

# The Nyāya Argument for Disjunctivism

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**Abstract:** The Nyāya school of classical Indian epistemology defended (by today's standards) a radical version of epistemic externalism. They also gave arguments from their epistemological positions to an early version of disjunctivism about perceptual experience. In this paper I assess the value of such an argument, concluding that a modified version of the Nyāya argument may be defensible.

## 1 Introduction

Our knowledge about the external world is often grounded in perceptual experience.<sup>1</sup> What we take ourselves to know about the external world has often been used to motivate particular claims about the nature of perception and perceptual experience. Philosophers working in the epistemology of perception might be familiar with the following type of argument, from intuitions about *what we know* to conclusions about the nature of perceptual experience:

- P1** Perceptual experience justifies belief that *p*.
- P2** If P1 is true, then perceptual experience must have property  $\Phi$ .
- P3** Theory T rules out property  $\Phi$ .
- C** Theory T should be amended or rejected.

A rough version of the above has been used to argue against sense data theory:

- SD1** Perceptual experience justifies belief about the external world.
- SD2** If SD1 is true, then we have perceptual contact with the external world.
- SD3** Sense data theory rejects perceptual contact with the external world.
- C** Sense data theory should be amended or rejected.

I am interested in a variant of this kind of argument: these are arguments from theories of *how we know* to conclusions about the nature of perceptual experience:

**P1\*** Theory of knowledge K says that knowing that p requires  $\psi$ .

**P2\*** Theory of experience E rules out (or fails to explain)  $\psi$ .

**P3\*** Intuitively, we can know that p.

**C** Theory K rules out theory E.

In this paper I will examine and defend a version of this kind of argument (one that goes from a theory of knowledge to a theory of experience), which comes from the Nyāya school of classical Indian epistemology.

The Nyāya were an orthodox Hindu school of classical Indian philosophy. In contrast to heterodox Buddhist traditions, Nyāya defended a commonsense metaphysical realism based on intuitions about the acquisition of knowledge. The school's foundational text is the *Nyāya-Sūtra* – a five volume text that lays out the groundwork for a theory of the conditions under which knowledge, which is treated as a kind of 'successful cognition', might be obtained reliably.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps one of the most enduring contributions of the Nyāya school is the theory (*vāda*) of knowledge sources (*pramāṇa*).<sup>3</sup>

Nyāya divides the obtaining of knowledge into four irreducible categories (perception, inference, comparison, and testimony), and holds that perceptual experience – or *pratyakṣa* – is the primary source of our knowledge. Nyāya holds that perception is a kind of veridical cognition:<sup>4</sup>

Perception is the knowledge resulting from sense-object contact (and which is) 'not due to words' (*avyapadeśya*), 'invariably related' [to the object] (*avyabhicāri*) and is 'of a definite character' (*vyavasāyātmaka*) (NS; i.1.4) (Chattopadhyaya and Gangopadhyaya, Nyāya: Gautama's Nyāya-Sutra with Vātsyāyana's Commentary, p. 43).

The Naiyāyikas (Nyāya scholars) were motivated by their treatment of knowledge to accept a disjunctivist theory of perceptual experience, on which veridical and illusory perception are treated as fundamentally different phenomena. Nyāya holds that illusory experience is grounded in impressions from previous experiences left on the mind. Consider this passage from Phaṇibūṣaṇa's fourteenth century elucidation of the Nyāya-Sūtra:

The Naiyāyikas hold that when the visual sense comes into contact with the flickering rays of the sun, because of the perception of the similarity therein of water previously perceived elsewhere, there is the revival of the reminiscent impression (*saṃskāra*) of the previously perceived water, which in turn recalls the water and thus in the rays is erroneously perceived the water belonging to a different space and time (ND) (Chattopadhyaya and Gangopadhyaya, Nyāya: Gautama's Nyāya-Sutra with Vātsyāyana's Commentary, p. 53).

In contemporary parlance, the Naiyāyikas were proponents of an *externalist* theory of knowledge, defending a view on which knowledge is treated as an occurrent mental event caused by the obtaining of a perceptual relation – *pratyakṣa* – between agent and object. Nyāya also argued for a disjunctivist, naïve realist theory of perception. Interestingly, some of the Nyāya arguments for naïve realism seem to be arguments *from* their particular version of epistemic externalism. This is significant because this connection – between theories of knowledge and theories of experience – is underexplored in contemporary analytic philosophy.

In Section 2, I give a brief overview of the externalist theory of epistemology defended by Nyāya (as well as some contemporary relatives) and theories of perceptual experience. I then proceed to the argument from externalism to disjunctivism: in Section 3, I reconstruct what I take to be the Nyāya argument for the school's particular theory of perceptual experience. I note that this argument is only an argument for a weak sort of *epistemic* disjunctivism. In Section 4, I consider ways of making the argument stronger.

## **2 Background: Epistemology and Perception**

I now turn to a brief overview of epistemological externalism (2.1) and also of theories of perceptual experience (2.2). Because these topics are both so broad, I will be limiting my discussion to the version of externalism defended by Nyāya, as well as its contemporary correlates: these are externalist theories of knowledge that treat knowledge as an occurrent mental event (e.g., Williamson, Knowledge and its Limits). However, I take much of what is said in this paper to be applicable to other versions of externalism. Likewise, in my discussion of theories of experience I will focus on the two most popular *relational* theories of experience: common factor intentionalism and naïve realism.

## 2.1 Externalist Epistemologies

Contemporary analytic epistemology can be divided into roughly two camps, one internalist and the other externalist. Internalist theories take the source of justification to be internal states, and typically hold that there is some sort of ‘luminosity’ condition on knowledge (a condition which states that if you know that  $p$  then you know that you know that  $p$ ).<sup>5</sup> Externalist theories take the source of justification to be external, and allow that knowledge is not luminous.

The most widely held externalist view in epistemology is *reliabilism* (Goldman 1979). This is the theory that your belief that  $p$  counts as knowledge that  $p$  if it was produced by a reliable source. Beliefs that I come to have on the basis of perceptual experience (might) count as knowledge because perception is a reliable source of knowledge.

An analysis of knowledge cut to the same externalist cloth is defended by the Nyāya school.<sup>6</sup> Nyāya defended a theory of knowledge based on immediate cognitive contact (*jnana*) between agents and objects, treating knowledge as an occurrent mental process, rather than a dispositional mental state. Nyāya treats knowledge not in terms of externally justified belief, but as a specific kind of cognition or mental event due to a ‘reliable source’ (*pramāṇa*):

Successful activity (*samartha-pravṛtti*) results when the object (*artha*) is cognized by the ‘instrument of valid knowledge’ (*pramāṇa*). Hence the instrument of valid knowledge is invariably connected with the object (*arthavat*). There is no cognition (*pratipatti*) of object (*artha*) without the instrument of valid knowledge... (NB) (Chattopadhyaya and Gangopadhyaya, Nyāya: Gautama’s Nyāya-Sutra with Vātsyāyana’s Commentary, p. 3).

Knowledge is a relation between agent (*pramātā*) and object.<sup>7</sup> That relation is mediated by *pramāṇa*: the knowledge source. This is a short-lived, immediate cognitive relation. As Phillips and Tatacharya note in the introductory remarks to their translation of Gaṅgeśa’s *Tattva-cintā-maṇi*:

Ontologically, a cognition is a short-lived, episodic quality of an individual self. Strictly speaking, a cognition is a mental event and a short-lived state rather than an act... Unlike

western epistemology, Nyāya focuses not on beliefs but on cognitions that are identified by their objects or “objecthood” (*visayatā*)... (Phillips and Tatacharya, Epistemology of Perception, p. 13).

This notion of a reliable source differs from contemporary notions of reliability (as well as from the colloquial use of the term): for Nyāya, a knowledge source must be completely reliable and never produce ‘false’ cognition. To say that knowledge is the ‘result’ of a reliable process (like sense-object contact) is not strong enough. Knowledge is the relation between knower and object that the ‘reliable source’ (i.e., perception) mediates. As Vātsyāyana states, “in all cases of perception the knower has the definite knowledge of an object through the sense” (NB) (Nyāya: Gautama’s Nyāya-Sutra with Vātsyāyana’s Commentary, 52).

Thus, we might succinctly say that the Nyāya view is that knowledge is a kind of successful cognition. Consider knowledge-by-perception (which will be the focus of this paper): what it is to know something via perception (*pratyakṣa*) is simply to have a perceptual experience of that thing.

We might take an agent *a*’s perceptual experience of some object or property *O* to be constituted by the instantiation of some relation *R* between *a* and *O*. So, on the Nyāya *pramāṇa* theory, a mental event or cognition will count as knowledge when this relation is instantiated. In order for my occurrent mental state to count as a state in which I ‘know’ about the yellow banana in front of me, it suffices that I stand in the relation of perception to the banana and its yellowness.

Analyzing knowledge in terms of cognitive success requires that we say something about what our cognitions are successful about and what their accuracy conditions are. For example: let us say that I have a total hallucination but that the scene I hallucinate is almost identical in appearance to my actual office, where I am sitting. I cannot, via introspection, distinguish between the hallucination and the real world. This hallucination might cause me to believe the true proposition that my desk is made of wood. But does the cognition I have of the hallucinated scene amount to knowledge? Obviously not: I am hallucinating. The Nyāya explanation is that this is not a case of actual perception (*pratyakṣa*) even though it seems to me that it is. In the case of total hallucination, you do not have any perceptual contact with the world: your occurrent cognition does not have objects in the world as cause and so cannot really be true of anything.

While the reliabilist claims that the relation of perception justifies our taking beliefs to be knowledge, the Nyāya view takes the relation of perception to be the constitutive cause of our true cognitions. But we can see that both theories emphasize the success properties of perception. A reliabilist like Goldman would say that because perception is successful with respect to generating true beliefs, it has justificatory powers. Nyāya says something stronger but similar: perception is such that standing in a relation of perception to some object gives us knowledge of that object. Because knowledge is factive, this apparently entails the view that perception is fully reliable (i.e., that having a perception means having a ‘good’, non-illusory perception).

## 2.2 Perception and Experience

There is considerable debate about whether ‘perception’ ought to be treated as a success term which invariably relates perceivers to real-world contents. ‘Belief’ is not a success term: I can stand in the belief relation to  $p$  when  $p$  is not true. Can I stand in the relation of perception to an object  $O$  when  $O$  is not real? Or is something other than perception causing my *phenomenal experience* – the experience that I have as of the way the world is – when I have a hallucination of  $O$ ? A subtler question: can the object of my perceptual experience be inaccurate in some sense? Can I have an experience of  $O$  as  $F$  when  $O$  is not  $F$ , or is my apparent experience of  $F$ ness in this case the mere seeming of experience; some sort of experience\*?<sup>8</sup>

For clarity, two distinctions might be made:

1. Between accurate and inaccurate perception,
2. Between veridical and non-veridical experience.

The first distinction asks of hallucinations whether they are perceptions of some non-worldly object or whether they have some internal cause. The second distinction asks of the *phenomenology* of hallucination if it is indistinguishable from veridical experience (the same kind of thing as veridical experience) or if it just *seems* indistinguishable from veridical experience (a different kind of thing than veridical experience). Let us consider some ways of dividing things up. I will describe different theories of perception and experience and how they relate to one another, but – for ease of exposition – I will not attempt to explain motivations for (or against) these particular theories.

I have been discussing perception in terms of a relation between perceiver and object. Now we might ask: is this a two-place relation (that is, a direct relation) or if it is in some sense mediated? The intuitive answer is that the relation of perception is a direct relation between agent and object; what I see when I look at a book is just that book. The objects out in the world make up the contents of my perception. Call this view *direct realism*. If direct realism seems trivial, perhaps it will be helpful to contrast it with two other theories of perception, both of which fall under the label *subjectivism*.

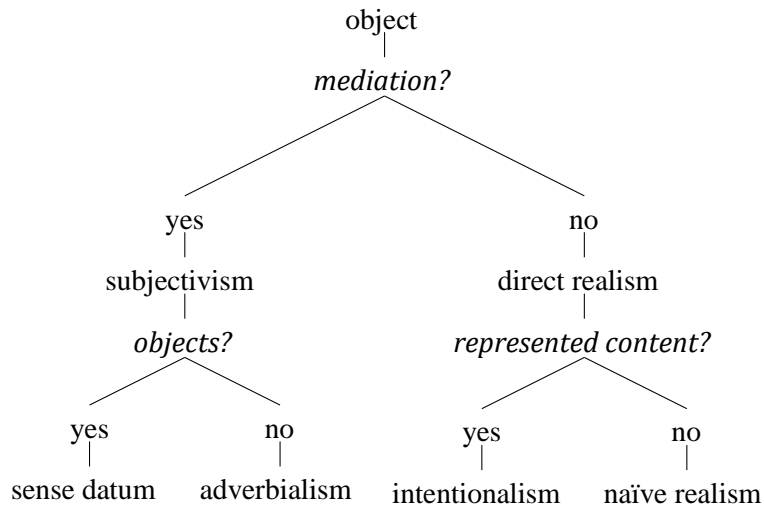
The first of these subjective theories, dominant through most of the last century and prominently defended by A.J. Ayer (1956), G.E. Moore (1953), and Bertrand Russell (1912), is *sense data theory*. Sense data theorists hold that perception is not a direct relation between perceiver and object; instead, it is a relation between perceiver and a kind of subjective content, or sense data. Direct realism and sense data theory both explain perception in terms of a relation between perceiver and object. Another subjectivist theory, *adverbialism*, explains perception in terms of presentational aspects of experience. Perception of a red car is having an experience which presents itself to you *car-ly* and *red-ly* (Chisholm 1957).

The focus of this paper is on direct realism. Direct realism is a theory of the relation of perception, but it is not itself a theory of perceptual *experience*. If I perceive a round red ball, then I have a relation to some object (a round red ball). But what explains the appearance of the ball as red and as round? We can distinguish two approaches to answering this question. On one approach, we first consider the possibility that there is some illusory feature of our experience. Perhaps the ball is not *actually* red, it is blue, but I am experiencing an illusion of redness.

Wanting to tell the same story about the nature of experience of redness in the good case (the ball is actually red) and the illusory case (the ball is actually blue), we might adopt what is known as a *common factor* view. Let us say that perceptual experience is to be treated as a relation; common factor views of experience hold that perceptual experience consists in a uniform relation between good and bad cases. The most prominent common factor view in direct realism is *common factor intentionalism*, which takes the nature of experience to consist in a relation between perceiver and intentional (propositional) content. Intentionalism says having an experience of *p* is representing some content; in a veridical experience this representation is externally caused (by a direct perception of some object), in non-veridical experience it may have *some* external cause (illusion) and some internal cause, but it is the same representation of content. This representation is a common factor between good

and bad cases.

Another approach to the question of what explains experience is to analyze experience in terms of its success properties. We might think that in good cases, when you have an experience of  $p$ , it is because you see that  $p$ . That is, the experience is characterized entirely by the direct relation you have to the object of your perception. Call this *naïve realism*.



If having an experience of  $p$  is just seeing that  $p$ , then what about the cases in which I have an illusory experience (cases where I seem to be having an experience that  $p$  but do not see  $p$ )? It may seem that the good and the bad experience are phenomenally indistinct, but in some constitutive way they are different. If I have an experience that  $q$  but do not see that  $q$  (because it is not there) there must be some other explanation. So, having an experience of  $p$  is either seeing that  $p$  or doing something else. Call this explanation of the relationship between good and illusory experience *disjunctivism*.

Nyāya holds that there is a causal difference between a process that generates perception and a process that generates pseudo-perception. Specifically, non-veridical perceptions are caused by the revival of a reminiscent impression (*samskara*), which is discussed at length in NB. For example, in the case of an illusion of water (as in a mirage), the “immediate cause of this illusion is the recollection of water revived by the reminiscent impression of the previously perceived water” (ND) (Nyāya: Gautama’s Nyāya-Sutra with Vātsyāyana’s Commentary, 53). From the point of view of the perceiver, however, things appear to be the same in both cases.



Let me note a subtle distinction often glossed over in discussions of naïve realism and disjunctivism. We have two theories of the intentionality of experience, intentionalism and naïve realism, and two theories of the overall *nature* of experience, disjunctivism and common factor theory. Naïve realism entails some sort of disjunctivism; a naïve realist account of good cases of perception cannot give a common factor treatment for cases in which no object is directly perceived. It is for this reason that ‘naïve realism’ is often used interchangeably with ‘disjunctivism’.

Intentionalists, however, are free to accept a sort of disjunctivism about the overall nature of experience. It is fine to say that experience in good cases is characterized by a representation of some content  $p$  and that in bad cases something else is going on. Though many motivations behind intentionalism come in the first place from the appeal of common factor views, intentionalism is compatible with disjunctivist treatments of the overall nature of experience. We might thus think that the following two characterizations are sufficient for our purposes here:

*Common Factor Intentionalism*

Having an experience of  $p$  is representing some intentional content. This experience can be externally caused (good cases) or internally caused (bad cases).

*Naïve Realism*

Perceptual experience in cases of veridical perception is fully exhausted by the relation of perception between perceiver and world. Having an experience of  $p$  is either seeing that  $p$  or doing something else.

Intentionalist theories are currently dominant in the literature on theories of perceptual experience.<sup>9</sup> Naïve realism (the view defended by Nyāya) is less popular, but gaining traction.<sup>10</sup>

### **3 The Nyāya Argument**

I have now outlined the (externalist) Nyāya analysis of knowledge, which accounts for perception as a knowledge source in terms of its success properties. I have also given a rough overview of some (relevant) theories of perception and experience. In this section I will go over an argument coming from Nyāya (which I call the

‘Nyāya argument’), from the school’s externalist theory of knowledge to a disjunctive theory of experience. In Section 4 I will attempt to apply some of these arguments to considerations about externalist theories of justification in general.

As already noted, the Nyāya position is that perceptual knowledge involves a relation between perceiver and object; what Gangeśa calls “a veridical cognition” (GT) (Epistemology of Perception, 141). Nyāya claims that perceptual knowledge is a mental event caused constitutively by a relation’s instantiation between perceiver and object (or ‘part of the world’).<sup>11</sup> Consider the following passages. First, from Vātsyāyana’s *Nyāya-Bhāṣya*:

Perception (*pratyakṣa*) is the function (*vṛtti*, i.e., *vyāpāra*) of each sense organ (*akṣa*, i.e., *indriya*) in respect of its appropriate object...When the function is of the nature of contact, the result is valid knowledge in the form of perception (NB) (Chattopadhyaya and Gangopadhyaya, Nyāya: Gautama’s Nyāya-Sutra with Vātsyāyana’s Commentary, 32).

And this from Phaṇibūṣaṇa’s elucidation of the *Nyāya-Sūtra*:

In his definition of perception Gautama... uses the expressions ‘invariably related to the object’ (*avyabhicāri*) i.e., non-erroneous and ‘of a definite character’ (*vyavasāyātmaka*) (ND) (Chattopadhyaya and Gangopadhyaya, Nyāya: Gautama’s Nyāya-Sutra with Vātsyāyana’s Commentary, 53).

We can say that S knows that *p* if and only if she instantiates this relation with respect to *p*. Another way of putting this is to say that objects which a perceiver knows about are objects of her perception’s intentionality (objects at which her perception is directed).

If having a perception is enough to guarantee knowledge, then perception has to be perfectly accurate. Otherwise, we would be committed to saying that a perception with a false intentionality (perception of a cup as silver when it is really tin) will count as knowledge simply because the right sort of relation is instantiated. There is a sense in which it is quite obvious that perception is not perfectly accurate. I may be hallucinating; what seem to me to be the contents of my perception may be other than how the world actually is.

So, Nyāya argues, we must distinguish between good cases of perception (*pratyakṣa*) and bad cases. Gangeśa explains how treating knowledge as a cognitive relation leads to a kind of disjunctivism about perceptual experience:

A veridical cognition is [not only known but] produced, too, from something extrinsic, not “of itself,” i.e., not from a collection of causes sufficient to produce just any cognition. If a veridical cognition were produced from the same collection of causes as is sufficient to produce just any cognition, a non-veridical cognition would be a veridical cognition... Therefore, because of the difference between a veridical and a non-veridical cognition, the two are (in part) produced, respectively, by an epistemic excellence and an epistemic defeat (GT) (Phillips and Tatacharya, Epistemology of Perception, 141).

Phañibūṣaṇa also notes this in his elucidation:

Perception is... considered to be a *pramāṇa* and the very word *pramāṇa* signifies the instruments of valid knowledge alone. Thus the instruments of illusory perceptions are already excluded from perception as *pramāṇa* (ND) (Chattopadhyaya and Gangopadhyaya, Nyāya: Gautama’s Nyāya-Sutra with Vātsyāyana’s Commentary, 54).

*Pratyakṣa* is a relation between perceiver and objects out in the world, causing a particular phenomenal experience. Whatever relational or non-relational state we think is instantiated in bad cases (illusion, hallucination) has an internal cause.<sup>12</sup> Certain perceptions (good cases) have a particular intentionality: they are directed at objects in the world. Certain other pseudo-perceptions (bad cases) do not have the same intentionality or do not have an intentionality at all. Thus, we seem to have an argument from the Nyāya theory of knowledge – on which knowledge is a veridical cognition – to disjunctivism. As Phillips (2013) notes of the Nyāya view of true perception and illusory perception: “The two do not in fact have the same intentionality, and the one results from a veritable knowledge source (no mere method) and the other does not” (Epistemology in Classical India, p. 10).

#### **4 The Argument Revised**

The Nyāya argument, as I have presented it, is actually compatible with common factor intentionalism. The argument presents reasons for thinking that good cases of perception have some important epistemic differences from illusory cases. But a common factor intentionalist should be perfectly willing to agree to this: she agrees that ‘perception’ is a success term. The common factor intentionalist holds that perception is a relation between perceiver and object, and what is going on in bad cases is something else; both just happen to instantiate a phenomenal experience grounded in the same relation between perceiver and *subjective* intentional content. Both cause the same sort of experience, in other words. Let’s call this thesis, which allows that identical experiential states can have different epistemic merit, *epistemic disjunctivism*.

We might ask the following: if knowledge is treated as a kind of true cognition, is it enough to say that the cause of perceptual experience is not identical in good and bad cases (epistemic disjunctivism)? Or do we *also* have to say, by way of experiential disjunctivism, that the experience itself is not identical in good and bad cases? I will argue that taking the Nyāya position on knowledge actually gives good reason to accept the view that perceptual experience is disjunctive.

Common factor intentionalism (combined with Nyāya view of knowledge) holds that an experience of *p* is an intentional *p* state, which can be caused by a relation between perceiver and object (in which case they have knowledge) or internally caused (in which case they don’t). We might ask, however, whether the experience *p* itself plays an important epistemic role. If it can be shown that the experience itself causes a true cognition (an instance of knowing), then a view that takes veridical and illusory experiences to be constituted by the same relation will fail on the Nyāya account. In other words, if experience plays an important epistemological role, then Nyāya should rule out common factor intentionalism. Consider the following *experience thesis*.

**EX** There is some knowledge for which perceptual experience is the only source.

I will argue that knowledge of what certain things in the world are *like* meets this very criterion.<sup>13</sup>

Let’s start with what can be explained by a common factor intentionalist who takes knowledge to be true cognition. She can explain how I might have knowledge of a red ball. A cognition of a red ball, in a good case, will be caused by an agent bearing a relation of perception to a red ball. Then we may say that this constitutes her knowledge of the red ball. In a bad case, she has not cognition of a red ball – just a false cognition internally

caused. The common factor intentionalist says that the agent's experience in the good and bad cases of redness and roundness is constituted by the same intentional state, but this need not give us pause, since experience plays no constitutive epistemic role here.

We might think that experience plays a very different epistemic role, however, for certain other kinds of perceptual knowledge. Experience undoubtedly gives us knowledge of what things are like to us (experiencing red when I glimpse the red notebook on my desk lets me know what that phenomenology is like to me). We might also think that veridical experience gives us knowledge of what things are like in the world with respect to properties that those things have and that we experience. When I see a red ball, not only do I get (1) knowledge of a red object, or (2) knowledge of what redness is like to me, but also (3) knowledge of what an object with a certain property (redness) is like *to look at*. By experiencing a silver thing as silver, I learn what a thing that has the property of silver is like to look at. I learn something about what silver objects are really like. This knowledge comes directly from the experience. That is: whatever relation my experience of a silver thing as silver is (whether it is a relation to a proposition or to an object), it is a plausible candidate for perceptual knowledge.

Is it uncontroversial that we have such perceptual knowledge? I think it must be. If I am looking at a red notebook on my desk, and I consider my current phenomenal state, I know through reflection that red objects are objects that produce *this* kind of experience. This is not something I have come to know *a priori*; I have learned what red objects are like through perceptual experience. If knowledge is a matter of factive relational mental states/events, then what I have learned could have resulted only from a knowledge event in which I experienced the redness of some red object or the silverness of some silver object.

Why does this make trouble for common factor intentionalism? If I experience a tin thing as silver, I obviously do not learn anything about what silver things are like. This would require there to be some thing O such that O is silver and I learn what O is like with respect to its silverness. If I perceive a tin thing as silver, there is nothing that instantiates silverness, and so the claim that there is some silver thing, such that I have learned what it is like to experience that thing's color, is false. Nor do I learn anything about what tin things are like. There is an object that instantiates tin-ness, and there are perhaps things that I learn about this object; however, I do not learn anything about what it is like with respect to its tin-ness.

So, if I experience a tin thing as silver, I do not learn what silver things are like, though I may learn something

about what it is like to have a certain kind of experience. But common factor intentionalism holds that the relation which constitutes my experience of silverness, when the object actually is silver, is the same relation as in the illusory experience of silverness. If this relation is to count as a knowledge state, then common factor intentionalism seems to be committed to my knowing what a silver thing is like by observing a tin thing. If instantiating  $p$  in one case gives me knowledge (knowledge of what silver things are like) then, on the kind of externalism under consideration here, instantiating  $p$  in every case will give me knowledge. Thus, if an experience of a cup as silver in one case gives me knowledge, then it will give me knowledge in every case where that experience is explained in terms of the same relation.

The common factor intentionalist *could* say that what I come to have knowledge of in seeing a tin thing as silver is what it is like to see silver, or what the phenomenology of silvery experiences is. That may be. But the problem is that, in the good case, I get further knowledge of what *that* silver thing is like (of what it is like to observe the silver thing being observed). If there is a common factor between good and bad cases, then there is no way of discriminating the event in a good case from the event in a bad case. Either both cases would have to count as knowledge of what an (observed) silver thing is like, or else neither counts.

Plainly, it does not help to say that what is actually constitutive of knowledge is the *causal* relation between the object and the perceiver. This would be to claim that the perceiver learns what tin things are like with respect to being tin by having an illusory experience of a tin thing as silver! So, if perceptual knowledge is just instantiating a relation between perceiver and content, and if a perceiver can know through experience what silver things are like, then veridical experience of a thing as silver must be a state different from nonveridical experience of a thing as silver, or the factivity of knowledge must be given up.

If so-called epistemic disjunctivism can help, how it can help is not clear. At stake is whether instantiating particular relations can count as knowledge. If instantiating the relation of experience to an intentional content (out there in the world or propositional) can be knowledge, then a different relation will be needed to explain illusory cases.

A disjunctivist account (one that is not just epistemic) encounters no such problem. Experiencing a cup as silver gives me knowledge of what silver things are like, in good cases, and is constituted by some relation  $aRs$  (a perceiver  $a$  bears the relation of experience  $R$  to a property of silverness  $s$ ), which is constitutive of knowledge

of what a silver thing is like with respect to its silverness. Experiencing a cup in the bad case is constituted by a different relation  $aVs^*$  (a perceiver  $a$  bears the relation of non-veridical experience  $V$  to a property phenomenologically indistinguishable from silverness  $s^*$ ), providing an explanation of why it does not count as knowledge.

Note the difference between this kind of argument and arguments (like those found in Byrne 2016 and Logue 2012) to disjunctivism from claims about what we know. These arguments may support one another, but there is a difference in the details. Byrne's and Logue's projects rely on intuitions about what we know; my argument looks to considerations about *how* we know.

To focus on Logue's argument: she proposes that intuitions about what we know via experience (about color and shape properties) suggest naïve realism. We take it as intuitive that knowing things about the way shapes and colors are comes from experiences of shapes and colors. Logue uses this insight to locate a significant epistemic difference between good and bad cases of experience (without appealing to any particular analysis of knowledge). A problem with Logue's argument is examined by Pautz (forthcoming), who notes that the ability of our experience to track facts about the world should not be counted on.

I have proposed that an argument can be mounted from the analysis of knowledge itself – an argument which should give us pause about common factor intentionalism. Given an analysis of knowledge that reduces it to certain states, the fact that common factor views do not discriminate between veridical and illusory states with some content  $p$  means either giving up the factivity of knowledge, giving up this analysis of knowledge, or giving up common factor intentionalism, as in this trilemma:

- K**      Knowledge is the instantiation of a relation  $aRp$ .
- CF**     Veridical and nonveridical experience  $aRp$  instantiating.
- F**      Knowledge is factive.

The Nyāya response is to give up CF. If knowledge is just the instantiation of certain relations, there might be non-factive relations that are phenomenologically indistinguishable from factive relations.

#### **4.1 Disjunctivist intentionalism or naïve realism?**

It might be tempting to take any good argument for disjunctivism to be a good argument for naïve realism and against intentionalism. But perhaps this is not always so: accepting a form of disjunctivist intentionalism might be the best solution to the above trilemma. A disjunctivist version of intentionalism holds that in good cases experience is representational (as opposed to naïve/direct) and in bad cases also representational, though in a different way, perhaps via a different mechanism of representation. There are reasons why this is the theory of experience most appropriate for Nyāya.

The theory solves a generality problem for the kind of externalism about knowledge that Nyāya defends. If perception is constituted entirely by a relation between perceiver and object, and if knowledge states are caused directly by instantiating this relation, we should be able to claim that perceivers have knowledge of all sorts of microphysical facts (about cells, molecules and other items that make up the objects of our perception) as well as facts of which we have knowledge intuitively. But intentionalism solves the generality problem that makes it impossible to say why I have knowledge of the tin cup's physical but not its microphysical features. We can say that knowledge supervenes on the represented content, and that this content is far more coarse-grained than the totality of facts before us in any given instance of perception. So the relation between perceiver and object which is constitutive of knowledge is really a relation between perceiver and representation *caused* by a direct relation between perceiver and object.

## 5 Conclusion

To summarize:

- i. I reconstructed an argument from the Nyāya account of knowledge to a disjunctivist theory of perceptual experience.
- ii. I noted that the simplest version of the argument entails only what I have called 'epistemic disjunctivism': the view that veridical and non-veridical perceptual experiences can be constituted by the same relation but still have different epistemological properties.
- iii. I then proposed using the Nyāya position to argue for a stronger version of disjunctivism: that veridical and non-veridical experiences cannot be constituted by the same relation.
  - a. This argument is based on our having knowledge of what things are like; knowledge that comes



directly from experience.

What to make of all this? There are good arguments for and against intentionalism and naïve realism, not to speak of externalism in epistemology. But is this the *kind* of argument to make? Consider the trilemma again:

- K** Knowledge is the instantiation of a relation aRp.
- CF** Veridical and nonveridical experience aRp instantiating.
- F** Knowledge is factive.

F must not be given up, plainly. But what about K and CF? Or, to ask a metaphilosophical question: if we start with K assumed or being argued for, is it appropriate to conclude by rejecting CF, or is it K that must be rejected? I have no answer. But I think there is a general lesson: philosophers should attend more to these second-order implications of analyses of knowledge and justification.

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<sup>2</sup> There is a disagreement about the composition of the Nyāya-Sūtra. It is usually attributed to Gautama Aksapada, who may have lived sometime between the sixth century BCE and the second century CE; other authors may have contributed, or the original text may have been composed collectively. It was edited in either the first or the second century CE (Ganeri 2001, 10).

<sup>3</sup> *Pramāṇa* is also translated as "methods of knowing" (Ganeri 2001, 10); the "cause of veridical cognition" (Dasti 2008, 283).

<sup>4</sup> The principle primary sources referenced in this paper are the first chapter of the *Nyāya-Sūtra* (I will use the abbreviation NS), Vātsyāyana's *Nyāya-Bhāṣya* (NB), which is a commentary on NS, Phaṇibūṣaṇa Tarkavāgīśa's *Nyāyadarśana* (ND), which is a fourteenth century commentary on NS and NB (I borrow these abbreviations from Dasti 2008); the perception chapter of Gaṅgeśa's *Tattva-cintā-maṇi* (GT), and Udayana's *Āmatattvaviveka* (UA). UA is an attempted reconciliation between Nyāya and Buddhist traditions, and kick-started the Navya- Nyāya school in the thirteenth century. Quotations of primary source material will be taken from translations by Chattopadhyaya and Gangopadhyaya (1982), for NS, NB, and ND, Phillips and Tatacharya (2004), for GT, and Kher and Kumar (1987), for UA. See Phillips, *Epistemology in Classical India*, 2013 for a recent survey of this material.

<sup>5</sup> See (Schoenfield forthcoming) for a recent attempt to divorce internalism from luminosity.

<sup>6</sup> In fact, the Nyāya view is sometimes described as a kind of 'process reliabilism' (Patil 2009, 34).

<sup>7</sup> Specifically, the object 'rightly known' (*prameya*).

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that the Nyāya story here is that in illusory perception there is something you get right about the contents of your experience: namely, that there is an object about which you have a mistaken impression.

<sup>9</sup> Intentionalism in one form or another has been defended very recently by Alex Byrne (2016), Adam Pautz (forthcoming), and Michael Tye (2009), among others.

<sup>10</sup> Naïve realism has recently been defended by John Campbell (2002) and Heather Logue (2012), among others.

<sup>11</sup> This is analogous with contemporary 'dogmatist' positions in the epistemology of perception (Miller 2016).

<sup>12</sup> There are also cases of *pseudo*-knowledge sources (*pramāṇa-ābhāsa*).

<sup>13</sup> This thesis is commonly discussed in the literature on phenomenal concepts, which are putative concepts that can only be possessed by undergoing certain perceptual experiences. While phenomenal concepts do present a fairly clear example of the experience thesis, there are some fairly compelling arguments against the existence of phenomenal concepts (Ball 2009). Thus, I do not wish to rely on them in making my claim.