

Representationalism and the Transparency of Experience

Representationalism is a thesis about the phenomenal character of experiences, about their immediate subjective ‘feel’.¹ At a minimum, the thesis is one of supervenience: necessarily, experiences that are alike in their representational contents are alike in their phenomenal character. So understood, the thesis is silent on the nature of phenomenal character. Strong or pure representationalism goes further. It aims to tell us what phenomenal character *is*. According to the theory developed in Tye 1995, phenomenal character is one and the same as representational content that meets certain further conditions. One very important motivation for this theory is the so-called ‘transparency of experience.’ The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the appeal to transparency more carefully than has been done hithertofore, to make some remarks about the introspective awareness of experience in light of this appeal, and to consider one problem case for transparency at some length, that of blurry vision. Along the way, I shall also address some of the remarks Stephen Leeds makes in his essay on transparency.

I. The Appeal to Transparency

I believe that experience is transparent. I concede, however, that the argument for representationalism from transparency has not been well understood. So, in this section, I try to clarify the argument, or at least my version of it, step by step.

Step 1: Focus your attention on the scene before your eyes and on how things *look* to you. You see various objects; and you see these objects by seeing their facing surfaces. Sense-datum theorists claimed that the facing surfaces of the objects are themselves seen by seeing further immaterial surfaces or sense-data. The sense-datum theory is unacceptable, however, for a whole host of familiar reasons. Intuitively, the surfaces you directly see are publicly

1. Philosophers who advocate representationalism include Dretske (1995), Harman (1990), Lycan (1996a, 1996b), McDowell (1994), Rey (1992), White (1995) and myself (1995, 2000).

observable physical surfaces.² They are at varying angles to the line of sight and varying distances away. They can be photographed. In seeing these surfaces, you are immediately and directly aware of a whole host of qualities. You may not be able to name or describe these qualities but they look to you to qualify the surfaces. You experience them as being qualities of the surfaces. *None* of the qualities of which you are directly aware in seeing the various surfaces *look* to you to be qualities of your experience. You do not experience any of these qualities *as* qualities of your experience. For example, if blueness is one of the qualities and roundness another, you do not experience your *experience* as blue or round. Note the use of the word ‘if’ here. At this stage, no definite claim is being made as to the identity of each of the relevant qualities. Sydney Shoemaker, for example, denies that we are directly aware of colors in visual experience, whereas I hold that we are.

To appreciate how there is room for disagreement on this point, consider the following scenario. Suppose that Jack and Jill are both normal perceivers, viewing a ripe tomato in good light. Neither one is misperceiving its color. Still, according to Shoemaker (1994), the possibility remains that their color experiences are phenomenally inverted, that the phenomenal character of their experiences is radically different. How can the facing surface of the tomato look different to them, given that both are normal? The answer, in Shoemaker’s view, is that Jack and Jill are directly aware of different qualities, each of which is experienced as covering the facing surface of the tomato. These qualities are relational qualities of the surface of the tomato that involve relations to intrinsic qualities of experiences, and neither is identical with the color red. However, Jack and Jill are not aware of them as relational. That, Shoemaker notes, would distort the phenomenology. Just as the quality of being heavy is not experienced as relational when something feels heavy even though it is relational, so too the

2. The notion of a physical surface here is to be understood broadly. A flickering flame, for example, has a constantly changing surface in the relevant senses of ‘surface’. A cloud has a surface, as does a spray of water. Glowing matter from exploding fireworks has brightly colored surfaces. Surfaces are not the only particulars we basically see. We also directly see volumes, as, for example, when I view a quantity of Coca-Cola in a glass.

relevant qualities here are not experienced as relational either. These qualities, Shoemaker says, are “the experienced character of redness” for Jack and Jill.

The point that matters for present purposes is simply this. Whatever the nature of the qualities of which we are directly aware when we focus upon how the surfaces before us *look*, these qualities are not experienced as qualities of our experiences but rather as qualities of the surfaces. And this is so, even if the qualities involve relations to intrinsic qualities of experiences. For the former qualities are the ones of which we are directly conscious. Since we are not conscious of their relational nature, we are not conscious of any intrinsic qualities of experiences involved in that nature.³ So, the disagreement between Shoemaker and myself about whether we are directly aware of colors in visual experience does not threaten step 1.⁴

Step 2: To suppose that the qualities of which perceivers are directly aware in undergoing ordinary, everyday visual experiences of things are really qualities of the experiences would be to convict such experiences of massive error. That is just not credible. It seems totally implausible to hold that visual experience is systematically misleading in this way. Accordingly, unless it can be shown that serious trouble ensues, the qualities of which you are directly aware in focusing on the scene before your eyes and how things look are *not* qualities of your visual experience.

3. On this point, Shoemaker and I are in agreement.

4. Perhaps it will be said that, in attending to the facing surface of something in my field of view, a tomato, say, I am directly aware of the way the tomato looks to me. I agree. Intuitively, the way the tomato looks to me is red, and, as I stare at the tomato, I am directly aware of red (or so I claim). There are those who say that introspection of an experience of a colored surface reveals the manner of presentation of the color. On this view, I am in complete agreement with Leeds when he writes, “when we introspect carefully at a patch of color, what we become aware of is not the manner in which the color was presented, but rather a more complex pattern of colors” (p. 30). For criticisms of Shoemaker’s position on this topic, see Tye 2000, Chapter 5.

Step 3: If you are attending to how things *look* to you, as opposed to how they are independently of how they look, you are bringing to bear your faculty of introspection. But in so doing, you are not aware of any inner object or thing or event. When you introspect your visual experience, the only particulars of which you are aware are the external ones making up the scene before your eyes. You are not aware of those objects *and* a further inner object or episode. Your awareness is of the external surfaces and how *they* appear. The qualities you experience are the ones the surfaces apparently have. Your experience is thus transparent to you. When you try to focus upon it, you 'see' right through it, as it were, to the things apparently outside and their apparent qualities. But when you introspect, you are certainly aware of the phenomenal character of your visual experience. On the basis of introspection, you know what it is like for you visually on the given occasion. Via introspection, you are directly aware of a range of qualities which you experience as being qualities of surfaces at varying distances away and orientations *and thereby* you are aware of the phenomenal character of your experience. By being aware of the external qualities, you are aware of what it is like for you. This is not to say, of course, that you *infer* the phenomenal character of your experience from your awareness of the external qualities. Obviously, no *reasoning* is involved. Still, by attending to what you experience outside, as it were, you know what it is like inside. So, your awareness of phenomenal character is not the direct awareness of a quality of your experience. Relatedly, the phenomenal character itself is not a quality of your experience to which you have direct access.

This conclusion is one that the sense-datum theorists would have endorsed. Sense-datum theorists were at pains to distinguish the act of sensing from the thing sensed and they insisted that the qualities of which we are directly and immediately aware are qualities of the latter, specifically, an immaterial surface or sense-datum (as noted in step 1).⁵ Thus, it should

5. Qualities of *sensa* are not qualities of experiences, even if it is held that experiences are constituted by both acts of sensing and *sensa*. To suppose otherwise is to commit a fallacy of composition.

come as no surprise to find G.E. Moore, one of the chief advocates of the sense-datum theory, drawing our attention to the phenomenon of transparency, in the following passages:

When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous. (1903, p. 25).

I do now see certain blackish marks on a whitish ground, and I hear certain sounds which I attribute to the ticking of my clock . . . It seems to me quite evident that the relation to the marks which I express by saying that I *see* them is not different from the relation to the sounds which I express by saying that I *hear* them . . . (1913, p.173)

It should be noted that this connection between the sense-datum theory and transparency, as I understand the transparency thesis, is one that Leeds would deny, given his conception of transparency. For Leeds, “the acid test of a transparency view is what sorts of properties and objects the view takes us to be aware of in perception.” (p. 12). He continues:

So long as these are properties of the perceived physical objects, and so long as introspection does not produce awareness of (i.e., so long as it doesn't produce, non-inferentially, beliefs about) other objects and properties, then the view is by my lights a transparency view. (p. 12)

These remarks entail that Moore does not accept a transparency view.

Step 4: The points made thus far do not require that your visual experience be veridical. Indeed, the case could be one of complete hallucination. The objects and their surfaces could be unreal. Still, the phenomenal character of your visual experience is not a quality or cluster of qualities of your experience to which you have direct access.

These comments assume, of course, that the visual experience you have when you see the surfaces is of a kind that could have occurred even if you were hallucinating. And some philosophers (so-called ‘disjunctivists’) deny that there is any such experience common to perception and hallucination. But while there is certainly a difference between one's state of mind in seeing a table, say, and one's state of mind in hallucinating a table—after all, seeing a table is a mental state involving a relation between the subject and a real table—intuitively, there is also something important in common. Intuitively, the reason why one may *think* that one is seeing a flat, square surface not only when one is seeing such a surface but also when

one is hallucinating is that one can have a visual experience of the same phenomenal type in both cases.⁶

This seems to me unquestionably the common sense view of the matter. And it is also the view taken by scientists studying the psychology of vision. In scientific work, it is taken for granted that the same conscious visual state can occur whether or not the cells on the retina are activated by light reflected from a seen object or by artificial stimulation. This is reflected both in experimental designs and in the psychological generalizations scientists adduce that cover both veridical visual states and misperceptions alike.

Step 5: As you view the scene before your eyes and how things look to you, necessarily, if any of the qualities of which you are *directly* aware change, then the phenomenal character of your experience changes. Consider, for example the facing surface of a blue ball in a bowl before you. In attending to the color of the ball, you are directly aware of a certain quality, *Q*, as covering that surface. You experience each just noticeable part of the surface as having *Q*. Again, whether *Q* is itself the color blue or some other quality, awareness of which mediates your awareness of blue, is left open here. But change *Q*—for example, by changing the color of the tomato or by donning color-inverting lenses—and what it is like for you in viewing the ball necessarily changes. Facts like this one are surely not brute. Moreover, they obtain even in the case that you are hallucinating. If the ball does not exist, still you are directly aware of *Q*; and if some other quality replaces *Q*, the phenomenal character of your experience changes. An explanation is needed of why the phenomenal character of visual experiences is sensitive in this way to surface qualities, qualities that, if they are qualities of anything at all, are qualities of surfaces experienced. Given the conclusion of step 4, the explanation surely is that the phenomenal character *involves* the surface qualities of which the subject of the visual experience is directly aware, that these qualities at least partly *constitute* phenomenal character.

6. In this paragraph, I am using the term ‘see’ in its success sense. But I do not claim that ‘see’ only has a success sense. For more here, see p. 20 below.

Step 6: What, then, is visual phenomenal character? One possible hypothesis is that it is an intrinsic, subjective quality (or cluster of qualities) of the surface experienced, so that the experience itself inherits its phenomenal character from the relevant subjective surface quality (or qualities). That hypothesis seems intelligible, however, only on the assumption that the surface itself is a subjective entity—a surface of the sort the sense-datum theorists posited. The best hypothesis, I suggest, is that visual phenomenal character is representational content of a certain sort, content into which certain external qualities enter.⁷ This explains why visual phenomenal character is not a quality of an experience to which we have direct access (representational content is not a quality of the thing that has representational content) and why visual phenomenal character necessarily changes with a change in the qualities of which one is directly aware (changing the qualities changes the content). It also explains why the phenomenal character of a visual experience is something the experience *has*, something that can be common to different token experiences, and why visual experiences have phenomenal character even if nothing really has the qualities of which one is directly aware via introspection.

Step 7: Visual phenomenal qualities or visual qualia are supposedly qualities of which the subjects of visual experiences are directly aware via introspection. Tradition has it that these qualities are qualities of the experiences. Tradition is wrong. There are no such qualities *of experiences*. If we stipulate that something is a visual phenomenal quality or a quale only if it is a directly accessible quality of an experience, then there are no visual phenomenal qualities

7. A few remarks on content. The idea that visual experiences represent the world as being a certain way is uncontroversial. Visual experiences have correctness conditions. For the subject of the experience, the world *seems* a certain way, the way represented by the experience. The experience is accurate if the world is that way, inaccurate otherwise. The way the world is represented is the content of the experience. Qualities entering into the content are qualities the world (or things within the world) seem to the subject of the experience to possess. The overall content of ordinary visual experiences is highly complex. See here Tye 2000, Chapter 4.

or qualia. Still there are qualities of which the subjects of visual experiences are directly aware via introspection. They are qualities of external surfaces (and volumes and films), if they are qualities of anything. These qualities, by entering into the appropriate representational contents of visual experiences, contribute to the phenomenal character of the experiences. So, they may reasonably be called 'phenomenal qualities' in a less restrictive sense of the term.

Step 8: All of the above points generalize to other perceptual modalities. For example, we hear things by hearing the sounds they emit. These sounds are publicly accessible. They can be recorded. Similarly, we smell things by smelling the odors they give off. They too are publicly accessible. You and I can both smell the foul odor of the rotting garbage. Odors, like sounds, move through physical space. We taste things by tasting their tastes. One and the same taste can be tasted by different people. Some tastes are bitter, others are sweet. When we introspect our experiences of hearing, smelling, and tasting, the qualities of which we are directly aware are qualities we experience as being qualities of sounds, odors, and tastes. It seems very natural to suppose that among these qualities are the following: pitch, tone, loudness, pungency, muskiness, sweetness, saltiness, sourness. But this supposition is not needed by the argument. The crucial point again is that the qualities of which we are directly aware via introspection—*whatever* they turn out to be—are not qualities of the experiences of hearing, smelling, and tasting. Rather they are qualities of public surfaces, sounds, odors, tastes, etc, if they are qualities of anything at all (for, as before, the experiences may be hallucinatory). Change *these* qualities—the ones of which we can be directly aware via introspection—and necessarily the phenomenal character of the experience changes. Again then phenomenal character is best taken to be a matter of representational content. And again, there are no phenomenal qualities, conceived of as qualities of experiences.

Step 9: The case of bodily sensations is treated in the same way. Let me give one illustration, that of experiencing pain in a finger. You can have a feeling of pain without noticing it, as, for example, when you are distracted for a moment by something else, but if you do notice a pain—if you are introspectively aware of it,—then your attention goes to *wherever you feel the pain* (in this case, to your finger). Your attention does not go to where your experience is (that is, to your head, if your experience is a physical thing) or to nowhere at all. In attending to your pain, you are directly and immediately aware of a certain quality or

cluster of qualities, which you experience as being in your finger. That quality or cluster of qualities is what you want so strongly to stop experiencing. As before, no claim is made as to the identity of this quality or cluster. Moreover, perhaps you are feeling a pain in a phantom finger. Still, you are directly aware of a quality you strongly dislike, a quality that you *experience* as being in a finger, even though the finger no longer exists. The point to stress, then, is that the qualities of which we are all directly aware in introspecting pain experiences are not qualities of the experiences (assuming that there is no massive error), but qualities of bodily disturbances in regions where the pains are felt to be, if they are qualities of anything. The argument proceeds from here as in the cases of the experiences of seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting.

These points are not ones that Leeds would endorse. He writes:

A toothache does not seem to present the world to me in anything like the way that looking at my tooth does: rather, although it seems in some way to present me with properties, these are not presented as properties of my tooth (and still less as properties of my brain or nervous system)—rather they seem to be presented as properties of (or at) point *s* in a somatic field. (p. 6)

I agree with Leeds that there is a big difference phenomenologically between my seeing the tooth (in a mirror, say) while I have a toothache and my experiencing the toothache. But this difference is one that poses no threat to my thesis of transparency with respect to pain experiences; for the properties presented in the two cases are very different (just as they are in the cases of seeing a cube and feeling a cube by running one's fingers over it). In seeing the tooth, I am aware of its color and shape, and I am unaware of the quality I dislike so much in having the pain experience. In experiencing the toothache, the situation is reversed.

Leeds asserts that in experiencing a toothache, the properties presented to me are not presented as properties of my tooth. I disagree. When I focus upon my toothache, I am aware of my tooth hurting. The disagreeable quality of which I am aware—whatever further account we give of its nature—is presented to me as a quality of my tooth (the tooth to which I direct my dentist when he asks me “Which tooth hurts?”). Perhaps the thought is that I am introspectively aware of my tooth hurting, but I am aware of this by being aware of something

else, a quality of a region of a somatic field. This seems to me no more plausible or well motivated than the corresponding claim that our visual experience of external physical surfaces is mediated by experience of visual sense-data. But putting this to one side, there is still no incompatibility with transparency (in my sense). For the putative somatic field is an object of the experience, and its qualities are not qualities of the pain experience.

Step 10: The previous steps may be generalized to the case of the phenomenal character of felt emotions and moods. In the case of emotions, the qualities of which one is directly aware in introspecting felt emotions are frequently localized in particular parts of the body and experienced as such. For example, if one feels sudden jealousy, one is likely to feel one's stomach sink, one's heart beat faster, one's blood pressure increase. Likewise, in the case of the feeling of fear or anger (see Tye 1995). With moods, however, the relevant qualities are usually not experienced as localized in this way. If one feels elated, one experiences a change in oneself *overall*. The qualities of which one is directly aware in attending to how one feels internally on such an occasion are experienced as qualities of *oneself*. One is aware of a general sense of buoyancy, of quickened reactions, of somehow being more alive. These qualities are not qualities of *one's experience*. One's feeling of elation is not buoyant or faster reacting or somehow more alive.

One may also experience a change in how the external world itself appears. The sky may appear brighter; the chirping of nearby birds louder; the time to do some task shorter. This point comes out vividly in the following remarks, brought to my attention by Bill Lycan, from Robert Benchley's 1921 meditation on the dentistry of the time (entitled "The Tooth, the Whole Tooth, and Nothing But the Tooth"):

Heigh-ho! Here's the elevator man! A charming fellow! You wonder if he knows that you have just had a tooth filled. You feel tempted to tell him and slap him on the back. You feel tempted to tell everyone in the bright, cheery street. And what a wonderful street it is too! All full of nice, black snow and water. After all, Life is sweet! (1921, p. 83)

In none of these cases is it true that the qualities of which the subject is directly aware are experienced as qualities of his or her experience of elation. Accordingly, transparency obtains

for felt moods just as it does for other feelings and experiences. The explanation moreover is the same.

That, then, is how, in my view, the appeal to transparency should go. I want next to make a few remarks about the nature of introspective awareness of phenomenal character in light of the position adopted in this section.

II. Introspective Awareness of Phenomenal Character

When we introspect our experiences and feelings, we become aware of what it is like for us to undergo them. But we are not directly aware of those experiences and feelings; nor are we directly aware of any of their qualities. The qualities to which we have direct access are the external ones, the qualities that, if they are qualities of anything, are qualities of external things.⁸ By being aware of these qualities, we are aware of phenomenal character. How can this be?

Prima facie, awareness of phenomenal character is not a quasi-scanning process. Our attention goes *outside* in the visual case, for example, not to the experience *inside* our heads. We attend to one thing—the external surfaces and qualities—and yet *thereby* we are aware of something else—the ‘feel’ of our experience. Awareness of that ‘feel’ is not direct awareness of a quality of the experience. It is awareness that is based upon direct awareness of external qualities without any inference or reasoning being involved. Introspective awareness of the phenomenal character of an experience, I maintain, is awareness-*that*—awareness that an experience with a certain phenomenal character is present.

This claim, it is worth noting, fits well with the linguistic constructions that are naturally employed in connection with such awareness. To talk of our being aware of the phenomenal

8. This remark pertains to the case of perceptual experiences. For bodily sensations, emotions, and moods, the relevant qualities are qualities of bodily regions, processes, and states (and also, for some moods, qualities of external things).

character of an experience or of how an experience ‘feels’ is to use a generic perceptual verb (‘aware of’) followed by an abstract noun (‘the phenomenal character’) or an interrogative nominal (‘how the experience feels’). In cases of this sort, where there is a perceptual verb, the abstract noun or interrogative nominal typically stands in for a factive clause so that what is being described is (a species) of awareness of some fact.⁹ For example, if I am described as hearing the answer to your question or as seeing who is at the door, I do not satisfy the description merely by hearing the sentence that is the answer or seeing the person who is at the door. I must be aware *that* the given sentence is the answer to your question, *that* the given person is the one at the door. In short, I must be aware of some appropriate fact. Likewise, in the case that I am aware of the phenomenal character of my current experience.

Consider the following situation which is, in some important respects, parallel to that which obtains with respect to introspective awareness of phenomenal character. I set a bomb to go off at 5 p.m. At 5 p.m., I am somewhere else, but I am looking at my watch. Seeing it read 5:00, I am aware that the bomb is now exploding, but I do not see the bomb. I am not directly aware *of* it. Nor am I directly aware *of* the bomb’s qualities at 5 p.m. For example, I am not directly aware of the quality of exploding. My awareness of the bomb is propositional. I judge that the bomb is exploding, and I do so by looking at my watch. By being aware of my watch and its qualities, I am aware that an event involving an object of which I am not directly aware is taking place elsewhere.

The case just presented is one of displaced perception or ‘secondary’ seeing-that (seeing that *P* by seeing something not involved in the truth-conditions for the proposition that *P*). Introspection of phenomenal character is usefully modeled upon such cases.¹⁰ But there are also some significant differences. My belief that the bomb is now exploding is based upon a background belief that when the watch reads 5:00, the bomb explodes together with my awareness that the watch reads 5:00. Someone who lacked that background belief would not

9. Cp. Dretske 1993.

10. See here Dretske 1995.

believe that the bomb is now exploding by looking at my watch at 5 p.m. The background belief and the content of the perceptual awareness explain why the other belief state is present. They provide a propositional justification for that state. In the case of introspection of phenomenal character, however, there is no corresponding justification. If I am aware of certain external qualities, I do not need a background belief to be aware that I am undergoing an experience with a certain phenomenal character, once I introspect. The process is automatic. Introspection of phenomenal character is a *reliable* process that takes awareness *of* external qualities (in the case of perceptual sensations) as input and yields awareness *that* a state is present with a certain phenomenal character as output. It is the reliability of this process that underwrites knowledge of phenomenal character. In this respect, introspection of phenomenal character is like introspection of thought contents. Let me explain.

If I think that water is wet, and I introspect, I become aware *that* I am thinking that water is wet. This awareness is not based upon an inference from other propositional states. Nor is it the result of attention to an internal auditory image of myself saying that water is wet, though such an image may accompany my thought. Intuitively, my introspective access to what I am thinking is direct. It seems plausible to suppose that introspection of thought contents is a reliable process that takes as input the content of the thought and delivers as output a belief or judgement that one is undergoing a state with that content.

On this view of introspective knowledge of thought contents, the concept of a thought that *P* is, in its first-person present-tense application, a *recognitional* concept.¹¹ Those who have mastered the concept can introspectively recognize that an occurrent thought that *P* is present without going through any process of reasoning. In cases involving what Tyler Burge has called “Cogito thoughts” (that is, cases in which one consciously thinks to oneself that one is thinking that *P*), there is a conscious act of recognition. But in the typical case, one’s recognition of what one is occurrently thinking does not involve a conscious act. One can recognize that one is thinking that water is a liquid, when the only conscious thought one is having is that water is a liquid.

11. For more on recognitional concepts, see Brian Loar 1990.

In much the same way, we do not have introspective knowledge of phenomenal character by inferring that character from something else. We acquire introspective knowledge of what it is like to have such-and-such an experience or feeling via a reliable process that triggers the application of a suitable phenomenal concept or concepts. This reliable process, as noted earlier, takes as input the direct awareness of external qualities (in the perceptual case). Phenomenal concepts—the concepts that enable us to form a conception of phenomenal character via introspection—are, in my view, recognitional concepts of a special sort.

Phenomenal concepts do not inform their possessors that phenomenal character *is* a certain sort of content. The identification of the former with the latter is a hypothesis that is justified in terms of its explanatory power. Nothing in the character of phenomenal concepts rules out the possibility that the qualities of which we are directly aware, when we introspect, are really qualities of immaterial surfaces or *sensa* presented to us by material objects. Admittedly, these surfaces must be three-dimensional, in some sense, for they are experienced as such, and that patently requires further explanation. But the sense-datum possibility, in my view, is ultimately eliminated on further grounds—its unnecessary complexity, its postulation of nonphysical causes (given that phenomenal character is causally efficacious), its counter-intuitiveness in denying that the surfaces of which we are directly aware are not just plain, old material surfaces. What introspection and phenomenal concepts rule out is the possibility that the qualities to which we have direct introspective access are qualities of experiences.

III. **Blurry Vision**

If you unfocus your eyes, you can see objects in a blurry way without seeing them as being blurry. Your experience does not represent the objects as blurry. Representationally, it has been claimed, your experience after you unfocus your eyes is the same, in all salient respects, as the experience before. But phenomenally, there is a difference. Since representationalism does not allow any phenomenal difference without a representational difference, this case is a putative counter-example to representationalism. It also threatens to create trouble for Step 1 of the appeal to transparency on behalf of representationalism. For if there is a phenomenal difference between blurry vision of a surface and clear vision of it that

is not grounded on a difference in the qualities that look to the subject to belong to the surface, then there must be further qualities the subject experiences, qualities that belong to the visual field itself, considered as a subjective entity, or to the experience.

This above case is due to Paul Boghossian and David Velleman (1989). One rather like it is raised by Ned Block (forthcoming (b)). Block asks us to imagine that we are watching a movie screen that fills our whole field of vision. The images on the screen are themselves blurry and look that way. Here Block claims we have clear impressions of blurry images. In the second example, we are reading a program in the movie theater and we then look up at the screen. The images on the screen now may or may not be blurry (as far as we are aware), but we have a blurry impression of them. Block is dubious that the representationalist can capture satisfactorily the difference between having clear impressions of blurry images and blurry impressions of clear images.

Another everyday example worth mentioning is that of poor eyesight. When I take off my reading-glasses, my vision of nearby things blurs a little. Alternatively, if I stare at a bright light and look away, I have a blurry or fuzzy after-image. Blurriness, it might be claimed, is an aspect of the phenomenal character of my visual experiences in both of these examples that is not fixed by the representational content of the experiences.

I accept that there is indeed a difference between the case of seeing objects blurrily and the case of seeing them as blurry. But properly understood, in my view, it is no threat to the representationalist's position. When one sees a sharp object as blurry, one sees it as having indistinct contours and boundaries. This, we can agree, is not what normally happens when one unfocuses one's eyes or takes off one's eye glasses. In these cases, one simply loses information. Likewise, when one sees the world through eyes that are half-closed. In seeing blurrily, one undergoes sensory representations that fail to specify just where the boundaries and contours lie. Some information that was present with eyes focused is now missing. In particular, there is less definite information about surface depth, orientation, contours, etc.

In the case of seeing sharp objects as blurry, then, one's visual experience comments inaccurately on boundaries. It 'says' that the boundaries themselves are fuzzy when they are

not. In the cases of seeing blurrily, one's visual experience does not do this. It makes no comment on where exactly the boundaries lie. Here there is no inaccuracy.

There is a further difference between the two cases. When one sees an object or screen image itself as blurry, one brings to bear a conceptual representation of blurriness, a representation that demands that one have a cognitive grasp what it is for something to have indistinct or fuzzy boundaries.¹² By contrast, in the case of seeing something blurrily, the representation is nonconceptual. A small child with poor eyesight can see things blurrily. It should also be noted that a small child with good eye sight can see blurry things clearly. That too is nonconceptual. A threefold distinction thus emerges: seeing as blurry, seeing blurrily, and seeing clearly something blurry. Only the first of these involves a conceptual representation of blurriness.

The difference, I might add, between seeing a blurry screen image *blurrily* and seeing that same screen image *clearly* has to do with the degree of representational indeterminacy in

12. In general, seeing *X* as *F* requires possession of the concept *F*. I thus agree with Leeds when he says (on pp. 12-13) that "although I perceive the tomato as red, I do not perceive it as reflecting long wavelengths" (given the fiction that surface red is a matter of reflecting long wavelengths). But I do not accept the thesis that looking *F*, where '*F*' denotes a sensorily presented property of which one can be directly aware, requires the concept *F*. Looking *F* needs to be distinguished from looking to be *F* or looking as if *F*, and it is not conceptual at all (as I use the term 'conceptual').

For more here, see Tye 2000, Chapters 3 and 4. On my present view (which differs from the one Leeds discusses in connection with images), where '*F*' and '*G*' pick out the same property, something can be seen as *F* without being seen as *G*, but in all cases, something, in looking *F* (in the phenomenal sense of 'looks'), looks *G*. So, I do not accept Leeds' blanket contention that "the content of our perceptual states . . . involves more intensionality than any story about tracking can capture" (p. 16). This is certainly true for many perceptual states (in particular, those that are cognitive) but not for all of them.

the experience. In seeing the image blurrily, one's experience is less definite about boundaries and surface details than the blurriness in the image warrants. In seeing the same screen image clearly, one's experience accurately captures the image blurriness.

Still, is there really any *phenomenal* difference between seeing blurrily and seeing as blurry or between seeing blurrily a clear thing and seeing clearly a blurry thing? To be sure, there is a difference in higher-order consciousness between realizing that one is seeing blurrily and realizing that one is seeing as blurry, but this is extrinsic and non-phenomenal. There is also normally an associated phenomenal difference connected with the presence of characteristic bodily sensations involved in the region of the eyes when one sees blurrily (one's eyes 'feel' different). And seeing as blurry may well be accompanied by a linguistic, auditory image of oneself saying (in one's native tongue) that the relevant thing is blurry. That image, like other images, will have phenomenal features. But leaving these differences aside, is there any inherent phenomenal difference between the two states in typical cases, or between the states of seeing a clear thing blurrily and seeing a blurry thing clearly?

It seems obvious that, in principle, an experimental set-up could be devised that would leave one without any way of telling from the phenomenal character of one's visual experience (*without any additional cues*) whether one had shifted from seeing a sharp screen image through a blur to seeing clearly a suitably blurred version of that same screen image in at least some cases. Still, there does seem to me a purely visual phenomenal difference in some cases too.

Here is an example from Frank Jackson (in correspondence) that illustrates the point. Consider a water color painting done on wet paper so that the edges of the colored shapes blur. If I view such a painting with my glasses on, I have a clear impression of a blurry representation. Now consider a water color painting done on dry paper with sharp edges to the colored shapes. Viewing a painting of this sort with my glasses off, I have a blurry impression of a clear representation. Typically, there is a phenomenal difference between the two cases.

Jackson agrees with me that this example presents no problem for representationalism, however. His suggestion (in correspondence) is that with the blurry water color, my visual

experience represents quite precisely the blurriness of the edges; that is, it represents (a) that the edges definitely fall between spatial regions *A* and *B* of the paper and (b) that it is indefinite exactly where between *A* and *B* on the paper the edges fall. With the clear water color, seen without eye glasses, my visual experience is silent on the precise locus (if any) of the edges; that is, my experience represents that the edges of the colored shapes definitely fall between *A* and *B* while failing to represent exactly where it is between *A* and *B* the edges lie.

What about the example of the fuzzy after-image? When one sees an after-image, there is nothing that one sees. The term 'see' here has a phenomenological sense that lacks existential import. It is the sense that is operative when we say that Macbeth saw a dagger. Seeing a blue, circular after-image consists in having a certain kind of visual experience. The experience isn't blue or circular. Rather it is an illusory experience as of something blue and circular (from here), something filmy and hovering in space. The fuzziness of the after-image is most easily accounted for by supposing that it is a straightforward reflection of the representational impoverishment of the relevant visual experience. The experience does not 'say' exactly where the boundaries of the nonexistent blue circular thing lie. Again, no difficulty for representationalism.

So, blurry vision does not undermine the appeal to transparency. Whether one is seeing clearly, seeing blurrily or seeing clearly something blurry, the qualities of which one is directly aware are all experienced as qualities of the surfaces and edges represented by one's experience (including in some instances of the third case, the quality of blurriness).¹³

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