoms and that objects of different masses fall at the same rate in a vacuum. However, to many of us (if we are honest!), it seems that material objects are solid (in the common-sense sense) and that the heavier object will fall faster. The sense in which these common sense ideas seem true to us (even though we know they are not) is explained by our having intellectual seemings with the content that material objects are solid and that heavy objects fall faster than lighter objects.

We can also identify a set of intellectual seemings which compose our theory of “folk mathematics.” Consider the following puzzle: a bat and a ball cost \$1.10, and the bat is \$1 more expensive than the ball—how much does the ball cost? (Example from Kahneman, 2011) Most people incorrectly answer “10 cents.” Now, even to someone who is familiar with this puzzle, it may still seem that the answer is 10 cents. If so, this would be an intellectual seeming. It is not a belief, for we are familiar with the puzzle and know that the correct answer is 5 cents. Similarly, even to those of us who understand that we should switch doors in the famous Monty Hall problem, it will probably intellectually seem as if switching should not make a difference to our chance of winning the prize.⁸ It should be clear from these examples that the phenomenology of intellectual seemings has more in common with belief phenomenology than with the phenomenology of thought, imagination, or supposing.

Just as beliefs and intellectual seemings are distinct, it is also essential to the model I am defending here that perceptual experiences and intellectual seemings are distinct. In other words, I reject the “dual-aspect” view of perceptual experience, according to which the states I am calling “intellectual seemings” are *part of* our perceptual experiences (see Smith, 2002, and Quilty-Dunn, 2015, for discussion). To explain why my system is to be preferred, it will be helpful to consider a case where three kinds of state are activated—perceptual experience, intellectual seeming, and belief. The following example illustrates why we need to posit intellectual seemings as well as beliefs, and also, why we should not think of intellectual seemings as being part of perceptual experiences.

In other work (Gow, 2018), I draw upon intellectual seemings to explain absence experience. Anya Farennikova asks us to imagine returning to one’s table in the local café to discover that one’s laptop has gone. She holds that we will perceptually experience the absence of our laptop (Farennikova, 2013). For reasons that I won’t go into here, I think that we should prefer an account which does not require that we perceptually experience absences, and so I provide the following alternative model: upon returning to our table, we perceptually experience the table top (and so on), and we have an intellectual seeming with content like “my laptop has gone!”⁹ The reason we know that this is an intellectual seeming, and not simply the *belief* that one’s laptop is missing, is that it can persist even when one no longer has the belief. Farennikova offers the following modification of her “laptop” scenario to show that absence experience can be resilient to a change of belief: one is told that a magician is playing an elaborate trick with mirrors and one’s laptop is still on the table. One will still have an absence experience even though one no longer believes that one’s laptop is missing.

This example also shows why intellectual seemings should not be thought of as being part of perceptual experiences. The reason is that the intellectual seeming which realizes one’s absence experience is (very often) *caused* by a perceptual experience. (For example, the perceptual experience of the table top causes (at least partly) the missing laptop absence experience.) I find it difficult to make sense of the idea that our perceptual experiences can cause our absence experiences if we hold absence experience to be a component of the perceptual experience. Putting aside the question of whether my analysis of the missing laptop case provides a successful account of absence experience, it does, I hope, provide a successful way of clarifying the distinction between perceptual experience, intellectual seemings, and beliefs.¹⁰

Now that this general framework is clear, let me explain how it applies to the question of whether perceptual phenomenology is phenomenologically transparent; whether perceptual phenomenology can be wholly characterized solely with reference to objects and properties which seem to be externally located. The best way to do this is to apply the model I have described above to the qualia theorist’s alleged counter-examples to the phenomenological transparency of perceptual experience. I will explain the role which intellectual seemings play in an alternative

explanation of these examples. By presenting a series of imagined scenarios designed to isolate a subject's perceptual phenomenology, I argue that the sense in which some phenomena do not seem to be externally located cannot be accounted for by perceptual phenomenology. Instead, it is due to the intellectual seeming which partly constitutes our overall experiential state. So far as our *perceptual* experiences are concerned, everything we are aware of seems to be externally located.

3 | THE (ALLEGED) COUNTER-EXAMPLES

Internalist qualia theorists have gone to great lengths to argue that perceptual experience is not even phenomenologically transparent. They present examples of perceptual experiences, the introspection of which allegedly reveals objects or properties that do not seem to be externally located; more specifically, these objects or properties seem to be internally realized.¹¹ For the purpose of the following discussion, it will be useful to adopt (and adapt) a distinction given to us by Martin (2002), between two claims involved in the transparency idea—a positive claim and a negative claim.¹² Since we are restricting our analysis to phenomenological transparency, the positive claim is

(PT+) Introspection shows us that perceptual experience seems to involve the awareness of externally located objects and properties.

The negative claim is:

(PT-) Introspection shows us that perceptual experience does not seem to involve the awareness of features of our experience.

If perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent, then both of these claims must be true. In general, the positive claim is not thought to be particularly contentious—those philosophers who deny that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent are usually happy to endorse the idea that perceptual experience generally seems to involve an awareness of externally located objects and properties. Indeed, there are a number of proposals regarding how we are to capture this phenomenological fact. Farid Masrour discusses this phenomenon using the term “phenomenal objectivity” (Masrour, 2013); Michelle Montague claims that perceptual experience is “object-positing” and seems to involve a relation to particulars—a phenomenological feature of perceptual experience which she describes as “phenomenological particularity” (Montague, 2011); and drawing upon the work of the psychologist Anton Aggernaes, Katalin Farkas describes perceptual experience as seeming to involve objects which are public and “real” (Farkas, 2013b). Typically, those philosophers who reject phenomenological transparency do so by rejecting the negative claim. In other words, internalist qualia theorists agree that we seem to be aware of externally located objects and properties during perceptual experience, but they claim that we *also* seem to be aware of properties of our experiences (or qualia). In the remainder of this section, I consider the most well-known putative examples of situations where our perceptual phenomenology seems to involve internally realized objects or properties. It will become clear from the discussion of these examples how my method for dealing with them can generalize to any other alleged counter-examples to perceptual transparency.

3.1 | Blurry experience

If we let our gaze become unfocused, we experience blurriness. The qualia theorist claims that we experience this blurriness to be a feature of our experience rather than a property of externally located objects (see Block, 1996, 2003; Boghossian & Velleman, 1997). This is the most widely discussed of the qualia theorist's proposed counter-examples to transparency, and also the most persuasive. Blurry experience is pretty common. It is therefore easy for us to think about its phenomenal character. It is also true that we almost never believe or judge that objects themselves are blurry, because we know that ordinary objects aren't the kinds of things that can be blurry (the exception,

of course, is printed images or text). Blurry experience therefore presents the proponent of perceptual transparency with a considerable challenge.

Now, Adam Pautz suggests one possible anti-qualia response: we could understand the phrase “there is blur everywhere” non-predicationally, like when we say “it is raining” (Pautz, 2010, p. 304). This allows the blur to seem to be externally located even though we do not attribute blurriness to the objects around us. I think that this response is too concessive—I argue that perceptual experience does in fact attribute blurriness to objects. However, we also have an intellectual seeming according to which the objects in question do not seem to be blurry (after all, apart from images and text, ordinary objects are never genuinely blurry). Our intellectual seeming overrides our perceptual experience, and so it does not seem—all things considered—that the objects around us are blurry.¹³

We now need a means of adjudicating between my account of blurry experience and the qualia theorist's account. This is quite a challenge; debates concerning phenomenology are notoriously difficult to settle. First, it will be helpful to identify the fundamental point of disagreement between the two views. On my account, there will be no difference at the level of *perceptual* phenomenology between seeing images that are genuinely blurry and seeing clear images as blurry. This is because I claim that everything one is aware of in perceptual experience seems to be externally located, so the blur will seem to be a property of the image in both the experiences described above. According to the qualia theorist, there will be a difference at the level of perceptual phenomenology. Qualia theorists claim that an image will not look to be blurry when we are having a blurry experience of a clear image, whereas an image will look to be blurry when we are having a clear experience of a blurry image. This idea is essential to the qualia theorist's anti-transparency argument. Their argument is that someone who upholds transparency cannot account for this difference, because if the phenomenology of perceptual experience only involves objects and properties which seem to be externally located, then the blur will always seem to be “out there.” The qualia theorist uses their claim that there will be a phenomenological difference between these two experiences to argue that some perceptual experiences (like seeing blurrily) involve properties that seem to be internally realized.

Next, we can test which theory is right by considering whether they make the right prediction about the outcome of a hypothetical scenario that functions to isolate our subjects' perceptual phenomenology. To this end, imagine an experimental situation during which our subjects look at (sharp or blurry) images on a screen while wearing glasses, which they are told might or might not be blur-inducing. (As a matter of fact, the subjects viewing the sharp images are given blur-inducing glasses.) I predict that the images will perceptually seem to be blurry to all of these subjects, and because they are not told which kind of glasses they are wearing, they will not know whether they are seeing sharp images blurrily or seeing genuinely blurry images.¹⁴ If this prediction is correct, then perceptual phenomenology alone cannot determine whether or not an image is genuinely blurry. Since the qualia theorist holds that the difference between seeing blurrily and clearly seeing something blurry is given by *perceptual* phenomenology, the qualia theorist is wrong.

It is important to note that I am not denying that, in everyday cases, there is an experiential difference between seeing clear images blurrily and clearly seeing blurry images. My claim is that this difference is not at the level of *perceptual* phenomenology (and the scenario just described supports this claim). Instead, the difference we experience in ordinary situations is due to an intellectual seeming. In most cases of blurry experience, when we let our eyes go out of focus, for example, it doesn't *intellectually* seem that the blur is “out there,” simply because we know that ordinary objects are never actually blurry. So, even though the object *perceptually* seems to be blurry during blurry experience, it does not seem to us, all things considered, that the object is blurry—the intellectual seeming overrides our perceptual phenomenology.

If it is true that the subjects in our imagined situation would not be able to tell whether they are seeing blurrily or clearly seeing something blurry, then we have established that the qualia theorist is wrong about there being a difference in perceptual phenomenology between these two experiences. However, more needs to be said in defence of my claim that we perceptually attribute blur to the objects around us. This is not an original view; Fred Dretske (2003) and Tim Crane (2001) have also argued that perceptual experience attributes blur to external objects, and a number of objections have been made against the idea.¹⁵ Fortunately, because my theory posits intellectual seemings to account for the sense in which the objects around us do not (ordinarily) seem to be blurry, I am able to deal with these objections.

A. D. Smith objects to the claim that we perceptually experience blur to be a property of external objects on phenomenological grounds—he claims that it simply does not seem to us that the objects around us are blurry when we are having a blurry experience (Smith, 2008). It should be obvious that my account is immune to this objection, for I can agree with Smith that there is a sense in which the objects around us do not seem to be blurry: they do not *intellectually* seem to be blurry. Although the objects around us *perceptually* seem to be blurry, the intellectual seeming dominates our overall experiential state, so the objects around us do not seem blurry, all things considered. Crane allows that we will not believe or judge that the objects around us are blurry, but as it stands, his account does not explain the sense in which it does not *seem* to us that the objects around us are blurry. For this, we need an intellectual seeming.

Keith Allen has criticized the view that perceptual experience attributes blur to the objects around us for the following reason: perceptual experience generally inclines one to believe that things are the way they perceptually seem, even when (for other reasons) we fail actually to form the relevant belief. So perceiving the Müller Lyer lines inclines one to believe that the lines are unequal even when we know (hence believe) that they are in fact the same length. Seeing blurrily does not, according to Allen, incline one to believe that the objects around us are blurry—not even in the minimal sense associated with the Müller Lyer case (Allen, 2013). Since my framework includes intellectual seemings as well as perceptual experiences and beliefs, I am able to respond to Allen's point. Let me begin by pointing out the simple, yet significant fact that we almost never encounter genuinely blurry objects, whereas we often encounter two lines that are different lengths. Indeed, except for printed images and text, it is very unlikely that it will ever intellectually seem to us that the objects around us are blurry. Because of this, the intellectual seeming will be extremely compelling when faced with objects that perceptually seem to be blurry. It will therefore be particularly effective at suppressing the judgment that we are naturally inclined to make in response to its perceptually seeming to us that the objects around us are blurry. Given that it often intellectually seems to us that two lines are the same length, the judgment that we are naturally inclined to form as a result of seeing the Müller Lyer lines is not quite so effectively suppressed.

Michael Pace criticizes the view that blur perceptually seems to be externally located for having “the implausible consequence that it convicts the visual system of producing illusions in cases where it is functioning optimally” (Pace, 2007, 14). Pace's objection turns on the widely held assumption that success (or “optimal functioning”) requires accuracy. While this assumption is extremely intuitive, it is (as Nietzsche pointed out a long time ago) nevertheless mistaken.¹⁶ There is no reason to think that illusions cannot be useful. Indeed, if scientists are right that objects do not have colours in the way our everyday experience suggests, then our colour experiences are, to some extent (depending upon one's theory of colour), illusory. They are, of course, extremely useful nonetheless (see Gow, 2014, for discussion). This point notwithstanding, according to my account, our experiential state taken as a whole *does not* attribute blur to objects. Although it is true that it perceptually seems to us that objects are blurry, and so our perceptual system is indeed in error, our overall experiential state is dominated by an intellectual seeming according to which objects are not blurry.

So far, I have argued that the qualia theorist's claim that blurry experience is a counter-example to perceptual transparency is false. If the qualia theorist is right that the difference between seeing blurrily and clearly seeing something blurry is given in *perceptual* phenomenology, then the subjects in our hypothetical experimental situation should be able to know whether they are seeing blurrily or whether they are clearly seeing something blurry. It seems obvious that the subjects would not know this, and so the qualia theorist has not disproved perceptual transparency. What is more, I have argued that my account of blurry experience does not fall prey to the objections which have been made to other views which claim that perceptual experience attributes blur to objects. Now let's consider some other alleged counter-examples to perceptual transparency.

3.2 | After-images

A number of philosophers have appealed to after-images as potential counter-examples to the claim that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent (Block, 2003; Boghossian & Velleman, 1997; Farkas, 2013a; Kind, 2008).

However, I think that a proper consideration of the overall experiential state of a subject having an after-image experience will reveal that the sense in which the after-image does not seem externally located is cognitive, not perceptual.

Again, it will be instructive to consider a possible experimental situation: a subject is asked to look at a bright red image on a screen. She is told that after a short period of time, the image will be replaced by a similar image, but it will be green. She is asked to report whether the second image is the same size as the first. Perhaps the subject is told that the purpose of the experiment is to investigate the effect of colour on perceived image size. The real purpose of the experiment would be to see whether the subject notices that there is no second image and that she is experiencing an after-image caused by focusing on the red image. Of course, there are certain complications which would need to be overcome if this thought-experiment were to be put into practice. We typically experience after-images as having certain idiosyncratic features: the apparent position of an after-image changes with the movement of one's eyes, their vividness diminishes over a relatively short period of time, they are not occludable, and they do not exhibit size constancy or kinetic independence (Masrour, 2013; Phillips, 2013; Siegel, 2006).¹⁷ The subject would know that their green experience was an after-image if they changed the direction of their gaze, for example, since the apparent location of the after-image would change with the movement of their eyes. However, if these complications were overcome, I predict that the subject would not notice that the second image is really an after-image. If I am right, then this would suggest that other, non-perceptual, factors are responsible for the fact that we do not ordinarily judge that our after-image experiences are experiences of externally located entities. If this information was contained within perceptual experience itself (as the qualia theorist alleges), the subject in our experiment should be able to tell purely in virtue of their perceptual experience that they are seeing an after-image.

It is important to note that the fact that after-image experience is characterized by the features described above explains why it does not (ordinarily) *intellectually seem* to us that after-images are external. We know that coloured patches which are actually externally located do not behave in the ways we experience after-images as behaving. Consequently, it does not intellectually seem that after-images are externally located. However, if we were to rely solely on our perceptual phenomenology, then it would seem to us that we are observing externally located colour patches behaving in a very unusual way. It is only because our overall experiential state is partly composed of an intellectual seeming that it does not seem to us, all things considered, that after-images are externally located. As far as perceptual experience is concerned, after-images do seem to be externally located. After-image experience is not, therefore, a counter-example to phenomenological transparency.¹⁸

Incidentally, a modification of the experiment described above makes it clear why we need to posit an intellectual seeming rather than a belief to account for the sense in which after-images do not seem to be externally located. Imagine that our subject is told that the experimenter is monitoring the movements of her eyes and flashing a green image wherever her gaze falls. In fact, the green image will be an after-image, but (assuming the subject trusts the experimenters) she will believe that there is an externally located green image appearing wherever she looks. In this situation, I claim that it will *perceptually* seem to the subject that there is an externally located green patch, and she will *believe* that there is an externally located green patch. However, I suspect that it will still *intellectually* seem to our subject that the green image is not really "out there" at all. This may sound implausible initially, given her perceptual experience and her belief, which both place the green patch "out there." Yet I expect that everyone will agree that our subject will find the overall experience rather strange and quite disconcerting. She will perhaps feel somewhat conflicted about where the green patch seems to be located. But if the subject only has a perceptual experience and a belief (according to which the green image seems to be externally located) then what can be the explanation for her finding the experience odd? Her perceptual experience is in-line with her belief, so everything is as it should be. I suggest that the reason that our subject will find the experience strange is that, notwithstanding her perceptual experience and her belief, it still *intellectually* seems to her that the green patch is not really externally located. The reason being, of course, that patches of green never ordinarily behave in such an unusual way. The fact that how things intellectually seem to her conflicts with the content of her perceptual experience and belief explains why she may feel conflicted about where the green patch seems to be.

3.3 | Phosphenes

Phosphenes are coloured swirls and flashes of light that can be induced by applying slight pressure onto one's closed eyes. Such experiences may appear to be good candidates for perceptual experiences which do not seem to involve externally located objects and properties (see Block, 1996; Kind, 2003; Siegel, 2006). My argument for the claim that we do in fact *perceptually* experience phosphenes as being externally located begins with an admittedly rather jejune observation: whereas after-images are usually experienced when one's eyes are open (although they do persist when one closes one's eyes), phosphenes are usually experienced with one's eyes closed. Again, it is important to remember that our overall experiential state is composed of more than just perceptual phenomenology—it also comprises an intellectual seeming. I claim that phosphenes do *perceptually* seem to be externally located, and it is an intellectual seeming which is responsible for the fact that we don't (usually) judge phosphenes to be externally located. The fact that we know that our eyes are closed explains the existence of the intellectual seeming, which in turn, explains why it doesn't seem (all things considered) that phosphenes are externally located. The intellectual seeming is so compelling that we tend to ignore the phenomenological transparency of our perceptual phenomenology.¹⁹

In order to motivate my analysis of phosphene experience, let me describe a situation which allows us to isolate a subject's perceptual phenomenology. Imagine an experiment which begins by blocking the signals from proprioceptors in our subject's eyelids, so they would be unable to tell (from proprioception) whether their eyes are open or closed when seated in a dark room. It seems to me that our subject would not be in a position to know whether they are experiencing phosphenes with their eyes closed, or experiencing a phosphene-like light show; but in both cases, it would *perceptually* seem to them that they were experiencing something externally located. This suggests that the qualia theorist's analysis is incorrect—if phosphenes perceptually seem to be internally realized, as the qualia theorist maintains, then the subject should be able to know on the basis of their perceptual phenomenology alone whether they are having phosphene experience or external light-show experience. This is because the qualia theorist is committed to saying that the former perceptual experience will seem to involve internally realized “qualia.”

To avoid the charge that my argument is grounded on a merely hypothetical situation (and an admittedly rather far-fetched one at that), there is some empirical evidence for my claim that phosphenes *perceptually* seem to be externally located. There is a medical condition called retinal detachment which involves the retina becoming thinner and more brittle, and breaking away from the underlying blood vessels. Subjects suffering from this condition undergo phosphene experience when their eyes are open.²⁰ It is revealing that these subjects invariably take the flashes of colour and light to be externally located when they first experience them. This supports my claim that the sense in which phosphenes do not ordinarily seem to be externally located is cognitive (an intellectual seeming), not perceptual.

The sense in which phosphenes do not seem to be externally located must also be explained in terms of an intellectual seeming rather than a belief (even though the content of our intellectual seeming and the content of our belief will be the same in ordinary cases—it will intellectually seem to us that the phosphenes are not externally located, and we will believe that the phosphenes are not externally located because we have the belief that our eyes are closed.) To see why, consider the following thought experiment. Imagine a subject who is told that they will be placed in a dark room, and a phosphene-like light show will be displayed to them. However, they are told that even though their eyes will be open, a clever neuroscientist will ensure that they have closed-eyes proprioceptive phenomenology. In this case, the flashes will perceptually seem to be externally located, and the subject will believe that the flashes are externally located (since she trusts the experimenters). However, since the subject has the experience of her eyes being closed, I think that it will *intellectually* seem to her that the flashes are not externally located. In other words, even though the content of her perceptual experience and the content of her belief are the same (that the flashes of light are externally located), it will intellectually seem to our subject that the flashes of light are not externally located. This (admittedly impractical) thought-experiment supports my claim that, although in standard cases of phosphene experience, our intellectual seemings will align with our beliefs, it is the intellectual seeming which is responsible for its seeming to us that phosphenes are not externally located, and not the belief.

3.4 | The Perky experiment

During the famous Perky experiment (Perky, 1910), subjects were asked to visually imagine an object; an image of which was (unbeknownst to them) very subtly projected onto a screen in front of them. Subjects believed that they were visually imagining even though they were, in fact, perceiving an image. This looks to be a counter-example to my claim that all perceptual experiences are phenomenologically transparent since the subjects did not take their perceptual experience to be an experience of an externally located entity.

Once again, I propose that we must distinguish the subjects' intellectual seemings from their perceptual experiences. I submit (rather controversially) that the image did in fact *perceptually* seem to be externally located for the subjects involved in the experiment. However, because they had been asked to *imagine* certain objects, it *intellectually* seemed to them that the image was not externally located. This is quite a radical re-interpretation of the Perky experiment, but there is some evidence which supports my analysis. It is very interesting to note one of the comments of the subjects involved in the experiment—it suggests that my interpretation is exactly right. The subject says: “if I hadn't known I was imagining, [I] should have thought it real” (Perky, 1910, p. 433). In other words, it perceptually seemed to the subject that she was experiencing something externally located (which explains why she was inclined to believe that she was), but because of what she had been told by the experimenters, her perceptual phenomenology was overruled.

4 | CONCLUSION

I have argued that the experiences qualia theorists have presented are not counter-examples to the claim that perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent. In each case, as far as perceptual phenomenology is concerned, the various phenomena do seem to be externally located. Our overall experiential state is composed of more than just perceptual phenomenology, and the verdict of our perceptual experience can be overruled by the content of our intellectual seemings. This explains why we do not standardly judge that after-images, phosphenes, blur, and so on are externally located. It is not because they do not *look* to be externally located (they do), it is because they do not *intellectually seem* to be externally located.²¹

ENDNOTES

¹ It is best to frame the transparency debate as a debate over whether all the objects and properties one experiences are experienced as being externally located rather than as a debate over whether we seem to be aware of properties of our experiences. This is because, for the naïve realist, externally located objects and properties partly constitute our experiences, so in being aware of externally located objects and properties, we are also aware of properties of our experience. Kennedy (2009) also makes this point.

² I will understand the term “perceptual experience” in a maximally inclusive way—an experience which is phenomenologically speaking, a perceptual experience. Some philosophers will deny that some of these experiences (e.g., hallucinations) are genuine perceptual experiences. Disjunctivists hold that genuine perceptual experiences have objects and their properties as constituent parts (see Brewer, 2006; Campbell, 2002). Since hallucinations do not have objects and their properties as constituent parts, such experiences are not *perceptual* experiences. However, since the focus of this paper is on phenomenology rather than metaphysics, it seems reasonable to use a more inclusive sense of “perceptual experience.” In addition, my aim in this paper is to show that all perceptual experience is phenomenologically transparent. Therefore, the more experiences which are allowed to qualify as perceptual experiences, the more challenging my task becomes.

³ Although qualia were originally introduced into philosophy to describe the “what it is like-ness” of consciousness in general, the examples of qualia which are standardly given are always related to perceptual or sensory phenomenology. Therefore, my claim that certain objects and properties do not *cognitively* seem to be external does not obviously constitute a way for the qualia theorist to concede my point about perceptual experience and locate qualia somewhere else. In any case, my aim in this paper is not to refute the claim that we sometimes seem to be aware of internal features of our experiences but rather to challenge the qualia theorist's analysis of *perceptual* experience in particular.

- ⁴ Although there are some high-level properties which are certainly not part of perceptual phenomenology on my account (and this will become clear in the following discussion), I would like to remain neutral over the general issue of whether perceptual phenomenology includes high-level properties (such as being a pine tree) as well as low-level properties (like colours and shapes). It is therefore open to the reader to understand by “perceptual phenomenology” either the *what-it-is-likeness* of seeing red and round or hearing a high-pitched beeping sound (say), or the *what-it-is-likeness* of seeing a tomato (as a tomato) or hearing a smoke alarm (as a smoke alarm). See Helton (2016) for an excellent discussion of the high-level vs. low-level debate.
- ⁵ It seems to me that even those philosophers who believe that cognitive phenomenology (for example) reduces to a type of perceptual phenomenology can agree with these distinctions at the phenomenological level. After all, no one thinks that we generally confuse our *thinking* about Paris with *perceiving* Paris—not even those who think that thinking about Paris must ultimately be analysed in terms of perceptual phenomenology. Consider the overall experiential state of someone who is sitting in a coffee shop in Berlin and thinking about their upcoming beach holiday, with their experiential state when they are lying on the beach thinking about the coffee shop in Berlin. Everyone who agrees that there will be a difference between these two overall experiential states can agree with my phenomenological distinction between different kinds of phenomenology. (For an argument that all phenomenology ultimately reduces to perceptual phenomenology, broadly construed, see Prinz, 2007, 2012)
- ⁶ Chris Tucker summarises Huemer's arguments; thus, “Argument 1: I can be so convinced that an appearance is illusory that I'm not even inclined to believe it ... Argument 2: seemings provide non-trivial explanations of what I'm inclined to believe, and they couldn't provide such explanations if they were identical to inclinations to believe ... Argument 3: an individual can be inclined to believe things even though they don't seem true. I might be inclined to believe P because I really want it to be true, even though it doesn't seem true and perhaps seems false” (Tucker, 2013, p. 4).
- ⁷ Of course, there are differences to be found in the detailed accounts of intellectual seemings provided by these theorists. For example, there is a debate about whether intellectual seemings must present themselves as being necessary (see Sosa, 1996, 1998). These finer details are particularly important when considering the epistemological significance of intellectual seemings, but for present purposes, we can characterise intellectual seemings simply in terms of their having a propositional content and a belief-like or judgment-like phenomenology. All of the thinkers mentioned here are committed to this core idea, and it is in virtue of having these qualities that intellectual seemings are able to play the role I assign to them in this paper.
- ⁸ See <http://marilynvossvant.com/game-show-problem/>
- ⁹ It is necessary to *describe* the content of one's intellectual seeming using a sentence, but I do not think that intellectual seemings require the actual tokening of sentences in inner speech.
- ¹⁰ Perhaps another reason to prefer my model to the view that intellectual seemings partly compose perceptual experiences is that the latter view would seem to make conceptual capacities a pre-requisite for perceptual experience. Of course, whether this causes problems for the very intuitive idea that young infants and non-human animals have perceptual experiences depends upon one's criteria for concept possession (see Burge, 2010, and Block, 2014, for a relevant discussion).
- ¹¹ Internalist qualia theorists appeal to the experiences we will be discussing with the aim of refuting the claim that all perceptual experiences are phenomenologically transparent. This means, of course, that they consider the experiences in question to be perceptual experiences. Now, there is another school of thought which agrees with the qualia theorist that these experiences seem to involve objects and properties which are not externally located but thinks that, for this reason, the experiences do not qualify as perceptual experiences (Millar, 2014; Siegel, 2006). (Those who subscribe to this way of thinking believe it to be definitional of perceptual experience that it only involves entities which seem to be externally located.) Since my argument in this paper is with the qualia theorist, I have also assumed that the experiences to be discussed are perceptual experiences. However, my argument that these experiences are phenomenologically transparent will also function as an argument for why we should classify the experiences as perceptual experiences, for those who subscribe to the view that everything one is perceptually aware of must seem to be externally located.
- ¹² Siewert (2003) and Stoljar (2004) also make this kind of distinction.
- ¹³ A. D. Smith (2008) points out that we attribute blur to experiences, and a different property—fuzziness—to objects. While this is true at the level of judgment (we know that objects are never actually blurry), my claim is that *perceptual* experience nevertheless attributes blur to objects. That is, if we were to take our perceptual experience at face value, we would judge that ordinary objects are blurry when we are having a blurry experience. Of course (where objects rather than pictures and text are concerned), we never do take our perceptual experiences of blurriness at face value—our overall experiential state partly comprises an intellectual seeming which prevents its seeming to us, all things considered, that ordinary objects are blurry.
- ¹⁴ Michael Tye mentions a similar experimental situation. However, according to Tye, it does not perceptually seem to us as if the objects around us are blurry during blurry experience. Instead, our perceptual experience simply fails to specify where the boundaries of the objects lie. In other words, blurry perceptual experience does not involve misrepresentation (as it does on my account), it involves a lack of information (Tye, 2000, pp. 80–83).

- ¹⁵ Crane (2006) holds a different account in his study according to which we do not perceptually attribute blur to objects.
- ¹⁶ Nietzsche, 1966 (1886): Part One
- ¹⁷ Keith Allen has suggested to me (personal correspondence) that one could grant my claim that after-images perceptually seem to be externally located, but salvage the qualia theorist's view to some extent by denying that after-images perceptually seem to be mind-independent. The idea being, of course, that after-images could seem to be internally realized by seeming to be mind-dependent, notwithstanding their apparently external location. There are two ways of understanding the notion of "mind-dependence": objects can seem to be *metaphysically* mind-dependent, which would involve seeming to be essentially mental (perhaps the sensation of pain is an example of something that seems metaphysically mind-dependent in this sense). The other way something can seem to be mind-dependent is when a seemingly mind-independent entity appears to be "controllable" by the mind, as it would if we had telekinetic powers, for example. The qualia theorist needs after-images to seem to be mind-dependent in the former sense—they must seem to be metaphysically mind-dependent if they are going to support the idea that perceptual phenomenology involves seeming to be aware of qualia. However, it seems clear that after-images only seem mind-dependent in the latter sense. The experience of seeing a red patch wherever you turn your gaze is akin to the experience one would have if one could move objects by telekinesis. The red patch seems to be metaphysically mind-independent and "out there," yet it behaves as if it is controlled by one's mind.
- ¹⁸ Ian Phillips has also argued that after-images are perceptual experiences which seem to present us with externally located entities (namely, light-phenomena; (Phillips, 2013). His argument is different from my own, since it involves denying that after-image experiences possess some of the features I have listed. On my account, we perceptually experience after-images as being externally located notwithstanding their very idiosyncratic (apparent) behaviour. In other words, my argument does not require showing that after-image experience is like ordinary perceptual experiences of coloured patches or lights; after-images will perceptually seem to be externally located whatever strange features they seem to possess. Again, it is an intellectual seeming which is responsible for its seeming to us that after-images are not external (since genuinely externally located things do not behave in the ways after-images behave).
- ¹⁹ It is worth pointing out that one can, of course, have some visual perceptual experiences that perceptually and intellectually seem to involve the awareness of externally located objects and properties with one's eyes closed. It is possible to see bright light and the shadows caused by passing objects even if one's eyes are closed, for example.
- ²⁰ See <https://www.nmb.org.uk/eye-health-eye-conditions-z-eye-conditions/retinal-detachment> for a brief description of this condition.
- ²¹ Previous versions of this paper were presented at workshops and conferences at The University of Antwerp, The University of Cambridge, and Minds Online. I would like to thank all of the participants at these events, and in particular, Keith Allen, Jacob Berger, Tim Crane, Kati Farkas, Amy Kind, Bence Nanay, Luke Roelofs, Daniel Stoljar, and Li Li Tan for their very useful comments. I would also like to thank a reviewer for this journal for their helpful suggestions.

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