The Particularity of Perception as an Argument for a Relational View of Experience

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This thesis concerns the nature of perceptual experience. It asks what view of perceptual experience best accommodates the thought that the objects of perceptual experience are the particular objects present in one's surroundings. Two kinds of theories are considered. On one side of the issue are theories that take perception to be fundamentally representational in nature. According to these theories, perception always involves the instantiation of contentful internal states. The discussion of representational theories focuses on the views of Tyler Burge and Susanna Schellenberg, both of whom explain perceptual particularity in terms of representational content. On the other side of the issue are theories that understand perceptual experience in fundamentally relational terms. Broadly speaking, relational theories have it that, rather than requiring the instantiation of a contentful internal state, perceptual experience is a matter of standing in a relation to the particular entities perceived. Perceptual particularity is thus explained as the obtaining of a relation between the perceiver and the particular perceived.

The thesis argues against the thought that contentful internal states mediate perception of particular objects. The argument takes inspiration from John Campbell's thought that perceptual experience has a specific role to play in explaining the possibility of demonstrative reference and thought about particulars. It is argued that, by appearing as fundamental common factors between veridical and delusive experiences, contentful internal states get in the way of understanding perceptual experience as having this explanatory role and genuinely informing one of the particulars in one's surroundings. By dispensing with contentful internal states and viewing experience in terms of presentation rather than representation, a relational view of experience can better accommodate the thought that the objects of perceptual experience are the particular objects in one's surrounding environment.

Keywords: perception, perceptual experience, illusion, hallucination, representational content, representationalism, relationalism, disjunctivism

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1. Introduction

Perception seems to put us in a distinctive relation with our immediate surroundings by allowing us to see what is there and consequently allowing us to guide our action. A simple look through the window is often enough to determine whether an umbrella will be required on a walk to the store. Similarly, one may suggest "seeing for oneself" in response to someone's query about what lurks behind a creaky door. As these examples reveal, the focus in this essay will be on *visual* perception and perceptual experience. It is usually the primary focus in the philosophical literature as well.

To pinpoint the more precise question that I will be focusing on, consider the following example. Suppose your neighbor asks whether you have seen his cat that has recently gone missing. For you to be of any help, you must provide information about a *particular* cat. Just as you are about to answer in the negative, and disappoint your distressed neighbor, you manage to catch a glimpse of the cat in question. Pointing to it, you ask if *that* is his cat. Your neighbor turns to look and happily exclaims: "Yes, that is my cat!"

The above is an example of using a perceptual demonstrative to refer to a presently perceived particular. Both see the very same entity, and the demonstrative "that" is interpreted and understood precisely by perceptually attending to the particular cat. Despite the example's seemingly benign nature, I will attempt to show how it contains a fair amount of philosophical depth.

One of my primary tasks in this essay is thus to examine how different theories of perceptual experience relate to the above example. That is, I will examine how the theories attempt to explain how we perceive particulars. The theories of perception that I will consider could roughly be put in two categories, *representationalism* and *relationalism*. The former thinks of perception as fundamentally a matter of representation, while the latter thinks of it in fundamentally relational terms. More detailed characterizations will be given in due course.

I will begin by discussing Tyler Burge's representational theory of perception in section 2. Going over Burge's theory, even if very briefly, is especially valuable for two reasons. First, Burge takes the issue of particularity seriously which consequently has an influence on his representationalism. As I will mention, not all representationalists agree with Burge about the relevance of particulars in explaining perception. Second, presenting Burge's theory allows me to introduce some key terminology pertaining to the topic at hand.

In section 3, I will discuss the particularity of perception in more detail. Here I will discuss Susanna Schellenberg's views as she has made some useful distinctions relating to particularity. Schellenberg

also endorses a form of representationalism, which is in many respects different from Burge's theory, but also similar in an important way. One of the aims in this essay is to argue that despite appearances, Schellenberg and Burge think of particularity in a very similar way. I will also consider some general arguments in favor of thinking that particulars are involved in perception. I will end the section by discussing a view called *disjunctivism*, along with Burge's and Schellenberg's criticisms of it. Although it does not necessarily entail it, disjunctivism is often associated with a kind of anti-representationalism. Nonetheless, some of the thoughts that motivate disjunctivism will create a useful bridge between sections 3 and 4.

Section 4 is the longest one by far. There I discuss relationalism, which, like representationalism, encompasses a variety of views. The key claim is, however, that perceptual experience is fundamentally relational. One of the most prominent proponents of relationalism is John Campbell, whose writings I will use to make the contrast between representationalism and relationalism more concrete. Following Campbell I will argue that, unlike representationalism, relationalism leaves room for experience to play an important role in explaining how it is possible to think about a mind-independent world. By connecting the thought behind this argument with particularity, I attempt to show that representationalism is ill-suited to explain the particularity of perception. To make this argument work, I will argue against a specific understanding of the mind, utilizing some of John McDowell's writings. I will also consider some counterarguments to relationalism that have to do with so-called common factors.

Before moving on to the main text, two terminological remarks must be made. When I speak of Burge and Schellenberg as "representationalists", I only wish to attribute to them the thought that perception is fundamentally representational. The term 'representationalism' is often used to refer to theories of *consciousness* that take phenomenal properties to be reducible to representational properties. Burge (2005, 77 note 85) explicitly rejects that view. The other terminological remark that I wish to make is that I will generally use 'perception' and 'perceptual experience' interchangeably. Someone may think that this is ill-advised, since the latter is often taken to imply conscious perception, and there is empirical evidence that perception can occur unconsciously. Burge (2010a, 368) says explicitly that in discussing perception he "drop[s] the association with consciousness". Nonetheless, if 'perception' is the more inclusive term, and perceptual experience is only a subset of perception, then one may

simply understand this as an essay about the subset.[1] [2] With all that said, it is time to move on to the main text.

2. Tyler Burge on Representational Content

In *Origins of Objectivity* (2010a) Tyler Burge argues that perception is a matter of representation. The more specific claim is that perception is *constitutively* representational (Burge 2010a, 396). There is already much to unpack in this short statement. Let's start from the notion of 'constitution'. To be a thing of a certain kind is to satisfy certain constitutive conditions that specify what it is to be that kind of thing. Burge (2010a, 65) provides many examples of such constitutive conditions. These include such things as water being constitutively made up of hydrogen and oxygen, and hearts constitutively having the function of pumping blood in a circulatory system. They would not be what they are if they didn't satisfy those conditions. Similarly, if perception is constitutively representational, then there is no perception without representation.

Representation is the subject of a vast amount of philosophical literature. I will focus mostly on what Burge has to say about the issue, leaving aside much of the debate surrounding the matter. But to briefly explain representation in general, it is useful to consider such things as words and pictures. The sentence "London is the capital city of England" represents (to someone who understands English) the fact that *London is the capital city of England*. Similarly, a picture may, for example, represent a certain person or scene. To say that perception is representational is therefore to draw *some* analogy between it and things like words and pictures. It is difficult to define perceptual representation in a non-circular manner. The simplest way of putting the point that perception is representational is to just say that perception represents things as being a certain way.

A notion that will come up somewhat frequently in this essay is *representational content*. Burge (2010a, 37-38) says that representational content is a "fundamental aspect of psychological kinds […] at their finest explanatory grain", and that it "constitutes the veridicality conditions [of such kinds]". Perception is a psychological kind. That representational contents constitute the *veridicality*

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[1] However, I do find the distinction between conscious and unconscious perception a bit unclear, since it seems that we do not quite understand what consciousness itself is. If one means by unconscious perception simply a lack of awareness of the things perceived, then I see nothing in what I write that is outright contradictory with that. If one means by it a lack of "phenomenality", then I think we are in murky waters. But this is beside the point.

[2] I am not alone in using the two interchangeably. The SEP article titled "The Problem of Perception" (Crane & French 2021) starts with this sentence: "The Problem of *Perception* is a pervasive and traditional problem about our ordinary conception of *perceptual experience*" (my italics).

conditions of perceptions means that they specify the conditions in relation to which the accuracy or inaccuracy of perceptions can be assessed.[3] An analogy with belief will make this clearer. Suppose that you believe it is raining outside. For your belief to be veridical (i.e., *true*), it must be raining outside. A pictorial representation, on the other hand, may be *accurate* when it (for example) resembles the thing that is represented. In a similar way, for a perception to be veridical it needs to be accurate about its subject matter.

There are some complications when it comes to the accuracy of perceptions. For one, Burge (2005, 7, 41) thinks that perceptual content is always perspectival. That is, we always have only a partial perspective on the things perceived. Furthermore, Burge (2005, 7) thinks that this perspectival way – *the mode of presentation* – is the fundamental aspect in identifying perceptual state kinds. In other words, the *way* in which an entity is perceived is more fundamental in the explanatory order of things than the entity to which is perceptually referred to. To elaborate on this thought, suppose that one perceives a green door. There are obviously many ways in which one can perceive such a door. For example, one may look at it from different angles and in different lighting conditions, which varies, for one, the "look" of the door. The reason to think of these "ways" of perceiving as fundamental is motivated in part by reflection on perceptual error.

Illusions and hallucinations are cases of perceptual error. In an illusion, one may perceive a green door in a way that is subjectively indistinguishable from perceiving a blue door. Perhaps the lighting conditions are such that make what is really a green door look blue. In this kind of illusion, the representational content of the state one is in *misattributes* the property 'blue' to the green door. In this case, misattributing a property does not necessarily make the whole representational content inaccurate, since one may still accurately perceive that it is *that* door which looks blue. The perceptual state may therefore still be *referentially* successful.

To be able to make these kinds of distinctions, Burge (2005, 6) postulates that representational content consists of both a general and a singular element. General elements consist of ability-general, or context-free, representations that are freely repeatable and their individuation conditions are independent of particular entities (Burge 2005, 35; Burge 2010a, 380). The notion "context-free" is especially illuminating, since these general elements are such that can be shared by veridical perceptions, illusions and hallucinations alike. That is, independent of context, one may be in a representational state which has a specific *kind* of general content. The thought is that the very same

[3] A belief's veridicality conditions specify what condition must be satisfied in order for that belief to be *true*. Truth conditions apply to propositional contents, whereas accuracy conditions apply to non-propositional contents (Burge 2014, 389). Burge takes perceptual contents to be non-propositional (or non-conceptual).

kind (or type) of perception (or perceptual experience) may occur in veridical perception, illusion or even hallucination.

At the same time, Burge (2005, 6; 2010a, 380-381) thinks that perception constitutively functions to single out environmental particulars and thus enables interaction with those particulars. A useful example that Burge (2005, 6) gives to illustrate this is that if one perceives a scene, and there happens to be an exact duplicate of that scene somewhere else in the universe, one still perceives the particular scene that has caused the perception and not its duplicate. The same could be said for objects. If S perceives O, then even if by some cosmic luck an exact duplicate O* existed somewhere else, one would still perceive only O. According to Burge (2010a, 381), particulars can't be represented without the help of a causal context – in successful perception, the singular element is *applied* to some contextually specified particular.

These considerations obviously have a bearing on the veridicality conditions of perceptual states. But I will leave further discussion of veridicality conditions for later. In this section, I wanted to give a fair (albeit brief) characterization of Burge's view as it pertains to the issues that will be discussed in this essay. I will now move on to more detailed discussion of perceptual particularity.

3. The Particularity of Perception

One controversy in the philosophy of perception has to do with particularity. Broadly speaking, what the debate concerns is whether the content that characterizes perceptual states is particular-involving (in one sense or another), or whether it is wholly general. One way of framing the question in Burge's terminology would be to ask whether the representational contents of perceptual states involve a singular element. The main sides of this debate can be called, in Susanna Schellenberg's (2018, 16) terminology, *generalists* and *particularists*.

It is not my intention to explicitly contribute to the debate between particularism and generalism, since the main issue that I will be concerned with in this essay is *how* particularity should be accounted for. I will in a sense take it for granted that perception does involve particulars. Nonetheless, if the arguments presented later on are successful, then they will have consequences for this debate as well. With that being said I will now move on to discussing generalism, since even though it denies particularity in the relevant sense, explaining the view in broad terms will help clarify what the whole issue of particularity is about.

3.1 Generalism

Generalists, or *existentialists* (Hill 2019), hold that all perceptual content is existentially quantified content. The generalist view has it that the content of perceptual experiences can be characterized by such statements as "*there is* a such-and-such with such-and-such properties". As such, there is no reference within the content to any environmental particulars. Rather, the content makes a general claim that there exists *some* object with such-and-such properties in the environment. In this way, the content is environment-independent. The very same content could occur in different environments which include different particulars or (theoretically) no particulars at all.

At the same time, it seems intuitively reasonable to demand from a philosophical account of perception that it explains how it is that we perceive particulars. For example, it just seems obvious that I see this specific mug that is in front of me and that I am thus aware of a particular. But how is that? And how could a generalist, who thinks that seeing this specific mug consists of being in a perceptual state characterized only by existential content of the form "there exists a mug, and it is such-and-such", explain how it is *this* mug and not just any old mug that I perceive? The way I described the constitutive claim of generalism may make one wonder whether generalists can meet this challenge at all. The generalist may begin their answer by claiming that perceptual content is *phenomenological content*, and thus what determines the content of a perceptual state is its phenomenology (Davies 1992, 26). Taking the content of perception to be phenomenological content could certainly support the idea of content being existentially quantified rather than particular-involving. Let's take a brief look at one possible generalist answer in this vein.

Christopher Hill (2019, 1392) thinks that generalists do not need to deny that one may be perceptually aware of particulars, but that the explanation of such awareness is different than just including the particular mug in the content of the perceptual state. Hill (Ibid.) sketches a general strategy for answering the question as an existentialist that goes roughly as so: To be perceptually aware of a particular object O is to be in an experiential state E which represents there being an object with properties close enough to O, and E is caused by O. Hill therefore seems to think that successful perception is a sort of matching – a particular is perceived when it adequately matches one's experience. A blue mug is perceived when the representational content of one's experience matches the blue mug adequately, and when that experience is also caused appropriately by that blue mug. Both aspects must obviously be in place for this account to have any plausibility. One could hardly be considered aware of the blue mug in front of them if they represented there being no such mug at all, or if they just happened (that is, without being appropriately caused) to be in a state that matched the blue mug by pure luck.

The main motivation for existentialism about perceptual content is that it gives a seemingly unified account for all kinds of perceptual experiences. Hallucinations, for example, are often thought to be examples of experiences that do not involve reference to particular objects at all. If the contents of hallucinations are not to be characterized by singular contents that make reference to environmental particulars, then the obvious alternative is that they are instead captured by existentially quantified contents. Consequently, the generalist line of argument is that if we want to give the same account of the contents of *all* perceptual states, whether veridical, illusory, or hallucinatory, then we need to treat those contents as existential contents.

Another example that may count in favor of generalism is expressed (though not originally) by Ned Block and it concerns cases of so-called seamless transition. If an object, O, can be seamlessly swapped (i.e. without the subject consciously noticing the change) with a qualitatively identical object O*, then this seems to provide evidence for the generalist position. This is so, because it may seem unintuitive to think that there can be changes in the contents of conscious perceptual states which are not (even in principle) open to introspection. (Block 2023, 126-127.) That is, if S looks at O, and O is swapped with O* without S noticing, then many have the intuition that the content of S's conscious perceptual experience should be thought of as remaining constant. This is quite in line with taking perceptual content to be phenomenal content. But because it is certainly not uncontroversial to think that perceptual content is just phenomenal content, then this can't of course be taken as a knock-down argument in favor of generalism (and to be clear, Block does not think so either). But it may at least be taken to constitute one crucial element in a defense of the generalist position.

I will now move on to the main topic of this paper which is particularism. Although the point is not to specifically argue against generalism, it is difficult to motivate particularism other than by contrasting it with generalism. So even though in the following I will expand on particularism in part by going through some possible arguments against generalism, my aim is not to really contribute to that debate here. The aim is simply to give some reasons for thinking that perceptions involve particulars and to explain what that could mean. I will therefore not consider any possible counterarguments proposed by generalists, since that would be beside the point in the context of this essay.

3.2 Particularism

Particularism regarding perception holds that the contents of perceptual states can't be fully understood without reference to particulars in one way or another. If the indiscernibility of two

perceptual experiences is enough for them to have the same phenomenal contents, then particularists would say that perceptual contents are not mere phenomenal contents. Particularists think that perceptual particularity must be accounted for by the very contents of perception. Therefore, instead of accounting for particularity by reference to a combination of an existentially quantified content and a cause, proponents of particularism usually think that particulars play some role within the content itself.

How might one go about defining perceptual particularity more concretely? One very direct and succinct characterization of perceptual particularity comes from Susanna Schellenberg. The *particularity thesis* states that "[a] subject's perceptual state M brought about by being perceptually related to the particular α is [partially] constituted[4] by α" (Schellenberg 2018, 14). Here the term '*constitution*' is in play again. Schellenberg (2018, 15-16) uses the technical notion of 'grounding' in explaining what she means by constitution. In this context grounding can be seen as an attempt to avoid collapsing the notion of constitution into mere material constitution. Schellenberg does not therefore intend to say that particulars materially constitute perceptual states like bricks materially constitute a brick wall. Instead, particulars are constitutive in the sense that the perceptual states could not be the states that they are without those particulars. Therefore, Schellenberg's use of the term 'constitution' is quite similar to Burge's, though Burge does not seem to extend it as far as Schellenberg does. Burge (2010a, 64) explicitly denies that particulars constitute the natures of perceptual states.[5]

Schellenberg (2018, 17) distinguishes two types of particularity, relational and phenomenological. Phenomenological particularity is about how perceptual states *seem* to be about particulars. The claim is that the phenomenology of perception is such that we seem to be perceptually related to particular objects and events in our environment. Hill (2019, 1403-1405) argues that phenomenological particularity does not really pose any problem to generalism, and that even the most radical interpretation of what phenomenological particularity is would still not entail that the contents of perception are particular-involving.

Perceptual states characterized by relational particularity, on the other hand, are partly constituted by the particulars perceived (Schellenberg 2018, 17). This allows for the possibility of explaining phenomenological particularity by appealing to the contents of perceptual states, since relational particularity has it that those contents are particular-involving. However, here it is very important to

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[4] By 'constitution' Schellenberg always means *partial* constitution. I will also work with that simplification.
[5] But as we will see, Schellenberg and Burge are not in the end too far from each other on this issue.

be clear what really is meant by phenomenological particularity. As Hill (2019, 1403) notes, if phenomenological particularity is understood simply as it seeming to one that one is perceptually *aware* of a particular, then the generalist can refer to something like Hill's account of perceptual awareness. It seems to me that Burge's (2010a, 84) claim that perception is "inevitably as of particulars" could in itself be understood in either one of Hill's or Schellenberg's sense. The matter is complicated. Nonetheless, Burge is very much of the mind that perception represents particulars. This is evident in how Burge (2010a, 186) says, for example, that the "basic content [of perceptual states] must make reference to […] particulars". It is therefore safe to understand Burge as arguing against the generalist view that takes existentially quantified content to be basic.

The differences and similarities between Burge and Schellenberg on this matter will emerge from considering what exactly it is for a perceptual state to make reference to a particular. Serving as a bridge towards that, it will be useful to consider one argument in favor of particularism in general which I think brings out well the intuition for why perceptual contents should make reference to particulars in the first place. This will also help give shape to the discussion relating to disjunctivism and relationalism which will come later.

3.3 Soteriou's Argument Against Generalism

To repeat a *prima facie* objection to generalism, one can ask how perceptual experience so construed could account for the fact that we perceive particulars. As Michael Martin (2002, 9) puts it, for experiences to make demonstrative judgements about particulars reasonable, the content of experience should reflect that it is one rather than another particular that is perceived. But this, in itself, is only an argument against the generalist form of representationalism and as I have noted, there are representationalists like Burge and Schellenberg who do not support generalism about perceptual content. It is thus high time to take a closer look at how representationalism can accommodate particulars and thus answer the *prima facie* objection above, *without* collapsing into a non-representational theory.

Matthew Soteriou (2000) has provided an argument for why representationalists[6] should include room for particulars in perceptual content and also indicated in what way this could be done. Soteriou's argument takes as its target the generality thesis, which is just the thesis underlying generalism, which

[6] Soteriou himself uses the term *intentionalism*, not *representationalism*. This terminological difference is not important here, since what I am calling representationalism is just the view that perception is fundamentally a matter of representation.

is that the content of visual experience is existentially quantified and not object-involving (Soteriou 2000, 174-175). One can extract a dilemma from Soteriou's article (Soteriou himself does not put it in the form of a dilemma) which arises from upholding the generality thesis. The dilemma is that either the generalist has to give up on the idea that perceptual experiences can represent particulars, or one has to accept an unappealing account of the content of visual perception.

Soteriou argues that the first option is undermined by considering a case of *misperception* (see also (Martin 2002, 10-11)). The example Soteriou (2000, 179-181) gives is that if, due to wearing distorting glasses, one perceives an object (O1) that is actually to the left of them as being in front of them, then the experience they are having ("there is an object in front of me") could be made veridical by placing an object (O2) in front of them *if* we assume the generality thesis. That is, (O2) would make the general content true *even though* it is (O1) which is causing the experience. Being caused by (O1) distinguishes the case from a veridical hallucination in which one's experience is not caused by any appropriate object at all, but whose content just happens to match what is out there. Therefore, what we have instead is an example of *veridical misperception* under the generality assumption. But according to Soteriou (2000, 180), accepting this claim should make one give up the assumption that in order for a perception to be veridical, the environment needs to be the way it is represented as being. This, however, is something that "[w]e would be loath to give up […] in the case of belief" (Ibid.). This is a strong reason not to go for the first horn of the dilemma.

On the other side of the dilemma, the unappealing account of content is due to John Searle (1983). Searle's (1983, 48) own formulation (one of them) of the content of visual experience is the following: "I have a visual experience (that there is a yellow station wagon there and that there is a yellow station wagon there is causing this visual experience)". The main knock against it is that it basically makes a self-referential claim about the experience itself and is therefore thought to be overly sophisticated and complicated (for such expressions see e.g. (Burge 1991, 198) and (Papineau 2021, 78)). Such *prima facie* worries are obviously not enough to refute the view, but I will leave this specific issue to one side and assume that Searle's account is indeed too demanding.

By arguing against both horns of the dilemma, Soteriou (2000, 184) arrives at the conclusion that representationalists should drop the generality thesis altogether. That is, since one should not deny that perception can represent particulars on pains of accepting the possibility of veridical misperception and as one should not accept Searle's analysis of content, one should simply drop the generality thesis which poses this dilemma to us in the first place. Consequently, he suggests that one should think of the *truth-evaluable content* of experience as object-involving (Soteriou 2000, 187), meaning that the veridicality conditions associated with a perceptual experience, or a representational

state, are dependent on a specific context which involves specific particulars. Later on, we will see that this is basically just what Burge says as well. Soteriou (2000, 186) also notes, however, that by accepting objects into the truth-evaluable content of experience, representationalists would seem to have to make a distinction between content that is not truth-evaluable (non-conceptual content) and for content that is. Otherwise, it seems that representationalists could not sustain the idea that there is a "layer" of experience that is not object-involving, and which explains phenomena like illusion and hallucination. If such a distinction is not made, then it seems that some form of disjunctivism about these states would ensue.

This move to non-conceptual content is just what Burge endorses, while claiming that at some abstract level the structure of such content is still *analogous* to certain kinds of conceptual content[7] (Burge 2010a, 381; Burge 2019, 41; see also (Schellenberg 2018, 25) for a similar claim). I already mentioned in section 2 that Burge thinks of perceptual contents as having accuracy (rather than truth) conditions, precisely in order to avoid the association of such contents with conceptual abilities or propositions. Burge's "concession" that there is a structural analogy between perceptual content and a form of referential linguistic content is based on a certain view of reference.

Schellenberg (2018, 53-54) also argues that perceptual content is non-conceptual on the basis that at least some perceptual capacities[8] employed in perception are non-conceptual capacities. But focusing on this question whether perceptual content is conceptual or not will only serve as a distraction going forward, since what will be at issue more specifically is whether the involvement of particulars in perception is fundamentally representational at all, not whether they are represented conceptually or non-conceptually. But I am jumping too far ahead.

In the next section, I will discuss in more detail how Burge and Schellenberg think that particulars are involved in perception. I will argue that there are substantial similarities between Burge and Schellenberg on just that point, even though their preferred terminologies may at times seem to conflict with each other. The main point of agreement is the acceptance of a fundamental common factor.

[7] Namely, to "referentially applied singular noun phrases" (Burge 2019, 41).
[8] See (Schellenberg 2018, 31-32) for a comprehensive overview of what perceptual capacities are.

3.4 Particularity and Common Factors

Schellenberg offers an original argument for the particularity of perception. Perhaps seeing the full force of the argument would require elaborating on Schellenberg's key thought that perception has to do with employing perceptual capacities. But that is too substantial of a thesis to explain here in sufficient detail. Even so, Schellenberg's argument summarizes well one way of thinking how perceptual states may be constituted by particulars (i.e. one way such states can be object-involving).

Schellenberg's *particularity argument* is the following:

> 1. If a subject S perceives particular α, then S discriminates and singles out α (as a consequence of being perceptually related to α).[9]
>
> 2. If S discriminates and singles out α […] then S's perceptual state M brought about by being perceptually related to α is constituted by discriminating and singling out α.
>
> 3. If S's perceptual state M brought about by being perceptually related to α is constituted by discriminating and singling out α, then S's perceptual state M brought about by being perceptually related to α is constituted by α.
>
> From 1-3: If S perceives α, then S's perceptual state M brought about by being perceptually related to α is constituted by α. (Schellenberg 2018, 24-25)

The objective of Schellenberg's argument is two-fold, since it argues both that perceptual states are constituted by particulars and also attempts to show what constitutes that fact. Schellenberg does not support the first premise very much outside of saying that it is "unclear" what the alternative could be (but see note 9). Schellenberg (2018, 25) supports the second premise of her argument by saying that a mental state one is in by virtue of engaging in a mental activity is partly constituted by that activity. Therefore, if one is in a perceptual state in virtue of discriminating and singling out a particular, then that perceptual state is partly constituted by that very act of singling out the particular. The final move (that the singled out particular itself constitutes the perceptual state) is supported by

[9] It has been said that seeing a *ganzfeld* (a field of uniform color) poses a problem for Schellenberg's first premise (see (Dorsch 2024); see also Schellenberg's (2018, 27) anticipatory answer to this kind of objection). I think there is a more "common sense" objection to the premise. Imagine walking in a rainforest and coming up to a tree. Unbeknownst to you, there is a dot painted on the trunk of the tree. However, a cleverly masquerading chameleon blocks you from seeing the dot. It seems clear that if the chameleon, which by hypothesis one doesn't discriminate and single out from the tree trunk, wasn't blocking the dot, one would see the dot. Thus, in this case one could explain not seeing the dot by saying that one sees the chameleon instead, even though one does not discriminate it from its surroundings. What this example shows is at least that Schellenberg's premise may not be quite as straightforward as she seems to think it is.

the claim that because perceptual states are outputs of employing perceptual capacities, and if (one of) the function(s) of a capacity is to single out a particular, the output of employing the capacity is a perceptual state that is partly constituted by that particular (Schellenberg 2018, 26-27).

It is important to remember that Schellenberg uses the term 'constitution' to refer to a type of grounding relation, here between the particular α and the perceptual state M. This is to avoid any association with the idea that α is in any sense a "material" part of M itself. Instead, α constitutes M in virtue of S employing a perceptual capacity whose function it is to single out particulars of the kind α falls under. Therefore, it is fair to say that α constituting perceptual state M amounts to α being the particular to which M (non-conceptually) *refers* to. This would allow one to account for particularity by reference to veridicality conditions and without having to commit to a stronger form of object-dependence. Understood this way, the perceptual state M is still independent of α in a crucial way, in that the *type* of state M is, is not dependent on α.

Schellenberg's view on this point could roughly be summarized in the following way: Singling out a particular is a matter of employing a general, repeatable, perceptual capacity to a particular of the type which that capacity functions to single out. The employment of such a capacity yields a mental state with representational content (Schellenberg 2018, 47, 60). This representational content's *type* is dependent on which perceptual capacity it results from and is *tokened* by a particular in successful employment of the capacity (Schellenberg 2018, 87-88).

When Schellenberg talks about perceptual states being constituted by particulars, this refers only to token contents that are yielded by successful employment of perceptual capacities. Most of the time (assuming perception is successful most of the time) content types are tokened by particulars. The veridicality conditions of token contents involve reference to particulars, and it is in this sense that a token mental state is object-involving. So, most of the time perceptual states are constituted by particulars. But the crucial point is that perceptual states yielded by employing capacities are not *necessarily* tokened – the very same *types* of states could occur in situations with no appropriate particulars to be singled out at all.

Schellenberg (2018, 84) thus divides perceptual content into two components, one that "grounds perceptual consciousness" and another that "grounds perceptual particularity". The first component refers to the type or kind of content and the second to token content.[10] It is the employment of a capacity – regardless of context – that yields a type of state. Successfully employing a perceptual

[10] Burge (2011, 44) also implies that it is the ability-general state kind that grounds conscious perceptual states.

capacity to single out a particular yields a token state. The content of a token state is constituted by a particular since its veridicality conditions involve reference to that contextually determined particular.

With all this in mind, it isn't very controversial to take Schellenberg's view here to be a so-called common factor view (or common kind view). A common factor view subscribes to the claim that perceptual states (or experiences), be they veridical, illusory, or hallucinatory, form a common mental kind (Crane & French, 2021). Since Schellenberg thinks that state types result from the employment of perceptual capacities, and since those capacities are employed in the very same manner (though not equally successfully) in veridical perception, illusion, and hallucination, then all of those can be of the very same type of state. Moreover, state types are explanatorily more fundamental (than token states), since they result from employing perceptual capacities which need not necessarily be successful. Schellenberg thus subscribes to the idea that there is a common factor at the *fundamental level of explanation – a highest common factor*.[11]

Burge seems to be in substantial agreement on this point. He says that applications of perceptual representations can be individuated independently of any objects perceived and that "the same application could have been caused by another object or by processes that stemmed from no object" (Burge 2005, 54). The thought is that there is a common element in perception whose nature is independent of any particulars perceived. Burge also thinks that this common element is explanatorily fundamental. I will discuss Burge's main reason for this in more detail in section 3.6.2.

So, both Burge and Schellenberg make a type-token distinction for perceptual states. This is a reasonable move to make, since both think that a theory of perception should explain how we perceive particulars in our environment and also how nonveridical perceptual states relate to veridical ones (Burge 2014, 393; Schellenberg 2018, 73-74). In this context it is worth discussing Burge's idea of treating veridical perceptions, or "seeings", as *hybrid kinds*. Such hybrid kinds consist of a purely psychological factor – that which the context-free element (common factor, state type) of a given representational content characterizes – complemented by some external conditions which specify the particulars that are present in the context. (Burge 2010a, 389-390; Burge 2005, 26-27.) Consequently, one could think that to arrive at the whole truth of a veridical perception, one would have to know which environmental particulars are responsible for tokening a state type on a given occasion. Since Burge (2010a, 362 note 97, 385) has expressed disdain towards views that take perceptual states to consist of the objects perceived, thinking of seeing as a hybrid kind may allow

[11] The relevance of the fact that the common factor is thought to be at the fundamental explanatory level will become clearer in subsequent sections. To my knowledge the locution "highest common factor" is due to John McDowell.

Burge to circumvent this seemingly more radical position. And even though Schellenberg's terminology might sometimes suggest otherwise, she does not commit herself to that kind of radical view either precisely because she defines constitution in terms of grounding. Both think that particulars simply *individuate* a perceptual state at a more fine-grained and less fundamental level.

Because many of the features and elements Schellenberg ascribes to perceptual capacities (see note 8) are analogous to what Burge says about (perceptual) representational abilities, like that they are repeatable (compare with Burge 2005, 35), have the function of singling out particulars (compare with Burge 2010a, 539), can fail to fulfill that function (compare with Burge 2010a, 44), and so on, I think it is relatively fair to understand both as endorsing a view on which some general capacity or ability comes prior to particularity, and that the need to account for particularity only arises at a later level. So, even if Schellenberg's more liberal usage of the notion 'constitution' might suggest a commitment to a stronger form of object-dependence than Burge is willing to allow, I think that both philosophers are broadly speaking in agreement regarding particularity (though undoubtedly their views differ a lot in their details). The explanatory order of things implicit in both theories is from mind to world.

I have so far discussed particularity exclusively in a representationalist context. Representationalism emphasizes the importance of a general element, a common factor, to explain the possibility of perceptual error. It is this generality that is often seen as the main motivation behind representationalism, with particularity often being only a secondary target of explanation. Representationalism is not, however, the only game in town. In the next section, I will discuss some views that in one way or another dispute the common factor claim.

3.5 Disjunctivism

Disjunctivism in the philosophy of perception is the view that the different perceptual states – veridical perceptions, illusions, and hallucinations – are not to be analyzed as states of the same *fundamental* kind.[12] [13] Disjunctivism therefore denies, in one form or another, the common factor thesis that I discussed in the previous section. Consequently, disjunctivism has it that one should think of perceptual states as forming a disjunction: either the state is a veridical perception *or* an illusion

[12] Disjunctivism in itself is more of a negative thesis, since it merely denies a fundamental common factor. Therefore, views that are correctly categorized as disjunctivist do not necessarily agree on the *positive* nature of perception.
[13] Hill (2019, 1392) argues that any view that ascribes different contents to such states is a disjunctivist view. Burge and Schellenberg would thus be disjunctivists of a certain kind according to Hill, since they argue that the accuracy conditions of veridical perceptions make reference to particulars.

or a hallucination. To be more exact, some disjunctivists are "V or I/H" disjunctivists, and some are "V/I or H" disjunctivists[14] (Byrne & Logue 2009, xi), meaning that they disagree on which side of the disjunction illusions fall.

Some disjunctivists do not make the distinction between illusions and hallucinations explicitly at all. For example, John McDowell (2010, 244) writes about two types of "appearance" which are to be disjunctively analyzed as either the one or the other of "a case of things being thus and so in a way that is manifest to the subject", or "a case of its merely seeming to the subject that that is how things are". Another disjunctivist, J.M. Hinton, contrasts the "reality of X" with the "illusion of X" (Hinton 1967, 223), implying something similar to McDowell in that one appearance is the manifestation of a reality (a "seeing") and the other a mere seeming. The characterizations merely contrast veridical perceptual experience with nonveridical experience.

Whatever one's specific disjunctive theory claims, it should at least deny the common factor claim. Otherwise, it would be misleading to call it a disjunctive theory. More accurately, disjunctivism denies a *highest* common factor account of perception – an account that posits a common factor at the *fundamental level of explanation*. Disjunctivists thus explicitly deny the kind of claim made by Burge and Schellenberg that some general element shared by all kinds of perceptual state is the most fundamental aspect of the nature of such states (at least regarding certain explanatory aims). Many disjunctivists, like the two mentioned in the last paragraph, do not reject the thought that there is *a* common factor between veridical perceptions and other perceptual states that are subjectively indistinguishable. Hinton (1967, 223) and McDowell (2010, 244) both think that an "appearance" is what is common to such states. Hinton (1967, 226) even says that "it would be absurd not to posit […] similar going-on in me when I see a flash of light and when I have that illusion"[15]. A disjunctivist may thus accept a common factor, as long as the common factor is not such that makes a disjunctivist analysis of perceptual states unnecessary. This is why, in order to uphold disjunctivism at the very least, one should specifically deny a highest common factor.

As Soteriou (2016, 1) notes, the rejection of a common factor at the deepest explanatory level is often based on certain views about the nature of veridical perception. For example, McDowell (2010, 245) talks about perceptual experience as making (aspects of) the world "present" to the subject. Charles Travis (2004, 65), on the other hand, has said that perception "places our surroundings in view". Such talk is meant to contrast with the representationalist idea that experiences share a common mental

[14] V = veridical perception, I = illusion, H = hallucination.
[15] But this physiological "going-on" is not, according to Hinton, the kind of common factor that is required by a common factor theorist (see Hinton 1967, 224). I will say something similar in section 4.6.

core and are even in the veridical cases mere representations. If perceptual experience is fundamentally about placing the world in view or makes the world present to a subject, then this does seem to rule out illusions and hallucinations as states sharing that fundamental nature. For hallucinations and illusions are considered as cases where things are not as they seem to be. They are therefore not cases of having the world in view or present.

Disjunctivists usually think of veridical perception in terms of the obtaining of a relation between a subject and their environment. To say that perceptual experience is fundamentally relational is to say that perceptual experience itself is sufficient to put one in contact with the world (Soteriou 2016, 30-31, 40). Soteriou (2016, 31) is quick to note that this claim is stronger than saying merely that in genuine perception one is in direct contact with the world. Representationalists, like Burge and Schellenberg (and even generalists like Hill), could easily accept *that* claim. They could simply say that in successful cases of perception the representational content of the subject's state is veridical and appropriately caused, which is just what perceptual awareness of the world amounts to according to the representationalist picture. But they could not accept the more demanding claim that a perceptual experience *by itself* – that is, without the obtaining of further facts – is enough to secure contact with the world. They could not accept this claim because of their commitment to a fundamental common factor, which entails that one could be in the very same psychological state independent of how the environment is.

The reasons to endorse some kind of disjunctive view of perceptual experience are varied and I won't go into all of them here. But one influential reason is based on epistemological considerations. Epistemological disjunctivism is probably most famously endorsed by McDowell. As I mentioned previously, McDowell thinks that in experience (of the good kind) the world is present to one. The epistemological import of experience so conceived is that it puts one in a position to have indefeasible warrant for belief. That is, it puts one in a position to know that things are the way they appear to be. (McDowell 2010, 245-246.)

This kind of epistemological position does seem to follow quite naturally from a relational conception of experience. Since relationalists generally think that experience places the world in view, or "reveals" it (Campbell 2002a, 118), it is not an enormous leap to then say that, if taken at face value[16], having an experience of that kind can provide indefeasible warrant for belief. Simply put, if in the good case experience only reveals what is there in the first place, taking things to also be that way can't lead one to error. Early motivation for this kind of view can be found in J.L. Austin's *Sense and*

[16] See Travis (2004) for critical discussion of the idea that experiences have a face value.

Sensibilia. Austin (1962, 115) says, for example, that while pig-like marks on the ground constitute *evidence* that there is a pig close by, stumbling upon the pig and *seeing* it doesn't constitute any more evidence. Rather, it settles the question. No more evidence is required.

For representationalists, seeing the pig does not settle the question in quite the same straightforward way, since seeing the pig consists of being in a general psychological state that could occur even in the absence of a pig. Representationalists would therefore have to appeal to some further conditions in order to explain how seeing the pig constitutes knowledge. So, the state one is in – by itself – *does* only provide evidence. It isn't epistemologically conclusive. McDowell (2013b, 148) finds this kind of representationalist approach unbearable[17], saying that if one does not have indefeasible warrant for belief then one does not know that things are the way one believes them to be. That is, if experience even at its best doesn't put the subject in a position to acquire indefeasible warrant, then "for all one knows, things are not as one believes them to be" (Ibid.). Since discussing the epistemological merits of different theories of perception is not my main issue here, I will leave this issue to one side.

Before concluding this section, it is important to give some idea about disjunctivism's relation to that which is the main issue, namely, perceiving particulars. Martin (2008, 93-94) articulates the claim of naïve realism, which is a form of disjunctivism, to be that the objects of perception literally constitute one's conscious experience – "experience seems literally to include the world". What follows from this is that "one could not be having the experience one has, were the objects perceived not to exist, or were they to lack the features they are perceived to have" (Ibid.). If this is so, then in perceiving a particular object O, for example, one's perceptual state is literally constituted by O. This is not constitution in Schellenberg's sense of grounding, but more in the sense of material constitution. O is a literal part of the perceptual state, and whichever way O is represented may not be fundamental to the state at all.

If perceptual states somehow literally include the objects that are perceived, then it seems that particularity in effect comes for free to those who endorse a naïve realist theory of experience. A particular object O, when perceived, is simply part of the perceptual state itself. Therefore, when one perceives O, one is in a perceptual state whose fundamental nature is such that could not occur in the absence of O. The specification "fundamental nature" is an important one, since it is what makes the distinction between naïve realist or relationalist theories and representationalist theories. The former

[17] Important to note that in the paper cited here McDowell does argue that perception is representational. But McDowell's representationalism is very different from that which has been discussed in this essay.

theories are radically object-dependent by positing objects as fundamental constituents of perceptual experiences.

The naïve realist disjunctivist thus has a succinct and simple way to explain perceptual particularity. But to subscribe to such a theory merely in order to answer one such specific question would be hopelessly *ad hoc*. In the next section, I will discuss some of Burge's and Schellenberg's objections to the picture presented by disjunctivists.

3.6 Objections to Disjunctivism

3.6.1 Schellenberg's Relational Content

Although Schellenberg does offer arguments against relationalism[18], the main aim of Schellenberg's approach is to reconcile the insights of relationalism with representationalism. Schellenberg (2018, 111-112) identifies five different relationalist objections to the content thesis – the idea that perception is constitutively representational. While acknowledging that many of the objections are effective against certain types of representationalism (generalism in particular), Schellenberg (2018, 117) argues that if we conceive of representational content as itself relational, we can make the relationalist insights compatible with representationalism. Consequently, we would not have to accept the more radical claims Schellenberg sees relationalists as being committed to.

The idea of relational content derives from Schellenberg's view that perception and perceptual experience is a matter of employing perceptual capacities. Relational content is supposed to combine the positives of relationalism and representationalism. Schellenberg (2018, 118) writes that "S's perceptual state M is constituted by relational content *rc* in virtue of S being perceptually related to α and of S representing α". As I have previously discussed, Schellenberg takes the perceptual relation between S and α to be a matter of S employing a perceptual capacity whose function it is to single out particulars of α's kind. The thought is that α constitutes S's perceptual state due to being the particular S's perceptual capacity has singled out on that occasion.

Employing perceptual capacities yields states that are repeatable and have accuracy conditions (Schellenberg 2018, 59, 115). These are definitive features of states with representational content (Schellenberg 2018, 116). Schellenberg thus argues that since perception is a matter of employing perceptual capacities, which are repeatable and yield states with accuracy conditions, that perception

[18] Schellenberg (2018, chapter 5) argues more specifically against *austere* relationalism, a position which entails the denial of the "content thesis".

is constitutively representational in nature. As a result, Schellenberg argues that perception is fundamentally both relational and representational and this is what relational content intends to capture. Because Schellenberg formulates many relationalist objections as dilemmas where we must choose between some relationalist insight and the thought that perception has representational content, the idea that perceptual content is itself relational could dissolve such dilemmas altogether. But as I will argue in the upcoming sections, the insights of relationalism cannot be made compatible with representationalism due to the latter's insistence on a fundamental common factor. As such I do not think Schellenberg's conciliatory approach succeeds. Next, I will discuss some of Burge's criticisms of disjunctive theories of perception.

3.6.2 Burge Against Disjunctivism

Burge thinks that "[the main defect of disjunctivism] is its incompatibility with science" (Burge 2011, 55). Burge therefore thinks that some constitutive claims of disjunctivism do not fit together with the study of vision as practiced in perceptual psychology. One of the aspects implicit in the science which Burge takes disjunctivism to be incompatible with and which he focuses on in his criticism is the *proximality principle* (Burge 2005, 25, 27).

Here is how Burge characterizes the proximality principle:

> *Holding constant the antecedent psychological set of the perceiver, a given type of proximal stimulation (over the whole body), together with associated internal afferent and efferent input into the perceptual system, will produce a given type of perceptual state, assuming that there is no malfunctioning in the system and no interference with the system.* […] Call this principle the Proximality Principle. (Burge 2005, 22)

The point is that the perceptual state type is dependent on just how things are with the subject at a given moment in addition to the proximal stimulation (like the light array that is formed on the retina) affecting the subject. We can suppose that two qualitatively identical objects, O and O*, produce the same proximal stimulation on S (they reflect light in exactly the same way). The proximality principle would have it that S's perceptual state that results from viewing O is of the very same type as the state that results from viewing O* (if all other conditions are held constant). That the states formed are of the same type means that they are states whose contents involve the same context-free element.

Regarding particularity, what follows from the proximality principle is that since two numerically distinct, but qualitatively identical objects can lead to the same type of perceptual state (by producing the same effect in the perceiver), which particular is perceived on any given occasion is a fact external to the state of the perceiver. The problem this poses for disjunctivism is quite straightforward. If an experience depends on the existence of particular objects, and is thus (by its very nature) supposed to put one in contact with the world, how could it do so if the very same type of state can be produced *without* those particular objects? Burge's idea of understanding "seeings" as hybrid kinds seems like the more natural approach if we take the proximality principle to be fundamental.

Adherence to the proximality principle is itself not wholly unproblematic, since it leads to the *underdetermination problem*. The problem arises from the fact that the same proximal stimulation may have its origin in different environmental causes (Burge 2010a, 90-91). For example, seeing a slanted square surface may look the same as viewing a trapezoid straight on, since they can produce the very same proximal stimulation on the perceiving subject. The problem is therefore to explain how the perceptual system differentiates between the two – that is, how it represents just the one and not the other. A common strategy is to postulate principles that bias certain environmental causes over others (Burge 2005, 12). So, a possible solution to our play-example could be to suppose that the perceptual system has evolved to represent slanted squares over trapezoids due to the greater frequency of the former in the environment.

While underdetermination is a significant problem for representationalism, the issue that the proximality principle poses for disjunctivism does seem more straightforward and acute. If the science assumes a principle which states that the very same kind of perceptual state can be formed in different contexts due to the indeterminacy inherent in the proximal stimulation, then disjunctivism's claim that there is no common factor at the fundamental level can seem anti-scientific. Burge thinks that perceptual state kinds just are the fundamental common factors. If there is a highest common factor, then disjunctivism's positive claim, that perceptual experiences (partly) consist of the particular objects perceived is under threat.

Soteriou (2016, 46-52) provides one possible way in which a disjunctivist could resist Burge's argument from the proximality principle. Soteriou bases his discussion mainly on J.M. Hinton's arguments. The main point, in a nutshell, is that the disjunctivist could deny that the kind of state that is formed in accordance with the proximality principle *just is* the same as one's conscious perceptual experience. In effect, the disjunctivist could attempt to place the burden of proof on their opponents by asking why the psychological state kind needs to be identical to one's perceptual experience as opposed to being a state which merely obtains when one has a perceptual experience. Soteriou (2016,

50-51) writes that while the disjunctivist (one who follows Hinton at least) needs to deny the claim that the proximal cause of one's veridical experience produces *only* those psychological effects which would be there in a non-veridical experience as well, they don't need to deny that there are *some* psychological effects in common.

Whatever one thinks the above counterargument's merits are, the proximality principle is not the only avenue of attack Burge uses against disjunctivism. Burge (2011, 45-46) thinks that the common factors that many disjunctivists allow, such as the "appearances" McDowell writes about, lack the required specificity to be explanatorily relevant kinds of common factors. Burge (2011, 50-51) takes McDowell to accept "things appearing to be thus-and-so" as a common factor, but finds this characterization to be problematic on two fronts: (1) it is too general, since things can appear to be thus-and-so in multiple ways, and (2) the term 'things' does not do justice to the fact that the form of perception is singular – that it is (or purports to be) as of particulars.

But a disjunctivist could accept both (1) and (2). If, as McDowell (2013a, 260) says, "things appearing to be thus-and-so" is either the presentation of things being so or a mere appearance to that effect, then the disjunctivist can accept that two states could be alike all the way down to the way in which things seem to be that way. That is, disjunctivists can (and do) accept indiscernibility. Therefore, the first criticism doesn't have the intended effect. The second criticism seems to fall flat as well, since McDowell (Ibid.) intends the locution only as a content schema and not as the content of any actual experience.

One could argue in favor of Burge that even if disjunctivists can accept that two experiences are indiscernible, they don't have a good explanation for what accounts for this indiscernibility. The naïve realist or relationalist has a straightforward answer for the appearance in the good case – the appearance simply consists of the world being "revealed" to one. But what is the *positive* explanation for the indiscernible appearance in the case of a hallucination? Saying that in hallucination there is a "mere appearance" to the effect that things are thus-and-so does not really give an answer as to how that appearance comes about. This certainly is a big issue for those who want to defend a naïve realist theory of perception. On the other hand, representationalism seems almost tailor-made to answer the question. Burge may simply say that all indiscernible states share a fundamental common factor, the same general representational content, which accounts for the indiscernibility.

However, there is an equally, if not more, powerful argument a relationalist can level against representationalism. I think that this argument is metaphysically more fundamental than any argument having to do with indiscernibility and other commonalities between veridical and nonveridical

experiences. It is this argument that I will consider in detail in the second half of this essay. The argument could be put roughly as follows. By not allowing particular objects to be genuinely involved in experiences, representationalism can't explain how we can form a conception of such particulars through experience. If the fundamental nature of perception is captured by a common factor which itself is independent of the existence of particular objects (as even particularists like Burge and Schellenberg think), then it is hard to make sense of how experience can have the kind of explanatory role it is commonly taken to have. In the next sections I will consider the roots of this objection and attempt to explain why representationalism, even in its particularist form, does not have a sufficient answer to it.

4. Relationalism and the Explanatory Role of Experience

4.1 Mind-Independence and Berkeley's Puzzle

Up until now, I have talked about particulars without making explicit what I mean by 'particular', since thus far an intuitive understanding has sufficed. To my knowledge, Schellenberg does not explicitly state what particulars are either, assuming instead that the notion is intuitively clear. However, Burge (2010a, 54) gives substance to the notion, saying that "[p]articulars are non-shareable, non-repeatable, non-multi-realizable entities". As such, any given human, stone, or star is a particular. *Being* any of these is not – *being a human* is not a particular, but a particular can be a human. I take it that these are rather uncontroversial things to say.

I also take it that it is not too implausible, in light of mentioning humans and stars as examples of particulars, to add that the existence of such particulars is not directly dependent on anyone's experience of them. What I mean is merely that a star can go on existing even if no particular observer was around to perceive it. The particular mug in front of me could exist without me looking at it. I could move the mug elsewhere and it would keep existing there without my presence. I could then come back and perceive the very same mug at a later time. The mug has particularity precisely because we take ourselves – and others – to be able to have experiences of *that* mug on separate occasions. We take it that we have experiences of that mug and not that each of our experiences had, as it were, their own mugs.

John Campbell (2002b) formulates a problem regarding our conception of objects as staying in existence in just that sense, a problem he calls "Berkeley's Puzzle". The puzzle is to explain how perceptual experience could provide us with a conception of objects as mind-independent –

independent of our experience of them (Campbell 2002b, 127-129). The thought is that it must be our very experience of those objects that allows us to understand them as mind-independent. Berkeley himself famously denied just that, arguing that there is no such thing as mind-independent existence. But I will for the sake of this essay assume the opposite and claim that the puzzle must be faced head-on.

The issue at hand could perhaps be put even more poignantly: How is it that I have a conception of objects, perhaps even of the world, independent of *myself* and not just of mind? I think this way of asking the question avoids some possible problems, such as having to unnecessarily take a stand on broad questions concerning the ontology of objects. I think what is important in the puzzle is that we take the objects of perception to be the same for everyone, that they are particulars in a *shared* environment. The interest is not so much in what the objects fundamentally are. Therefore, I take the more fundamental question to ask how it can be possible for perceptual experience to provide me, whatever I am, an idea of objects outside and independent of me, whatever they are. Whenever I use the notion of mind-independence (outside of attributing the notion to someone else), I will mean this more specific notion[19] (but it won't make much of a difference if one wants to think of mind-independent objects as, say, physical objects).

Assuming that perceptual particularity is agreed upon, and thus that there are mind-independent objects, it is I think not too controversial to say that perceptual experience of a particular can make it possible to think about and demonstratively refer to that particular. That is, in the event that one sees a particular cat, it can become available – *in virtue of having the experience* – to think about and demonstratively refer to that cat. This is what Campbell (2002a, 114) calls the explanatory role of experience. The point is not to say that there is an entailment here from experience to thought, since there could be an asymmetry between experience and thinking, meaning that not all who are capable of the former are also capable of the latter. But it still seems that at least the opposite is true, that without having perceived that particular cat, one could not think about it or demonstratively refer to it.[20]

In what follows, I will lean quite heavily on Campbell's idea that perceptual experience has a role to play in explaining how we have a conception of particulars in a shared world. I will also follow

[19] One could even call it "me-independence".

[20] One can obviously acquire the ability to think about and demonstratively refer to a particular by many different means, such as through a newspaper article or simply by someone mentioning a particular in conversation ("Have you read *Aristotle's* 'Metaphysics'?"). But that kind of answer can't go on forever, since I take it that the possibility of such articles and conversations derives from earlier experience.

Campbell in arguing that a relational view of experience[21] can best account for this conception. The plan is to first make explicit the core claim of a relational view of experience, which is that perception fundamentally consists in the obtaining of a relation. After that, I will give a brief sketch of a view of the mental that can better accommodate a relational view, with the help of John McDowell's reading of Hilary Putnam's "The Meaning of 'Meaning'". This will allow me to pinpoint the more general location of the dispute between the relational view and Burge's and Schellenberg's representational views. I will argue that the general representational strategy is incapable of explaining how we perceive particulars by making the common factor more fundamental than the particulars themselves.

4.2 Relationalism and Acquaintance

The main claim of relationalism is that the *relation* "S perceives O", where S is the subject and O is a particular object, is taken as explanatorily fundamental, or primitive, in an account of seeing (Campbell 2002a, 117-118). Moreover, if perceptual experience is fundamentally a relation between a perceiver and an object that is perceived, then such an experience can't exist without the existence of its *relata*. This contrasts with representationalism which doesn't analyze experience fundamentally as the obtaining of a relation "S perceives O", but as consisting of S being in a representational state whose veridicality conditions involve (in one way or another) the object O. By claiming that the relation "S perceives O" is fundamental, relationalists are committed to saying that there is no common factor at the explanatorily fundamental level (in relation to this specific explanatory aim) even between perceptual experiences of qualitatively identical objects.

The principal point of saying that perceptual experience is fundamentally relational is to avoid postulating any mediating element between the perceiver and the object perceived. Representationalism has it that representational states, while not being perceptual *intermediaries*, still mediate perception by being common factors at the fundamental level. According to representationalism, an object is perceived *only* if some internal condition is satisfied first. In contrast, it is not uncommon for relationalists to appeal to some form of an *acquaintance relation* with the objects of perception in order to avoid committing to (fundamental) common factors. Bill Brewer (2011, 97), for example, thinks that the perceptual relation in question precisely is a conscious acquaintance relation holding between the perceiver and a mind-independent object. Campbell holds

[21] I am, however, making a distinction between Campbell's own view and relationalism in general.

something similar, since he thinks that experience of an object is more fundamental than thought about it (Campbell 2002b, 130, 143).[22]

Acquaintance is historically not the most straightforward notion. Nonetheless, I think Bertrand Russell's original characterization brings out the fundamental idea quite clearly. Russell (1910, 108) says that being acquainted with an object is to be in a *direct cognitive relation* to the object itself, and that S being acquainted with O comes to the same as O being *presented* to S. Russell (1910, 112) himself goes on to say that we are not acquainted with physical objects. If physical objects are understood as those mind-independent objects Brewer and Campbell refer to, then obviously there is a difference here between Russell and the latter philosophers about just what one can be acquainted with. Nonetheless, most philosophers today think that the direct objects of perception are mind-independent objects of the physical world, and I have no desire to dispute that. Following relationalists like Brewer and Campbell, I will take it that the acquaintance relation that is postulated is a relation one bears to mind-independent objects. Whether it's necessarily a conscious relation is, in my opinion, too complicated of an issue to go into detail here.

Russell famously introduced his notion of acquaintance in the context of knowledge, distinguishing knowledge by acquaintance from knowledge by description. I want to distance myself at least from the claim that by being acquainted with O, one therefore has knowledge of O. I do, however, accept the more modest claim that without being somehow acquainted with O, one can't be in a position to acquire knowledge *specifically* about O. Brewer (2011, 140-141) also emphasizes that the perceptual acquaintance relation between S and O is more fundamental than any epistemic relation S could bear to O.

The relationalist idea, then, is the following. In perceiving object O, subject S is acquainted with O in virtue of being presented it. S obviously could not be acquainted with O, if S were presented with some other object, like the qualitatively identical O*. Furthermore, since being acquainted with something requires the existence of that thing (something non-existent can't be presented, since at the very minimum what is presented must be present), hallucinations can't be analyzed in the same way as perceptions. This does commit relationalism to a *kind of* disjunctivism, but only insofar as relationalism denies a fundamental common factor between perceptions and hallucinations. Common factors need not be denied *tout court*.

Since Russell himself did not extend the acquaintance relation much beyond his postulated sense-data (which are paradigm mind-*dependent* entities), I think one must give some explanation for why

[22] Campbell's idea seems to be that thought, unlike perception, is fundamentally representational or propositional.

we could have *that* kind of relation, a direct cognitive relation, to mind-independent entities. One may even get a sense that there is a contradiction in terms, since it's difficult to see how both of the following could be true at the same time: (1) that acquaintance is a direct cognitive relation to an object, seemingly requiring the mind to be in contact with the object of acquaintance, and (2) that one can be acquainted with mind-independent entities. For how could the mind be "in contact" with the objects of acquaintance if those objects were mind-independent? The issue is especially pressing, since relationalists want precisely to avoid analyzing this "contact" in the way representationalists do, which is in terms of content and causal context. Burge, for example, is satisfied by saying that the "contact" in question just amounts to the fact that perceptual states refer non-derivatively to the environment (Burge 2005, 29). But if the relationalist was happy with this characterization, then there would be hardly any need to appeal to the notion of acquaintance or presentation. To give some substance to the difference between relationalism and representationalism on this point, it will be useful to consider a more general point about the mind.

4.3 Mind as an Organ and Seeing as a Mental State

The tension with which we ended the last section, that between (1) and (2), is more prominent if one has a "duplex"[23] conception of the mind. The thought behind such a view, according to McDowell (1992, 37), is that the complete truth about the mind consists of two parts: how things are "in the head" (internally) and how those things stand in relation to things outside the head. Such a duplex conception seems to me to be implicit in Burge's and Schellenberg's accounts of perception. For example, Burge's well-known thesis of anti-individualism explicitly concerns the relation between "a subject matter beyond the individual and the individual that has the mental states" (Burge 2010a, 61), suggesting that part of the full truth of a mental state is beyond the mental state considered in itself. The duplex conception can be understood as a kind of common factor view of the mental, in which mental contents are perhaps sometimes *individuated* by extra-mental conditions but still also have an intrinsic nature without being so individuated.

McDowell (1992, 39) takes that duplex accounts of the mind implicitly think of mental activity as happening in an *organ*, material or immaterial, whose "intrinsic nature […] is independent of how the mind's [i.e., organ's] possessor is placed in the environment". Such a conception has traditionally had to face either the task of explaining how such items can be intrinsically representational, or how their representational nature can be understood in "naturalistic" terms. Hilary Putnam (1981) has

[23] This notion appears in (McDowell 1992) who cites Colin McGinn as the one who introduced it.

convincingly argued against the former while Burge (2010a, 292-308; 2014) himself has given forceful arguments against the latter. Let's assume (controversially, no doubt[24]) that these arguments are decisive. What option is left? If the mind (conceived of as an organ) can't intrinsically represent, but the notion of representation as it is used in psychological explanation can't be naturalized either, then it may seem that there is no way out. However, McDowell himself has sketched an alternative view on which mental life is not considered as happening in an "organ" at all, but instead that its "location" is roughly the same as the location of our lives in general (McDowell 1992, 40).

My aim is not to endorse McDowell's view in all of its details, which would be impossible to do here anyway. Neither is the aim to challenge the indisputable usefulness of treating the mind as an organ (literally, if one is of the opinion that mind equals brain). My point is rather to show that if the mind is treated as an organ, the "full" truth about mind can't surface (not to imply that the full truth is unlocked by the following considerations either), simply because it makes an ultimately untenable distinction between things "internal" and "external" (to the organ). To me, there seems to be one insight in particular in McDowell's paper that can help in outlining a view of perceptual experience that is fundamentally relational in nature.

McDowell's main point in the paper under consideration (McDowell 1992) is to understand Hilary Putnam's[25] point about the inconsistency of two assumptions – (1) "[t]hat knowing the meaning of a term is just a matter of being in a certain psychological state" and (2) "[t]hat the meaning of a term determines its extension" (Putnam 1973, 700) – in a different light. McDowell says that instead of denying the correctness of the first assumption (as Putnam could be read as doing in that paper), we should conceive of the mind (mental/psychological states) in a way that can accommodate both assumptions (McDowell 1992, 36). The aim is therefore to understand the mind in such a way as to make "knowing the meaning of a term" a state of mind.

Putnam's (1973) paper introduces the famous Twin Earth thought experiment. In light of that thought experiment, which I will not rehearse here, it is easy to conclude that knowing the meaning of a word is something which involves an element external to the individual using that word. If it is possible that two internally identical individuals mean different things by their word 'beech', then it seems that the difference must be something external to their minds. But this takes for granted the organ conception of the mind. It takes for granted that in virtue of being internally identical, the natures of

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[24] The literature concerning representation is vast and thus I am aware that issues surrounding representation are nowhere near settled. But the move made here is not at all unwarranted either, as there seems to be some confusion as to the proper use of the term 'representation' (see (Favela & Machery (2023)). I will return to some of these issues in sections 4.5 and 4.6.

[25] McDowell refers to Putnam's "The Meaning of 'Meaning'". I am quoting from "Meaning and Reference".

the two individuals' minds are identical. McDowell's positive point is to argue that the two individuals' psychological states (states of mind) are in fact different, not merely because the properly internal states are externally interpreted as having different contents as the duplex conception would have it, but simply because one's mental life *consists in* being directed at beeches while his *doppelgänger's* state consists in being directed at elms (McDowell 1992, 41). According to McDowell (1992, 44), what goes missing on the organ conception is the possibility of "representing without representations"[26].

I believe that a partially analogous case to what McDowell makes for knowledge of meaning can be made for seeing. Recall that Burge's view of perception is a "duplex" view in this sense: When a subject S perceives object O, this is mediated by the subject being in an internal state, which is characterized at the fundamental level by some general representational content – content that is shared by all intrinsic duplicates (abstracting away from anti-individualist cases). Such internal states put in place veridicality conditions for the world to satisfy. And as discussed earlier, the contexts in which the states occur must be taken into account when considering the full veridicality conditions of such states. This is most obvious in the case of perceiving particulars. In such cases, the internal states always require an external interpretation in the sense that the identity of the object that is perceived is not transparent in the subject's experience. It could be swapped with an identical object, or there could even be no object at all, while the subject would remain in the very same internal state.

The relationalist view is markedly different in just the sense that it tries to do away with a mediating internal state that has content. The perception of O by S just *is* a relation between S and O. Here it seems natural to think of S being acquainted with O, or of O being presented to S, since there is nothing fundamentally mediating S's cognitive access to O (I take "cognitive" in this context to refer more broadly to "mental"). But it is difficult to make this relationalist idea compatible with the thought that the mind is an organ, since it is difficult to make sense of the prior idea that the "symbols" making up the organ could intrinsically represent. Consequently, it would be difficult to say how a mental state so construed could necessarily involve O. However, if the relationalist sides with McDowell and rejects the idea of the mind as an organ with an intrinsic (environment-independent) nature, then it seems that a possibility opens up to conceive of states of *seeing* as mental states. That is, it could then be possible to make sense of the idea that the state of one's mind literally involves the object seen.

[26] By "representations" McDowell means internal symbols, with an environment-independent nature, that the organ view posits in our minds. I do not take McDowell's talk about *representing* as being in conflict with relationalism.

Let me reiterate the representational point of view on this matter to better bring out the contrast I wish to focus on. Representationalist views have it that seeing O is synonymous with veridically perceiving O. As Burge (2010a, 384) argues, veridical perceptions are at best hybrids consisting of a mental and an extra-mental element, since the full veridicality conditions associated with them are usually context-dependent and as such they are dependent on facts beyond one's mental state (in Burge's sense). But if we take the other point of view and think of seeings as mental states, and not merely as "hybrids", then conceiving of them in terms of veridicality seems misplaced. For if, as relationalists insist, S seeing O is constituted by O, there is no internal state – *fundamental to seeing O* – that is "made veridical" by perceiving O. S's seeing O could not take place if O wasn't there to be seen, and as such thinking in terms of veridicality is superfluous on the relationalist view of perception.

This is all well and good, but one is still likely to be left wondering why one should favor the relationalist view over the representationalist one. What is the problem in thinking of the mind as an "organ" with an intrinsic nature of some kind? One could start articulating the point in favor of relationalism in the form of an intuitively compelling argument against representationalism. It is that if perceptual experience is considered in the way representationalists suggest, then the identity of an object perceived does not exist in an experience insofar as one considers that aspect of the experience which is accessible to the individual having the experience. Therefore, when one perceives a particular green cube, the identity of that cube is not manifest in the experience. It couldn't be, according to representationalism, since one could not tell it apart from an identical cube or an experience merely *as of* a green cube. It follows from this that on the representationalist picture it is a *logical possibility* that one's experience, being independent – at the fundamental level – of the way things are in the environment, does not require the existence of the specific things it is supposedly about.

By contrast, relationalists do not accept such a logical possibility, since to have a perceptual experience of O is just for O to be a constituent of the experience. But how can the relationalist establish this conclusion? Articulating this will be my aim here. I will start with some "metaphorical" considerations.

If we place perceptual experience under the broad category of "the mental", then what is perceived, the content of the experience, should not be considered outside the reach of the mental. This is the

point of counting seeing as a mental state[27]. Since seeing is considered to be "factive"[28], seeing O requires that O exists. Therefore, if seeing is a mental state, then in seeing a particular, the existence of that particular is manifest in the experience and is as such *not* external to the mental life of that individual. To put the point differently, we can say that what one's mental state fundamentally is, is a state which involves that particular as an active and basic component.

The idea is that to *see Mount Everest*, for example, is to include the mountain itself within the mental life of that individual, not merely leaving it as an external "determiner" of one's "proper" mental state. It is hard to see how one could do so on the organ conception, since if the mind was an organ, it would surely be odd to think of the mountain as being *in* any such organ. As such, the mental state (whether a perception or a thought) that concerns Mount Everest would not fundamentally be about that very mountain on the organ view of mind, since the same state (of the organ) could occur without the presence or even existence of that mountain. The organ conception would analyze seeing Mount Everest as a representation ("symbol") in the organ being individuated by Mount Everest. The point I am making here is not a point about individuation, since I am arguing against the view that takes seeing to consist of an item to be individuated and an item which individuates it.

Consider Burge's idea of a hybrid kind again, the idea that veridical perception consists of a mental and an extra-mental component. In an obvious sense, it is only the mental element that is properly speaking part of the individual's mental life. And this mental element is shared by all indiscernible states. I want to problematize this idea by examining a conjunction of views that Burge seems to endorse.

Quite uncontroversially, in today's philosophical landscape at least, Burge (2010a, 90) thinks that (A) mind-independent objects are the direct objects of perception in that there is no intermediary object that is perceived. This is obviously a point of agreement between representationalism and relationalism and as such I have no qualms with it. What I take to introduce a real problem is that Burge (2010a, 536) (B) *assumes* the existence of a mind-independent world, and thus assumes the existence of those very objects of perception. This reflects the difference between representationalism and relationalism on what exactly it is to be a direct object of perception. For the relationalist, no

[27] This 'state'-terminology does not suit relationalism too well, since it seems to imply that what is in question is an internal state. But since much of the discussion in philosophy of mind revolves around the idea of mental *states*, I will make do with it.
[28] Truth-entailing. Burge (2005, 30) agrees that seeing is factive but argues against taking seeings as mental states because they involve perceptual states which could have failed to be seeings. But what Burge means by a 'seeing' is the same as 'veridical perception', which is not how I'm understanding seeing here.

assumption of the kind introduced in (B) is needed since perceptual experience itself is proof of the existence of a mind-independent world.

What poses a problem for Burge, especially in the context of perceptual experience, is the *conjunction* of (A) and (B). The trouble is this: The mental phenomenon that occurs when we perceive the postulated mind-independent world would stay just as it is even if there was no mind-independent world at all. This follows straightforwardly from the conjunction of (A) and (B), because if "being the direct object of perception" requires the assumption that such objects exist, then perception being directly of objects amounts to no more than saying that *if* such objects exist, *then* perceptual experience is of them.[29] This leaves open the possibility that it only ever seems as if such objects were perceived. If perceptual experience itself can't secure the existence of its objects, then it can't secure the existence of a mind-independent world either. But one would like to think that *being* is prior to *seeming*. Consequently, one would like to think the possibility of things seeming to be thus-and-so depends on things really being, or having been, so.

Now we are also in a position to see that neither the singular element in the representational content of a perceptual state (Burge), nor a perceptual capacity whose function it is to discriminate and single out particulars (Schellenberg), concerns the point at issue. For as Campbell points out in connection with Burge's account of representational content, the singular element itself can't distinguish scenarios where one object is swapped with an identical one or where there is no object at all. The context which ultimately determines the content of any particular application of that demonstrative element is not thought to be within the mental life of the individual. (Campbell 2002a, 125-126.) The point is that the representational content which characterizes the individual's state is such that could occur in different scenarios with different objects or no objects at all. The context, however, is not *known* (at least *knowingly*) by the individual (as, for example, seamless transition cases aim to show). As such, what is available to the individual, what is part of their subjective life, is insufficient in determining what the demonstrative element refers to or if it refers at all.

The relational view, on the other hand, has it that the mental event that takes place when S perceives O entails the existence of O. So, when S perceives O, the existence of O is "guaranteed" simply because that relation could not exist without O. But at this point it may be reasonable to ask along with Burge (2005, 61-63) why perceptual experience should give a "guarantee" of the existence of a

[29] One may of course argue that we know of the external world on some other grounds. Perhaps it is "the best explanation" for some phenomena (though admittedly I do not understand how something like "the world" could serve as the "best explanation" for anything). One could consequently argue that an explanation of perceptual experience can rely on this prior knowledge. But this answer is problematic at least regarding our knowledge of particulars, as I will argue in the next section.

mind-independent object in the first place. Isn't the relationalist begging the question by insisting that perceptual experience should directly inform one of the existence of a mind-independent world?

This insistence might look easily refutable if one takes the relationalist to claim that by perceiving O, S is in some kind of an infallible state regarding O. Even the most mundane cases of perceptual error serve as evidence against that thought. For example, S may perceive O's color or shape erroneously. But the relationalist need not deny the possibility of perceptual error in order to think that in genuine cases of perception we are presented with the object itself. To be sure, the relationalist would most likely have to think of errors in such cases as errors of perceptual *judgement*, not of perception properly speaking. I do not pretend to think that this move doesn't face its fair share of problems. At the same time, I think the relationalist could back up their claim by saying that for perceptual error about particulars to even be *possible*, perceptual experience itself should be unmediated regarding said particulars. I will work up to that conclusion in the next sections.

4.4 The Explanatory Role of Experience

Campbell (2002b, 134) argues that the fundamental objection to common factor theories of perception, like Burge's and Schellenberg's, is not how such accounts can explain how experience yields knowledge, but how such approaches to experience could give us the conception of objects independent of our experience of them. The question of knowledge is obviously strongly related, since if the common factor theorist can't afford the above explanatory role to experience, as Campbell claims, then it seems that it can't explain how we could have knowledge of mind-independent particulars. To put the point differently, if experience can't provide us a conception of mind-independent particulars, then it is difficult to see how experience could yield knowledge of such particulars either. There would simply be no things of that kind to have knowledge about. This is so at least on the assumption that no other means of acquiring the conception of objects as mind-independent is postulated. It is difficult to see what such other means could be (see note 20).

Campbell's main argument against common factor views (i.e. representationalism), in the two papers I am considering (Campbell 2002a; 2002b), has to do with perceptual demonstratives (like 'this' and 'that') and inferences using such demonstratives. The explanatory role of experience is that it provides us the conception of objects as mind-independent, which in turn allows us to understand the inferences. I will consider one particularly vivid example that Campbell provides in support of his claim that common factor views can't account for our understanding of inferences in which perceptual demonstratives occur.

The inference Campbell asks us to consider is the following: (P1) that woman is running, (P2) that woman is jumping, hence (C) that woman is running and jumping. He says that in order to recognize the validity of this inference, experience should make the sameness of the object transparent[30] to the one having the experience. According to Campbell, this is just what the common factor view of experience can't do. (Campbell 2002a, 129-130.) The problem that a common factor view has with this kind of example is that the experience could be the very same even if "that woman" referred to a different woman in (P1) and (P2). Therefore, one could not make the inference from "that woman", as it occurs in the two premises, to the conclusion that it is a particular woman that is both running and jumping. Campbell's claim is therefore that for one to understand the inference, experience should make it transparent that "that woman" refers to the very same woman in both premises. If that very woman is a constituent of one's experience, as relationalism holds, then supposedly one is in a position to understand the validity of the inference.

Both Burge and Schellenberg have criticized Campbell's argument. I think that there is an interesting aspect which is shared by both criticisms. I will focus on that commonality. Burge (2005, 56) thinks that Campbell's notion of transparency is left unspecific and that, whatever Campbell means by it, it should not entail infallibility regarding perceptual reference. That is, from it being transparent in experience that the woman referred to stays the same, it should at least not follow that one has infallible knowledge regarding the reference of their perceptual experience, since identical substitutes are possible. Schellenberg (2018, 125-126) also focuses on the "radical consequence" that Campbell commits to, which is to insist that the *phenomenal character* of experience is constituted by the particular woman perceived even if it is possible to substitute in that woman's identical twin without the subject noticing. Both objections take it that the possibility of error excludes transparency (presentation).

Schellenberg (2018, 126) thinks that the "obvious solution" is to account for tracking by appealing to the content rather than the phenomenal character of experience. That is, one should not think that sameness of reference in (P1) and (P2) is available at the phenomenal level, but at the level of content. Similarly, Burge (2005, 57) takes perception to switch referents when an unnoticed substitution takes place. This suggests that Burge, too, would rather have the difference reflected at the level of content rather than the phenomenal character of experience. Campbell does, however, accept that such substitutions could happen and that perhaps it is "impossible to tell, simply by having the experience" that that is what has happened (Campbell 2002a, 130). Since Campbell himself is aware of the

[30] I will understand Campbell's talk about transparency as the same as saying that objects are *presented* in perception. I will return to the idea of presentation in more detail in the next sections.

possible criticism, this suggests that Campbell's point about transparency is not what Burge and Schellenberg take it to be.

Campbell is of course not totally blameless in creating the appearance of radicalness, since he argues that it is precisely the phenomenal character of experience that is constituted by the objects perceived, while still accepting that one is not able to tell simply in virtue of having an experience which objects (if any) are perceived. As things stand right now, Burge and Schellenberg are right to criticize, or at least point out, the ambiguity in the notion of transparency. Nonetheless, I believe the real problem lies in the emphasis (on Burge's and Schellenberg's part) on indistinguishability and its supposed consequences. In the next two sections I will consider the relationship between common factors, indistinguishability and the possibility of perceptual presentation. The specific aim in section 4.5 is to show that indistinguishability has not been convincingly shown to result from the sameness of phenomenal character and as a result that indistinguishability does not contradict Campbell's claim.

4.5 Common Factors – Phenomenal Character, Indistinguishability, and Introspection

The notion of phenomenal character is not the most straightforward notion. Often what is meant by phenomenal character is the "what-it's-like" aspect of experience, "what it is like to subjectively undergo [an] experience" (Tye 2021). It is also sometimes said that two experiences have the same phenomenal character if they are subjectively indistinguishable. Schellenberg (2018, 73) goes further by saying that if two experiences have the same phenomenal character, then they would be indistinguishable "even if [one's] perceptual and introspective abilities were ideal"[31]. Without the addition of these "ideal conditions", defining phenomenal sameness through indistinguishability would be susceptible to a criticism already presented by J.L. Austin in opposition sense-datum theories. Austin (1962, 51) says that it does not follow from the fact that one can't distinguish between A and B that A and B themselves are indistinguishable. This point is quite easy to illustrate. I could not, for example, distinguish a painting by Picasso from a well-made fake. It certainly does not follow from my inability to do so that the paintings themselves would have to be indistinguishable.

Soteriou (2016, 121) considers something similar in relation to an epistemological form of disjunctivism: It does not follow from being unable to tell that one is not sober while being severely

[31] I will concentrate only on introspective abilities. Just like representation, introspection is an immensely complicated area of debate. My main aim here is to just broadly delineate one kind of position a relationalist could take on the issue.

drunk, that when one *is* sober, one couldn't rule out the possibility of being severely drunk.[32] Simply being unable to tell – while being in the bad situation – that one is not in the good situation does not in itself entail that one could not do so in the good situation. One could argue that something similar should go for perceptual experiences.

I think it is worth taking a step back at this point to ask what exactly is the significance of the thought that two experiences may be indistinguishable. None of Burge, Schellenberg or Campbell think that indistinguishability in itself entails sameness of *experience*, although for the former two it entails sameness of experience-*type*. The objection to transparency is not that experiences do not involve particulars in any way at all (and I have gone over the way in which Burge and Schellenberg think they *are* involved). It is that experiences, *in their features relevant to the mental lives of individuals*, are agnostic about the identity of the objects experienced. An experience of O can't be the *presentation* of O to S, if it is impossible for S to distinguish that experience from an experience of O*. The point is that indistinguishability allegedly precludes the possibility that perception is a matter of presentation.

In the case of experiencing qualitatively identical objects the relationalist can simply appeal to the qualitative sameness of said objects to explain their indistinguishability (Brewer 2011, 98). However, the same obviously won't do as an explanation of experiences where no such objects are present. If one appeals to presentation in the case of seeing, then it seems that one must treat hallucinations as experiences of a different kind. Explaining hallucination in terms of presentation would quickly lead to the postulation of sense data, but that is just what all sides of the present debate wish to avoid doing. The pressing task for the relationalist is to explain how it is that an experience that is the presentation of O can be indistinguishable from an experience that is the presentation of no object at all.

The first step in answering this issue is to carefully examine what is implicit in the rejection of presentation. Denying that an experience of O could be the presentation of O simply because an introspectively indistinguishable event could occur in O's absence would beg the question against Austin's criticism. Burge (2007, 220), too, says that one's discriminative abilities are not always adequate enough to determine the perceptual state one is in. Schellenberg would doubtless agree. What, then, stands in the way of understanding seeing as presentation?

It is important to keep in mind that in defining phenomenal sameness, Schellenberg refers to *ideal* introspective abilities. This idealization is supposed to avoid Austin's objection by insisting that in

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[32] Here, being sober and being drunk serve as analogues for veridically perceiving and hallucinating, respectively.

some cases distinguishing A from B is simply impossible and not merely the result of some introspective deficiency. The thought is that if a hallucination is indistinguishable from a perception even under ideal introspection, then the best explanation for that is that the hallucination and perception themselves are states of the same (fundamental) kind.

However, the insistence on introspection's capability to reveal such facts about hallucinations and perceptions simply leaves us in a deadlock. Whether subjective indistinguishability ever entails the sameness of two experiences instead of the experiences merely being indistinguishable from the subject's point of view can't itself be settled by introspection without making the assumption that introspection is at best infallible regarding the nature of experience. It is unclear what could license such an assumption. Consequently, it is unclear how introspection could settle the case against taking seeing to be a matter of presentation.

The point I want to emphasize is that establishing the existence of common kinds should be prior to considerations about subjective indistinguishability. That is, a common kind theorist should first establish that the relevant kinds of common factors exist and only then refer to those as explanations of indistinguishability. J.M. Hinton (1967, 226) seems to me to be just right on this point, saying that one should not twist subjectively indistinguishable events into indistinguishable subjective events. The most that introspection seems uncontroversially able to inform one of is merely events of the first kind.[33]

It may be objected at this point that just such common kinds have been (or at the very least, can be) established. As Burge (2005, 13) says, psychology (of vision) is committed to representations. But even if visual science made great use of the thought that perception is representational, it is difficult to make sense of that *philosophically* if representation itself is left unexplained. Here the issue gets quite complicated. As I mentioned in an earlier section, Burge has argued against attempts to naturalize representation (which often turn to causal and evolutionary considerations). The position Burge occupies on this matter is what he calls "modest dualism" (Burge 2010b). The combination of views that leads to this dualism seems to be precisely that visual psychology is committed to representations and that "naturalistic" accounts of representation fail to capture the psychologically interesting notion. But the failure of naturalistic reductions of representation should not prompt us to be dualists, since it has been no less difficult to understand how a dualistic mind could come to

[33] There is a similar line of reasoning in a slightly (but not completely) different philosophical context. In discussing an illusion of a red stripe (where there is no red stripe), Daniel Dennett (2017, 358-359) says this: "you misinterpret your sense […] that you're seeing a red stripe as arising from a subjective property (a *quale* […]) that is the *source* of your judgment, when in fact, that is just about backward. It is your *ability to describe* "the red stripe", your judgment, […] that is the source of your conviction that there *is* a subjective red stripe."

represent a mind-independent world at all. Rather, these points warrant the search for an alternative view – an alternative where the mind is not seen as an organ.

The reason I bring up these issues is that reflecting on them ends up supporting the thought that perception is fundamentally presentational. So, instead of retreating to a "modest dualism" in light of the (debatable) failure of naturalistic theories of representation and taking on the baggage of explaining how minds have the capacity to represent, a fair alternative is to question the fundamentality of representation itself. It is not clear that the commitment to mental representations in psychology rests on argumentation rather than heuristics (see note 24). It is quite possible that many psychologists working on vision are unaware of the philosophical problems having to do with representation, and it is consequently unclear whether they would want to adopt the kind of dualism that Burge does. In the next section, I will assume that there would ultimately be a desire to explain representation in physical terms and that these representations would be "located" (in one way or another) in the brain. By way of the classic skeptical brains-in-a-vat example, I will argue that representations so construed can't be fundamental common factors between perceptions and hallucinations either and thus do not rule out perception as being a matter of presentation.

4.6 Same Cause, Same Effect – More on Common Factors

Arguing in favor of sense data, Howard Robinson construes a short argument that quite closely resembles the thought behind Burge's proximality principle.[34] Robinson (2008, 153) argues that if two experiences have the same proximate neural cause, then they will be exactly alike in their subjective characteristics. Again, Robinson argues that this leads to sense data, but that is not important here. The relevant upshot of this argument is that a perception and a hallucination can be subjectively indistinguishable by having the same proximate neural cause (we can understand the neural activity as a representation). The thought is that duplicate brains equal duplicate experiences, no matter what is beyond the brains.

Isn't this quite a clear example of a kind of common factor between a perceptual and a hallucinatory experience? What is common to a perception and an indistinguishable hallucination is their underlying physical cause or nature. The thought is that the state of the brain suffices to produce an

[34] But here it is important to note that the criticisms levied here against the principle of "same cause, same effect" do not strictly speaking concern Burge's view because Burge thinks that representation has not been shown to be reducible to brain activity. I think that this gives reason to take Burge as endorsing the view that subjective indistinguishability is an effect of the occurrence of a *psychological* common factor, and that the belief in the existence of such common factors is warranted by an appeal to visual psychology. And here is where I think the reasons that the science has for postulating representations are open to question – whether it is done for philosophical or for heuristic reasons.

experience of a given type, whatever the prior distal causes of that state may be. The very experience that occurs while looking at a tree could be replicated by an advanced scientist tinkering with the brain in their laboratory. The same question arises yet again: How can a perceptual experience be the presentation of a particular object O, if the brain state responsible for that experience is producible in the absence of O?

It's important to notice that this kind of (physical) common factor is manifestly different than an introspective one. The envisioned common factor, an event in the brain, is not introspectable at all. At the very least it isn't an object that is known *better* through introspection than through third-person methods. Identifying the common factor with some going-on in the brain requires that experiences are categorized into perceptions and hallucinations based on how the brain is connected to its environment. After all, it would be impossible to know if the brain was in a delusive state if one never availed oneself of information about the environment in which the brain is embedded. In simple terms, perceptions could be thought of as brain states that are appropriately connected to their environment, whereas hallucinations could be thought of as states that are abnormally connected. The point is that identifying common factors as goings-on in the brain is already to take for granted that the brain is situated in an environment that gives meaning to its states.

The above kind of common factor need not be incompatible with a relational view of experience that takes perception to present, rather than represent, objects. In fact, I think that such a common factor presupposes presentation. But this thought requires further elaboration. So, suppose that there was in fact a brain in a vat to which we fed electrical impulses. Those of us on the outside could say that the brain's "experiences" are all hallucinations, since it certainly isn't *perceiving* things in its environment. At the same time, we might still want to say that it *seems* to the brain as if it was perceiving. But from the brain's point of view, there is no contrast to be drawn between perception and hallucination.[35] It simply has "experiences". That is, if we took the point of view of the brain, then any given token experience (any token brain event) is both a "perception" and a "hallucination" (or alternatively, neither). Although *we who are on the outside* are able to make the contrast between perception and hallucination, the brain in the vat, from its own point of view, can't make *that* distinction.[36]

[35] Unless, of course, we treated some of the impulses sent as "normal" and some as "abnormal".
[36] Its distinction would be that between perception* and hallucination*.

What I am aiming at is that *we* could not be brains in vats, since we *are* able to make the distinction between perception and hallucination.[37] If states of the brain were fundamental common factors – that is, if a brain state alone determined the nature of an experience – then we could not have this very conception of a distinction between veridical and nonveridical experiences, since it requires presupposing an environmental context. And it is this very understanding of an environmental context that requires explanation. But we can't understand it if we think of brain states as fundamental common factors – common factors that are by themselves sufficient for given kinds of experience.[38] Therefore, we should avoid inferring from the thought that a given brain state can result from multiple distal circumstances the thought that experiences, by their natures, must always stop short of presenting those distal circumstances.

In contrast, if an experience is a seeing, then the nature of that experience can't be agnostic about what is going on in the "external" world. The kind of experience a seeing is "discloses" states of affairs – it presents them. If perceptual experience is viewed as involving a fundamental common factor, it doesn't do that – it simply provides one with an appearance that could occur whether or not the world was as it appeared to be. But such a view seems to get things backwards – the whole idea that an experience may be misleading rests on the thought that on some other occasion it isn't. But what aspect of an experience that stops at the common factor can ever give reason to take it as disclosing something about the mind-independent world? If it was possible to boil down the cognitive significance of an experience to a common factor, it could not bestow on us the very thought that it *is* (just) *a factor in common between different experiences*. The remedy is to conceive of experiences in the good cases as revealing the world and not merely "correctly representing" it. Only then can we actually make sense of how an experience can mislead us about the *world*.

In these last two sections I have argued, for one, that introspection has not been shown to yield knowledge of a fundamental common factor instead of just the fact that two experiences may be subjectively indistinguishable. Furthermore, I have argued that a physical common factor, understood as some occurrence in the brain, should not be considered fundamental either. The relevance of these points for the overall relationalist argument is that if the arguments made in favor of common factors are either inconclusive or incorrect, then relationalism's denial of such common factors can't really be the weak point representationalists make it out to be. What relationalism denies is something that

[37] It would not be interesting to say that perhaps we have been envatted ten minutes ago, because that simply accepts that our ability to make the distinction derives from the time we were *not* envatted. Thus we would accept that we have a conception of the world in which our brains are envatted (and not just of the "world" we currently hallucinate), and that is just the point at issue.

[38] I of course already hinted at this by appealing to McDowell's thought that we should not conceive of the mind as an organ.

has not been successfully argued for in the first place. On the other hand, relationalism is much better equipped to handle perceptual particularity than representationalism. In the next section I will argue that representationalism does not have the tools to ultimately even get started on that question and that it must presuppose presentation.

4.7 Thinking about Particulars

The very idea of a common factor, as presented in the last section, seems to presuppose a grasp of environmental contexts – situations. Situations themselves seem to involve particularity – one is always in a particular situation. What constitutes that particularity? One natural response is that the particularity of a situation is constituted by the particular objects that are present. It is then not much of a leap to suggest that one can grasp which situation one is in by perceptual experience presenting the particular objects that are within that environmental context. As Campbell (2002b, 135) foresees, a representationalist could ask why it isn't enough that the common factor "image" merely represents the world as objective (as the situation having these particulars and not others). And Campbell's (Ibid.) response is that this question simply "takes for granted the intentionality of experience […], that experience of the world is a way of grasping thoughts about the world". The point is that experience should be what *explains* intentionality – that it explains why one's perceptual experience is about one particular object rather than some other object. The representationalist response therefore merely evades what is at issue.

I want to add to Campbell's argument that in addition to the intentionality of experience, the objection takes for granted the very *intelligibility* of our talk about mind-independent particulars. If experience does not have its explanatory role, if it is just one among many ways of representing the world, then it becomes unclear how it is that we apprehend our very thoughts about that world. When Burge, for example, appeals to the representational content's singular element as the element which ensures that we perceive particulars (in the good case), he is assuming that such particulars exist. But the representational content does not require for its own existence the existence of a particular object that it can be about. How can it therefore explain how we can come to form thoughts about a particular object O? If it can't explain that, then how are we to even understand talk about the particular O?

Brewer (2011, 62-63) says something to the same effect, claiming that the existence of a particular object O is more basic than the indefinitely many true sentences of the form "O is F". In response to Brewer, Schellenberg (2018, 127-128) notes that what is at issue is not the truth of sentences, but the accuracy of mental contents. But this response seems very superficial, since Brewer's reference to

sentences and their truth-makers only serves as an analogy[39] in the first place. The broader relationalist thought is that the existence of a particular object is prior to any *way* that the object could be represented, even by non-conceptual mental states. The point at issue is how perceptual experience affords us the conception of a particular O as *the* object that can subsequently be represented. To answer such a question, one can't simply appeal to more representation. At some point in our explanation, we must stop at O itself.

If we are to say that some particular O has the property F, then for that to make sense to us, we should understand what it is for O to be F. Here, Brewer thinks that representationalism runs into trouble. If perceiving that O is F presupposes that we grasp the content "O is F", then experience does not have a role to play in explaining how we can understand that (the intentionality of experience is taken for granted). Alternatively, if perceiving that O is F doesn't require that understanding, then how can experience representationally construed help explain how we grasp that thought? (Brewer 2011, 56-57.)

Let me illustrate the problem we are facing with one more example. Suppose that S sees some particular person, say, Zappa. The representationalists discussed here would account for this seeing in terms of a representational content which includes a singular element. The veridicality conditions of that state specify what conditions Zappa must satisfy in order to be perceived. Importantly, an exact lookalike of Zappa (L-Zappa) would satisfy the very same general conditions. Both would satisfy indefinitely many represented properties F_1, F_2, … , F_n.

A singular element must be introduced into the representational content precisely because there is a possibility that two distinct particulars satisfy the very same general properties. But this singular element, being a part of representational content, is itself general. To elaborate, consider that Burge (2005, 59) criticizes Campbell for not distinguishing demonstrative *form* from occurrent *application*. The thought is that the singular element is itself general because it is a demonstrative form that is applied to objects in perception. When S perceives L-Zappa, S applies the *same* demonstrative form as they would if they perceived Zappa. The difference consists in the (general) demonstrative form picking out different referents on different occasions of application.

But what is this other than making, to use Brewer's analogy again, true sentences prior to truth-makers in the explanatory order of things? Simply by applying the demonstrative form one does not thereby get in contact with an object, since it is possible for any application to fail its function. To explain how S sees Zappa, the representationalist would have to say that the internal condition, which is

[39] Brewer (2011, 62) himself says so on the page Schellenberg quotes.

general, comes first, and the thing that satisfies that condition – the particular person – comes second. And the problem that representationalism can't answer is how perceiving Zappa could make it possible to think about Zappa, if the particularity of Zappa has been squeezed out of him by making him first pass through an internal condition that L-Zappa could pass through just as well. This proposed mind-to-world direction of fit is incompatible with the idea that it is the particular itself which determines thought about it. In contrast, by presenting Zappa, and thus making the perceiver acquainted with Zappa, the relational view of experience puts one in cognitive contact with Zappa himself, allowing thought to be about him.

5. Concluding Remarks

Se non è vero, è ben trovato

Does a satisfying explanation of the particularity of perception require embracing relationalism? I have argued that it does, on the basis that nothing short of presentation seems to quite capture the uniqueness of particulars. As has been made clear, not everyone agrees, for Tyler Burge and Susanna Schellenberg argue that representationalism is well-equipped to handle particularity. Nonetheless, particularity figures in representationalist theories only as an afterthought. The explanatory advantage of representationalism, its main thrust, is the idea of common factors. But if one overemphasizes the importance of commonality, one runs the risk of losing out on particularity. When one's theory claims that two experiences share a fundamental common factor, one will be in dire straits to retain the thought particulars are involved in experience.

The principal distinction between relationalism and representationalism that I have focused on is that the former thinks of perceptual experience as a matter of presentation while the latter thinks of it as representation. The advantage of relationalism (regarding particularity) is that presentation puts one in a direct cognitive relation to the particular perceived, which in turn gives experience its explanatory role as that which makes demonstrative thought about particulars possible. Representationalism can't afford this explanatory role to experience, since it gives explanatory priority to the *ways* in which one perceives particulars, rather than the particulars themselves. Accordingly, it must first assume the existence of particulars, and only then can it provide a theory for how we perceive them. The conclusion is that representationalism can't explain how perceptual experience could provide the means for thinking about a mind-independent world and the particulars in it, while relationalism can.

So, while it is not at all an uncommon view that perceptual experience confronts us with particular entities, just how that confrontation should be understood is a topic of great controversy. Even the most innocuous event, like perceiving the Moon in the night sky, is intertwined with some very deep problems in the philosophy of mind. I hope to have brought out and shone a light on some of those problems.

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