

5. Apparent presentational character

The central topic of this chapter is apparent presentational character: when does it occur and what is its nature? I begin by examining some unsuccessful accounts of apparent presentational character (§1) before laying out and defending the pluralist's account (§2-§3). I then consider some epistemological questions about our beliefs about presentation (§4). I round out the discussion by giving a simple account of conveyed character (§5) and considering the relationship between apparent presentational character and various forms of “phenomenal character” (§6).

1. Apparent presentational character introduced; some unsuccessful partial accounts

The previous chapter offered a pluralist account of *real* presentational character. But the pluralist also owes an account of *apparent* presentational character – an account of why certain experiences *first-personally seem* to present particulars, and why those particulars *first-personally seem* to be mind-independent or mind-dependent.

For instance, if I see a red tomato, it will first-personally seem to me that I am presented with a mind-independent tomato. Likewise if I hallucinate one. If I experience an orange afterimage, I will once more first-personally seem to be presented with it, but this time it will seem to be mind-dependent. Thus part of the datum is this:

Apparent Symmetry: Any typical perceptual experience or sensation has *apparent presentational character* – that is, it first-personally seems to present one or more particulars, such as objects and property-instances. In perceptual experience, these

particulars typically seem to exist independently of the subject's mind. In sensation, these particulars typically seem to exist in a way that depends on the subject's mind.

Another part of the datum is that if I vividly imagine or episodically remember a tomato, it will not ordinarily seem to me that I am presented with anything. Any theorist of perception owes an account of such facts.

One tempting initial thought is that any genuinely presentational experience wears its presentational status on its sleeve: as long as you are really presented with a mind-independent or mind-dependent target, it will first-personally seem to you that this is so (if you are rational, attentive, etc.). Call this the *easy account*. Perhaps the account could be extended to sensory imaginings and episodic memories: perhaps these wear their non-presentational status on their sleeves, too. We would still need to explain why hallucinations and sensations incorrectly seem to present mind-independent and mind-dependent targets, respectively. But the easy account is a start.

Unfortunately, the account is incorrect. Suppose that, unbeknownst to me, you set up faint flashing lights within my field of vision. When I see them, my experience is indiscriminable from the phosphene experience that I get when I vigorously rub my eyes. This is already problematic for the easy account: it will not first-personally seem to me that I am presented with *mind-independent* lights. It will first-personally seem to me that I am presented with *mind-dependent* phosphenes. But we can modify the case to make the point even sharper. Suppose that

I vigorously rub my eyes just before I see the faint flashing lights. I simultaneously experience phosphenes and real lights. I will take lights to be mind-dependent phosphenes.¹

It is easy to multiply examples of this sort: for many sensations, there are possible perceptions that first-personally seem to match them precisely. A vivid sensation of a bright green after-image might perfectly match a perception of a green light; a sensation of ringing in the ears might perfectly match an actual faint ringing sound²; a sensation of bitterness on the tongue might perfectly match a perception of a faintly bitter taste. Under elaborate experimental conditions, it is even possible to create vivid, detailed afterimages in which subjects first-personally take themselves to be perceiving entire scenes. Here is how one scientist describes his own experience during such an experiment:

I could scarcely convince myself that the light was not still burning; it seemed as if I could see my real hand, the real objects on my table and even the pictures on the wall. These decidedly positive afterimages persisted for many seconds When I fixate with both eyes and then close them carefully after the last illumination, it is often difficult for me to believe that they are really closed. Observers often exclaim, 'My eyes won't shut,' 'I've lost control of my eyelids,' etc. This illusion is evidently due to the fact that the after-images, which have the same appearance, as far as colour and form are concerned, as the illuminated objects, are not only just as distinct as when the eyes are open but usually much more so. (Swindle 1916, p. 329)

¹ Cases quite similar to this are not hypothetical. They are actual. In order to test peripheral vision, ophthalmologists position patients in front of a half-sphere that produces flashing lights, some of which are extremely faint. I have done this test a few times and often had no idea whether I was experiencing real lights or phosphenes. That, even though I (unlike the subject described in the main text) knew the exact set-up beforehand.

² Again, this kind of case is actual, not hypothetical. It occurs in hearing tests.

The lesson is that some genuinely presentational experiences do not wear their presentational status on their sleeves. Even though they in fact present mind-independent targets, they do not first-personally seem to do so.

This might inspire us to modify the easy account. Even if not all perceptions wear their status as *presenting mind-independent targets* on their sleeves, they might still wear on their sleeves that they *present* their targets, full-stop. This *modified easy account* is much more limited in its explanatory power than the easy account, but is it at least correct?

It is not: some perceptions first-personally seem not to present anything at all. In one famous experiment, subjects looked at a white wall and were asked to imagine a blue banana rotating slowly on the wall. Unbeknownst to them, the experimenters then projected a dim image of a rotating blue banana on the wall. Subjects did not realize that they were seeing a projection of a banana. They believed that they were merely sensorily imagining the banana.³

Some will worry that a subject of this experiment *can* tell that their blue banana experiences are perceptions, since these experiences are involuntary. Suppose that this verdict is correct in this particular case. Still, I think it cannot be correct in general: it is possible for an involuntary experience to first-personally seem to be voluntary.

To see this, consider once more a subject who is instructed to look at a white wall and imagine a blue banana on it. This time, however, the subject is told that scientists will sometimes be projecting a blue banana image on the wall. Her task is to determine whether each of her blue banana experiences is a perception or a sensory imagining. Suppose that the experiment is run by future neuroscientists who can detect, through advanced neuroimaging, exactly when the subject forms the intention to imagine a blue banana. These scientists can predict the exact shape,

³ See Perky (1910).

orientation, color, and texture that the imagined banana would have. Whenever the subject is about to imagine a blue banana, the scientists project a faint image of a banana on the wall that has those exact qualities. The projected image will even rotate, change color, and so on in accordance with the subject's intentions.

A subject of this experiment would mistakenly take her perceptions to be voluntary. These perceptions would not first-personally seem to present anything, even though they would in fact be presenting blue-banana images. This restores the counterexample to both versions of the easy account.

Such a counterexample can even be developed without any science-fictional elements. (Serendipity is required instead.) Imagine a subject in a grassy field who is about to imagine a firefly in her surroundings. She intends to imagine the firefly traveling in a very specific pattern. By chance, she sees a real but very faintly lit firefly exactly where she had intended to imagine one, and by even greater chance, the firefly follows the path that she had intended to imagine it following. This subject is really presented with a mind-independent firefly, but she will take it that she is not presented with anything.

The moral is that neither version of the easy account will work. What account can the pluralist offer, then?

2. The categorization account introduced

I propose:

The *categorization account*: For an experience to first-personally seem to present a target, and for the target to first-personally seem to be mind-independent or mind-dependent, is

for the subject to *categorize* the experience or its targets as such. In normal, mature human beings, this categorization occurs on the basis of an overall gestalt.

This account requires much elaboration.

First elaboration. What is *categorization*? It is the process of applying concepts automatically and subpersonally, in a way that is not fully sensitive to the subject's current background beliefs. I leave open the possibility that categorization can occur without any connection to experience, but it is paradigmatically associated with perception: when you see something that looks to have certain distinctive pattern of shapes and colors, you categorize it *as* a maple tree. You would categorize it in this way even if you believed it to be a movie prop made of cardboard. Your contrary background beliefs would not have the power to stop the categorization from occurring.

I remain neutral about whether the categorization described in this account ever occurs within experience proper, or whether it always occurs post-experientially.⁴

Second elaboration. What is it for an experience to be categorized as *presenting* its target? The idea is that as we mature, we begin to answer this question by developing a *tacit partial theory*. At the same time, we use that theory to develop a *concept* of presentation, which can be applied via categorization.⁵

In particular, over the course of our experiences when we are very young, we notice that our experiences are sometimes voluntary – to a first approximation, their specific characters are

⁴ In Appendix 5E I will argue that *some* categorizations occur within experience proper. Still, I will remain neutral about whether *the categorizations that constitute apparent presentational character* occur within experience proper.

⁵ Austin Andrews defends the related suggestion that as we mature, we form a theoretically-laden concept of *perception* (see his 2020, esp. pp. 236-239). I am sympathetic to that idea as well.

sensitive to our will.⁶ We can choose to imagine the scent of vanilla or to remember the tune of *Paint It, Black*. However, we observe that some experiences – perceptions and sensations, for instance – are not like that. We have no volitional control over their specific characters. What could determine the character of our experiences in these cases, then? We tacitly reason that it is the character of certain target(s) that we are directly aware of, targets that exist concurrently with the experiences themselves. This is not the only possible explanation, but it is by far the simplest one, for reasons that I explain in Appendix 5A.

In this way we form the concept of *presentation*, without naming it that. This is the concept of whatever best fits platitudes such as the following (where *P* stands for both *platitude* and *presentation*):

- P1. Such-and-such experiences (which are in fact perceptions and sensations) present their targets.
- P2. Presentation entails involuntary deep awareness.
- P3. The character of a presentational experience is determined by the character of the concurrently existing target(s) of that experience.
- P4. Presentation is a joint-carving relation.

We then automatically and subpersonally apply this concept of presentation, via categorization, to certain experiences, including typical perceptions, hallucinations, and sensations.⁷

⁶ In the next chapter I will refine the notion of (in)voluntariness that figures in the account.

⁷ Though there are possible creatures that form and/or apply the same concept in a very different way.

Third elaboration. What is it for an experience to be categorized as presentational, and for its targets to be categorized as mind-independent or mind-dependent, *based on an overall gestalt*? This question brings us to the heart of the categorization account.

To illustrate what the pluralist has in mind, consider a mundane case in which you see a tomato. There are many cues that you are *presented* with a tomato rather than sensorily imagining or episodically remembering it. There are also many cues that the tomato, unlike an afterimage or a phosphene, is *mind-independent*.

Some of these cues primarily involve the sensory qualities *of the tomato*: the redness of the tomato is experienced as especially vivid, as relatively stable, and as part of a continuous three-dimensional surface. Then there are other sensory cues that involve the *interaction* between the sensory qualities of the tomato and the sensory qualities of your environment or body. For instance, you may lose your awareness of the redness of the tomato as the lights dim. In addition, your awareness of redness will persist only while you are looking in the right direction with your eyes open, and there will be changes in the shape that you are deeply aware of as you move around the tomato. One last important factor is that your deep awareness of these qualities will seem to be *involuntary*.⁸

For another illustration, suppose that you experience an orange afterimage. Again, the pluralist says that you rely on a gestalt of cues to categorize your experience. As before, your deep awareness is involuntary and vivid. Thus you categorize the experience as presentational (incorrectly, according to the pluralist – she says that sensations do not really present anything). However, the afterimage does not seem to be well-integrated with the environment, nor does

⁸ Thus this gestalt is not purely a matter of how the sensory qualities are: involuntariness is an example of a further factor.

your awareness of it seem to change in predictable ways as the lights dim or as you move or close your eyes. You eventually learn that others do not seem to be aware of your afterimages, either. For these reasons you categorize the afterimage as mind-dependent. In fact, once you learn what is characteristic of an afterimage, you will categorize sensorily similar targets as mind-dependent *even before* you have tried moving around or closing your eyes.

According to the categorization account, no single (non-weighted) set of cues is necessary and sufficient for the first-personal appearance that you are presented with a mind-independent tomato or a mind-dependent afterimage. (Deep awareness is a necessary cue, but obviously it is not sufficient.⁹) Instead, each of these appearances occurs when and because you recognize a gestalt of these cues that you have come to recognize after much previous experience.

That is the account. Why accept it?

⁹ You might wonder whether the appearance of involuntary deep awareness is necessary and sufficient for apparent presentational character (while leaving open whether the target is mind-independent or mind-dependent). I believe that it might be sufficient, but it is not necessary. Imagine that it is unclear to you whether your brief experience of a faint light is voluntary or not, but the experience is vivid, stable, and continuous with the environment. I submit that there would be apparent presentational character here.

Or consider this remark from Christopher Hill:

[Some experiences have] *presentational immediacy*. Objects of experiential awareness are not inferred or posited. They are *presented* to us. They are simply *there*.... But when we say this, are we saying more than that experiential awareness is direct or immediate, that introspective examination of experiential awareness fails to reveal anything about it other than its objects, and that ... our awareness of [those objects] is not controlled or modulated by endogenous, voluntary factors (other than attention)? As far as I can tell, the answer to this question is "no."

This quotation is about *presentation*. But it is tempting to extend Hill's idea to *apparent* presentation: you might say that to *seem* to be presented with a target is to *seem* to have direct, involuntary experiential awareness of that target that does not involve awareness of anything mental. The example that I just gave would also be a counterexample to this suggestion.

3. Evidence for the categorization account

I submit that the categorization account explains a wide range of data.

Datum. Some perceptions – experiences that really present mind-independent targets – may first-personally seem to present a mind-dependent target: recall the subject who rubs her eyes and sees faint, mind-independent lights but takes herself to be aware of mind-dependent phosphenes. Other perceptions do not first-personally seem to present anything at all. Recall the subject who thinks that she is imagining a blue banana rotating slowly on a wall, but who is actually seeing a faint projection of a rotating blue banana, as well as the subject who thinks she is imagining a firefly tracing a particular path in a field, but who is actually seeing such a creature.

The categorization account explains all of this. To begin with, it allows that a perception may sometimes lack the gestalt characteristic of an experience that presents mind-independent targets. This is what happens to the subject who sees faint flashing lights. Her experience is involuntary, so she correctly categorizes it as presentational. But her perceptions of those lights are not vivid, given that the lights are faint; her perceptions are not stable, given that the lights flash only briefly; and her perceptions are not well-integrated with the environment, since the lights are well-hidden. She has also just rubbed her eyes, which she has learned is usually followed by an experience of what she takes to be mind-dependent lights. In light of all of this, she incorrectly categorizes the targets of her experience as mind-dependent.

In addition, even though any perception must really present its targets, the categorization account allows that a perception may entirely lack a presentational gestalt. That is what happens in the blue-banana experiments. Here the subject's perceptions are not at all vivid, and the targets of her perceptions are unusual: we do not usually come across faint projections on walls. Most importantly, these experiences first-personally seem to be voluntary, for just when the subject

forms an intention to visualize a blue banana on the wall, she has such an experience. Thus it first-personally seems to her that she is not first-personally presented with anything at all. The same kind of story can be told for the subject who sees a firefly but thinks that she is imagining it.

Datum. Sometimes the first-personal appearances are silent on whether an experience presents a mind-independent particular or mind-dependent one. For instance, I might experience a ringing sound and wonder whether I am really hearing it or just experiencing a sensation of ringing in my ears. (Incidentally, versions of the case in which I am really hearing the sound provide another counterexample to the easy account.)

With the categorization account in hand, we can explain this phenomenon by observing that some gestalts do not clearly indicate whether a target is mind-independent or mind-dependent. In this case, perhaps the ringing is not especially vivid and is not coming from any obvious direction. This explanation is further confirmed by facts about what subsequent events might tip the ringing sound into seeming mind-independent or mind-dependent. If I go to investigate and notice that the ringing increases steadily in volume as I walk in one direction, then the sound will likely start to seem mind-independent. If there are no changes in volume no matter where I walk, that will likely tip it towards seeming mind-dependent.

A pair of data. Here is one possible view: what it is for a mental event to first-personally seem to present a mind-independent particular is for it to be a sensory representation with a determinate content. This view is false. Suppose that a boxer takes a hard punch to the head and experiences bright, vivid flashes of light. His experience of the light will have a highly

determinate content, but it will not seem to present him with mind-independent flashes of light – it will not seem to him that he is seeing, say, the flashes of the spectators’ cameras.¹⁰

Relatedly, it has been said that for a mental event to first-personally seem to present a particular, full stop – regardless of whether that particular seems to be mind-independent or mind-dependent – is for it to be a sensory representation with a determinate content.¹¹ This is also not true. Suppose that you close your eyes and then open them as little as possible to see a cup in front of you. You will barely be able to make out the cup, and your experience will be very faint. Still, it will first-personally seem to you that you are presented with a mind-independent cup.

The categorization account predicts these results. For it does not appeal to any single experiential cue to explain apparent presentational character, but to gestalts, which are holistic. In the case of the boxer, before he experiences vivid flashes, he feels the sensory quality of a sharp blow to his head beforehand, which he has learned is often followed by an experience of a vivid

¹⁰ I speak from experience. In sparring sessions, I have been struck hard enough to experience vivid flashes of light. They did not for a moment strike me as mind-independent.

¹¹ This is the view of Adam Pautz:

Why then do experiences, including hallucinatory experiences, have a presentational phenomenology while thoughts do not? ... My answer to this question is that there is no answer. Some intentional states (believing contents, desiring contents) do not have a presentational phenomenology. Other intentional states do have a presentational phenomenology: states in which one stands in the special “sensory” relation to contents (propositions or complex properties) which I have dubbed ‘sensorily entertaining’. (Or at least some episodes of standing in this sensory relation to contents have a presentational phenomenology; perhaps in imaginings and dreams we stand in the same relation to contents but *because the contents are quite indeterminate* the experiences lack a presentational phenomenology.) The state of having an experience as of the vivid presence of a red thing at a certain place just is the state of standing in this special relation to a *detailed* content according to which there is a red thing at a certain place. (2007, p. 519, emphases added)

flash. He has also found no reason to think that getting hit creates real, mind-independent flashes in his environment. Thus his experience of the flash does not seem to him to present anything mind-independent. Similarly, when you faintly see the cup, you can feel the sensory qualities of your eyelids that indicate that your eyes are not fully open, so you are not surprised to find that your visual experience is faint – not to mention that your experience of the sensory qualities of all other seen objects is faint, too. On top of that, your experience of the cup has many other sensory similarities to a standard perception of a cup: for instance, you experience the sensory qualities indicative of a table supporting the cup. That is why this experience will strike you as presenting a mind-independent cup.

Datum. It will take some time to build up to this datum.

Imagine that you seem to see a tomato in the usual way. You reach to pick it up – but your hand passes through the tomato, as though it were a hologram! Astonished, you try several times more, with no better luck. You try to prod the tomato with a fork, but that, too, passes right through. When you mention this astonishing phenomenon to others, you discover that they do not seem to see the tomato at all. You head to the market to investigate more tomatoes and seem to find a bin full of them. Again, your visual experience seems to be mundane. But when you try to touch the tomatoes, your hands pass through them once more, and the clerk whom you flag down for help tells you that the bin is empty.

If these sorts of experiences persist for long enough, then mundane tomato-experiences might cease to first-personally seem to present you with tomatoes. You will take yourself to be having mere *tomato-sensations*.¹²

¹² So far, this case is structurally identical to the doll case described in Siegel (2006, pp. 369-370).

Suppose that all of this was an elaborate prank: *you were seeing perfectly ordinary tomatoes all along*. A mischievous demon made parts of the tomato vanish as you reached for them, while counteracting the effects of gravity on any unsupported tomato parts that remained. She then replaced the missing tomato parts whenever you removed your hands. She also tampered with the visual experiences of those around you, temporarily blinding them to the existence of the tomatoes around them.

Now to the point: compare your experience of a tomato before the antics of the demon with your experience of a tomato afterwards, once you take it to be a tomato-sensation. Both of these experiences are perceptions of real tomatoes. They might even be sensorily identical: you might be looking at the very same tomato from the same perspective in the same lighting. Still, only your first tomato-experience will first-personally seem to present a mind-independent tomato. Your second experience will not.

In short, the datum is that there are pairs of possible perceptions that are sensorily identical but that differ in whether their targets first-personally seem to be mind-independent. This is somewhat surprising!

The categorization account explains why it is possible. The point is that we categorize the targets of our current experiences based on what we take ourselves to have learned through many previous experiences. It is this that leads us to conclusions about which gestalts are indicative of mind-independent targets and which are not. Thus subjects who have had different prior experiences can differ in how they categorize sensorily identical experiences.

Datum. We return now to a familiar point. Take any perception that first-personally seems to present mind-independent particulars. Any matching hallucination will first-personally seem to do the same.

It is notoriously difficult for the naïve realist to explain this datum. The pluralist explains it easily.¹³ For the categorization account says that all first-personal appearances of presentation in normal, mature human beings are explained by categorization of a particular gestalt. This gestalt is found in any typical perception. To this, the pluralist adds that for any perception, there is a matching hallucination, which she analyzes as a hallucination that involves deep awareness of the same sensory qualities (structured in the same way). Such a hallucination will have exactly the same gestalt as the perception, so any given subject will categorize these experiences in exactly the same way.

Datum. It is possible for the first-personal appearances regarding presentation to conflict with what you know. You might know that you are about to see faint lights that look just like afterimages or phosphenes. Still, if the timing of the lights is precise enough – if they go off just when you rub your eyes and fade shortly afterwards – then it will seem to you that you are not presented with mind-independent lights. Or you might know that your brain is about to be stimulated to create a perfect hallucination of a maple tree. The hallucination, when it occurs, will still first-personally strike you as presenting a mind-independent tree.

The categorization account explains this by saying that categorization occurs *automatically and subpersonally*. It is not sensitive to the entirety of the subject's background knowledge at a given moment, just as the Müller-Lyer illusion does not end simply because the subject knows that it is an illusion. This is compatible with categorization resulting from perceptual learning, since such learning occurs over extended periods of time.

¹³ As do most representationalists, but we will see soon enough that the pluralist's explanation is not the standard representationalist one.

This also makes it clear how the pluralist should handle an important phenomenological objection. The objection is that according to the categorization account, the first-personal appearance of presentation is phenomenologically indirect: you identify your deep awareness as having a certain gestalt, and from that you arrive, whether by inference or by some other transition, at the first-personal appearance of presentation. But this is plainly incorrect: the first-personal appearance is phenomenologically direct. It just immediately seems to you that you are presented with the tomato.

I agree with my opponent that the first-personal appearance is phenomenologically direct. That is precisely what the categorization account says: it is part of the view that your categorization of the relevant gestalts occurs *automatically and subpersonally*. The process takes no noticeable effort and is not within the realm of your first-personal access. Thus the first-personal appearance of presentation just shows up in your phenomenology.

An objection. Grant for the sake of argument that *once a subject already appreciates that certain particulars are mind-independent*, she can learn to identify the gestalts associated with perceiving those particulars. Still, you might wonder what gets this process off the ground. How can a subject come to appreciate that anything is mind-independent in the first place?

I believe that there is a great deal that might tip her off to this fact. For instance, she can easily learn through experience that a cup will fall if it is not supported by anything. Suppose, then, that she sees a cup supported by a table. She positions her hand so that it covers the table entirely while leaving the cup in plain sight. If the table were mind-dependent – if it ceased to exist now that the subject was no longer perceiving it – then the cup ought to fall. That does not happen. It is easy for a subject to pile up evidence of this sort.

Further points of interest. The categorization account can explain some additional data. The first datum is that zombies and super-blindsight subjects can see, albeit without deep awareness,

but they do not take their visual experiences to present anything (Appendix 5B).¹⁴ In addition, certain fantastical experiences, such as supernatural visions of the past or future, would first-personally seem to present mind-independent targets (Appendix 5C).

However, it has been argued that if perceptions were representational, then perceived particulars could not first-personally appear to be mind-independent. One objection is that it is impossible to extract the conception of a mind-independent object from a mind-dependent representation; another objection is that if perceptions were representational, then they would not be more fundamental than thought for grasping what an object is (or for grasping the mind-independence of an object). I respond to these objections in Appendix 5D.

Conclusion. The data concerning apparent presentational character turn out to be much more complicated than you might expect. But they are neatly explained by the categorization account.

The data support a further conclusion. Distinguish between two kinds of representations. For a representation to be *committal* is for the subject, simply in virtue of having that representation, to at some level take things to be as they are represented. For a representation to be *non-committal* is for this not to be the case. Beliefs are paradigms of committal representations: in virtue of believing that p , a subject must take p to be the case *at some level*—even if, at the same time, she holds the inconsistent belief that $\text{not-}p$. Desires are paradigms of non-committal representations: wanting to eat ice cream now does not make it the case that you take yourself to be eating ice cream now.

¹⁴ I thank Ori Beck for drawing my attention to these data.

The standard representationalist view is that all perceptual experiences – unlike, say, sensory imaginings – are committal representations.¹⁵ This is false: there are unusual perceptions, such as certain perceptions of faint blue bananas or fireflies, that are not categorized as presenting anything. The subject does not take the contents of these perceptions to be true at any level. That is why the pluralist instead says that *all* perceptions are non-committal representations – even perceptions that *are* categorized as presentational. For even then, the subject does not take the content of her experience to obtain *merely because she has the experience*. She takes the content of her experience to obtain *because she categorizes it in a certain way*.

I move now to some epistemological matters.

4. The epistemology of presentation

We sometimes form beliefs that we might express by saying, “I am *presented* with that thing.” Call any such belief a *presentational belief*. Can the pluralist provide a satisfying epistemological account of presentational beliefs? Suppose for example that I see a blue ball in front of me. I come to believe, in the usual way, that I am presented with a mind-independent ball. This belief amounts to knowledge. Now suppose that I suffer a matching hallucination and form a similar belief: the belief that I am presented with a mind-independent ball. This belief does not amount

¹⁵ For instance, Pautz says, “On Intentionalism, experiences are a type of intentional state akin to thoughts” (2007, p. 519); Siegel says, “perception involves states that are importantly similar to beliefs: visual experiences” (2010, p. 27); Millar speaks of “the sort of commitment that is present in belief and perceptual experience and absent from merely grasping or considering some proposition” (2014, p. 250). The same view is implicit but clear in Tye (1995, p. 142). The point has been given fuller expression by naïve realist Michael Martin: “the only plausible forms of intentional theory [i.e., representationalism] appeal to the stative [i.e., committal] notion of representation in order to explain the distinctive phenomenology of perceptual experiences” (2002, p. 387). Martin makes it clear that the phenomenology that he has in mind is apparent presentational character (pp. 387–388).

to knowledge – it is not even true – but evidently it is justified. How can the pluralist explain these facts?

It is easy enough to see why my presentational belief would amount to knowledge when I am genuinely perceiving: the belief meets all of the standard conditions on knowledge. It is true, of course. It is also *safe*. Consider all nearby worlds in which I am presented with that same blue ball and form a belief on the same topic on the same basis – on the basis of whatever gestalt I find in my experience. In such worlds, I might see the ball from a slightly different vantage point. I will still automatically and subpersonally take my experience to have a perceptual gestalt; on that basis I will categorize it as presenting a mind-independent ball; and either in virtue of that, or on that basis, I will form the belief that I am presented with a mind-independent ball. In every such world, my belief will be true.

My presentational belief will even be *sensitive*: in the nearest worlds in which I am *not* presented with that thing – say, worlds in which I turn my back on the ball or simply close my eyes – I will not believe that I am presented with a mind-independent ball. In addition, my presentational belief will be *formed via a reliable process*. For consider any process for forming beliefs on contingent, *a posteriori* matters. If the process is both safe and sensitive, it is hard to see how it could be unreliable.¹⁶

It may be objected that when I have a matching hallucination, I will form the same presentational belief. Might this undermine the status of my presentational belief as knowledge in the case of genuine perception? On pain of skepticism, it cannot. Perception surely positions me to know that I have hands, even though there are possible scenarios in which I form a similar

¹⁶ It is important to include the restriction to beliefs that are contingent and *a posteriori*. Necessarily true beliefs might trivially turn out to be safe and sensitive. Likewise for some contingent but *a priori* true beliefs, such as the belief that I exist.

but non-knowledgeable belief on the basis of a matching hallucination. There is no evident reason that my belief that I am presented with a mind-independent ball would be epistemically worse off than my belief that I have hands.

Now turn to the presentational belief that I form when I merely hallucinate a blue ball: again, the belief that I am presented with a mind-independent ball. This belief does not amount to knowledge, of course. It is not even true. But it is plausible that the belief is justified. Can the pluralist explain why? One natural answer is that the hallucinatory presentational belief is the output of a reliable belief-forming process. Another natural answer is that a belief is justified as long as it is simply the endorsement of how things first-personally seem to the subject, in the absence of defeaters. The hallucinatory presentational belief would meet this condition, as well.

I conclude that the pluralist has a simple and attractive account of the epistemology of presentation. I move now to her account of conveyed character.

5. Conveyed character

You will recall that the *conveyed character* of an experience is any property of the form: *conveying ... to the subject*. But what is it to *convey* something? In a metaphor, what an experience conveys to the subject is what it *tells* her. Thus we can find evidence for what an experience conveys to its subject by considering how the experience disposes her to act, as well as what beliefs the experience disposes her to form, both about the world and about the experience itself.

On reflection, I believe that the concept of conveyed character is simply the concept of *access consciousness*: it is a conceptual truth that what it is for an experience to have conveyed character is for it to be access-conscious, and that what the experience conveys is nothing more

than what it makes accessible to the subject.¹⁷ I do not have any particular theory of access consciousness. That is, I think, a matter for empirical inquiry. But I do have some suggestions about what in particular an experience conveys – equivalently, what it makes accessible – to its subject.

It is definitional that the contents of the subject’s sensory representations will be conveyed to the subject, as long as those representations are access-conscious. It is also clear that the sensory qualities of which the subject is deeply aware will be conveyed to the subject, assuming that hard consciousness entails access consciousness. Is there anything else that an experience might convey to its subject? I see one other important possibility. Some theorists think that categorization is sometimes *experiential*, in the sense that it sometimes occurs within experience proper.¹⁸ (I argue in Appendix 5E that this view is correct: we routinely categorize things as tables and tomatoes *within experience proper*. But I will not rely on this conclusion.) In that case experience can also convey to the subject information about how its targets are categorized. Drawing these threads together, the pluralist says that the conveyed character of an experience is the conjunctive property of:

- (i) being a sensory representation of such-and-such content (if the sensory representation is access-conscious);

¹⁷ Susanna Siegel, who coins the notion of conveyed character, at one point seems to entertain the possibility that “phenomenal consciousness” (the kind of consciousness characterized by conveyed character) might be distinct from access consciousness (2010, p. 81, fn. 3). This is a conceptual confusion. I believe that Siegel commits this error because she uses the standard “what it’s like” definition of phenomenal character, which, as I argued in chapter 2, can easily conceal the meaning of that expression.

¹⁸ See for example McDowell (1994); Brewer (1999); Mandelbaum (2018). For opposition to this view see for example Burge (2010); Block (2014); Millar (2018, pp. 258-259).

- (ii) being an instance of deep awareness of such-and-such sensory qualities (if the experience is partly constituted by access-conscious deep awareness); and
- (iii) being a categorization of these contents and sensory qualities *as* such-and-such (if this categorization occurs within experience proper).¹⁹

With this account in hand, return to a certain heated debate over an arborist's perception of a pine tree: does the natural-kind property of being a pine tree partially constitute the *phenomenal character* of her experience? The pluralist says that before we can answer this question, we must disambiguate the italicized expression.

I argued in chapter 3 that the property of being a pine tree is not a constituent of *hard character*. For we have no deep awareness of the property of being a pine tree; seeing a pine tree reveals nothing of *what it is* to be a pine tree. But if categorization can occur within experience proper, then presumably the arborist does *experientially categorize* the pine tree as a pine tree. If so, then the property of being a pine tree will be a constituent of the *conveyed character* of the arborist's experience.²⁰ Even if not, it is possible that we experientially and non-conceptually represent pine-tree *gestalts* – not as the *gestalts* associated with seeing *pine trees*, but just as *gestalts of that kind*. In this case such *gestalt* properties, though not the property of being a pine tree, would be constituents of conveyed character.

¹⁹ The account can be accepted even by those who think that categorization always occurs post-experientially rather than within experience proper. They will just think that condition (iii) is idle.

²⁰ On this point I agree with Siegel (2006). She argues that natural-kind properties can figure in the “phenomenal character” of perception, and, as I explained in chapter 2, what Siegel has in mind is conveyed character.

Finally, the property of being a pine tree is a constituent of *strong singular character*. For seeing a pine tree positions you not only to make singular reference to the property of being a pine tree, but also to know what you are thereby referring to. To build on our discussion in chapter 4, the idea is not that your experience directly reveals any part of the essence of the property of being a pine tree. It is rather that your experience reveals to you a substantial part of the essence of this particular pine tree's coloration and shape, and you use those properties to help lock onto the natural kind property. This is analogous to the way in which ordinary objects – particular pine trees, say – can be constituents of strong singular character. Seeing a pine tree does not reveal to you any part of the essence of that particular pine tree, but it reveals to you a substantial portion of the essences of various properties that the pine tree happens to have.

In this way, the pluralist provides an ecumenical resolution of the debate over the “phenomenal character” associated with seeing a pine tree. It is now time to consider how apparent presentational character relates to some varieties of phenomenal character.

5. Apparent presentational character and “phenomenal character”

Is apparent presentational character a form of hard character? Is it a form of conveyed character?²¹

I believe that it is not a form of hard character.²² In this chapter I have defended a fully reductive analysis of apparent presentational character. When I apply this analysis to my apparently presentational experiences, I cannot find any lingering hard problem about why they appear to *present* their targets. For I find the analysis itself fully satisfactory, and I can understand

²¹ I take it to be obvious that it is not a form of strong singular character.

²² *Contra* Fish (2008).

exactly how it is possible for a purely physical being to satisfy the conditions of the analysis. To be sure, there are hard problems surrounding why my apparently presentational experiences make me deeply aware of the sensory qualities that they do. There might also be hard problems surrounding intentionality, and thus surrounding the existence of concepts. But neither of these hard problems has anything to do with apparent presentational character *per se*. Modulo these hard problems, I think I understand exactly how it is possible for a purely physical being to enjoy apparent presentational character.

As for conveyed character, apparent presentational character may or may not be a form of it. I have said that for an experience to have apparent presentational character is for its subject to categorize it as presentational. The issue, then, is whether this categorization occurs *within experience proper*. If so, then apparent presentational character is a form of conveyed character. Otherwise it is not; it is a post-experiential matter separate from what the experience itself conveys.

My own conjecture is that when I see a scarlet bell pepper, it is part of the conveyed character of my experience *that the bell pepper is mind-independent* (or *real*), but it is not part of the conveyed character of my experience *that the experience is presentational*. For while our experiences can target bell peppers, they cannot target themselves, and I conjecture that we only experientially categorize the *targets* of our experiences. On this view, only part of the apparent presentational character of my experience is a constituent of conveyed character. But this is a matter for further investigation.

6. Conclusion

One of the most significant challenges for representationalism is to explain why perceptual experiences have apparent presentational character. For the representationalist understands perceptual experiences to be sensory representations. Thus she must explain why thoughts never seem to present anything despite being *representations*, and why sensory imaginings and episodic memories do not ordinarily seem to present anything despite being *sensory* representations.

The pluralist meets this challenge: she says that what it is to have apparent presentational character is to be categorized in a certain way on the basis of an overall gestalt. Thoughts, sensory imaginings, and episodic memories do not typically have a gestalt of the appropriate kind. Thus there is no apparent presentational character in these cases. With this account in her back pocket, the pluralist goes on to argue that apparent presentational character is not a form of hard character.

The pluralist also offers a simple and plausible account of conveyed character: she says that to have conveyed character is just to be access-conscious. Thus she can provide an ecumenical resolution to debates over whether natural-kind properties are constituents of the “phenomenal character” of certain perceptions. She can also clarify, without settling the matter, what it would take for apparent presentational character to be a form of conveyed character.

There remains an important lacuna in the pluralist’s theory, however: she has given an account of perception, but not of hallucination or sensation. The next chapter fills this gap.

Appendix 5A. An issue about the folk theory of presentation

I have suggested that we notice that our typical perceptions and sensations are involuntary – to a first approximation, the idea is that their specific characters are not sensitive to our wills. From this, we infer that the characters of such experiences are determined by the characters of the

targets that we are directly aware of, *targets that exist concurrently with our experiences*. You might wonder why we would draw the italicized conclusion. Why not think that these targets existed five seconds ago, or for that matter five millennia ago?

My answer is that the italicized conclusion is by far the simplest explanation of the phenomena. By analogy, consider the hypothesis that the universe sprang into existence five seconds or five millennia ago. This hypothesis is perfectly compatible with what we know about how things are currently arranged: our world *could* have just sprung into existence with (apparent) fossils distributed as they are, with apparent tectonic shifts having occurred, and so on. But this explanation is so arbitrary that it is hard to take it seriously. The same is true for our perceptions and sensations. We *could* explain why these experiences change over time by saying that we are directly aware of targets that existed exactly five millennia ago and were *then* changing over time. But this hypothesis is so arbitrary that we do not take it seriously. By saying that the targets exist concurrently with the experience, we remove this arbitrariness.

This turns out to provide another line of support for the categorization account: it can explain why we have certain false beliefs about the presentation relation. For instance, we falsely believe that the character of our veridical perceptions is determined by the character of the target *at the exact time of the perception*. This is not true. There is some delay induced by perceptual processing, so the character of our veridical perceptions is really determined by the character of the target *slightly before the perception*.

The categorization account explains why we would form this false belief. It is because we do not have any special first-personal access to the nature of presentation; we merely theorize about it on the basis of what our experiences tell us about their (actual or apparent) targets, and there is nothing in our experiences to tip us off to the existence of a perceptual delay. Thus we come to think that there is no delay.

Appendix 5B. Zombies and blindseers

There are some further data that the categorization account can explain.

Datum. Zombies perceive (albeit without deep awareness), but they do not enjoy first-personal appearances of presentation.

The pluralist explains this by appealing to one of the platitudes built into our concept of presentation: that presentation entails involuntary deep awareness. Because a zombie has no deep awareness, it cannot have our concept of deep awareness; thus it cannot have our concept of presentation; thus it does not categorize its experiences as presentational. To make the point concrete, consider the zombie that is physically just like me when I see a scarlet bell pepper. There is a certain physical process that *in me* partially constitutes my categorizing an experience as involving deep awareness. A physically identical process occurs in the zombie, but *in him* it does not constitute *his* categorizing an experience as involving deep awareness.

Datum. Blindseers can see (albeit without deep awareness), but they do not enjoy first-personal appearances of presentation.

The pluralist's explanation of the previous datum does not apply here: a blindseer might enjoy deep awareness when she hears, tastes, and smells, so she *will* possess our concept of deep awareness. However, she will not apply this concept when she categorizes her blindsighted perceptions! She does not enjoy any deep awareness when she blindsees: that is precisely what makes her blindsight blind. Thus she will correctly recognize that she is not first-personally presented with what she is blindseeing.

Appendix 5C. Fantastical experiences

As another line of support for the categorization account, I wish to mention a pair of fantastical experiences that first-personally seem to present mind-independent targets.

Suppose that Harry Potter is using the pensieve, a magical device which lets him experience any memories that have been stored there. When the pensieve is activated, it is as though Harry is actually reliving the remembered event: he seems to have a ghostly body that he can use to explore the remembered area, and it is as though he is really seeing, hearing, and smelling the relevant past events. Or imagine that Frodo Baggins is gazing at the Mirror of Galadriel. This magical artifact lets him experience events from the past, present, and future as if he were really there, but he does not know which of these time periods the event is from.

It is obvious that Harry's pensieve experiences and Frodo's mirror experiences would first-personally seem to present mind-independent targets. The categorization account predicts this. For these experiences have gestalts similar to those found in ordinary perceptions: these experiences are for example vivid, stable, and involuntary character. That is one more mark in favor of the categorization account.

What about *real* presentational character – do these fantastical experiences have that? They do not: for an experience to have real presentational character, its targets must exist at the same time as the experience itself, apart from the delay induced by perceptual processing. The experiences of Harry and Frodo are not like that. Still, the pluralist can say that Harry's and Frodo's experiences have a related but weaker joint-carving property, since they provide deep awareness of instances of sensory qualities from the past or the future.

Appendix 5D. Objections involving appearances of mind-independence

Some have worried that a representationalist cannot possibly explain why perceived objects typically first-personally seem to be mind-independent. This core concern has been developed in several different ways. Let us consider whether these might threaten pluralism.

One objection is that on the representationalist account, perception provides the subject with nothing more than a perceptual representation, i.e., a mind-dependent image. But the subject cannot extract a conception of mind-independence from something that is mind-dependent. Thus, representationalists cannot explain why perceived objects typically first-personally seem to be mind-independent.²³

This objection fails to undermine even a standard representationalist account. We can appreciate the point by identifying the precise sense in which, according to the standard representationalist, perception *provides* the subject with nothing more than a perceptual representation. The claim is just that to perceive is, in part, to perceptually represent. This is *not* the claim that the subject is *perceptually aware* of nothing more than a perceptual representation. To begin with, on standard representationalist accounts, the subject need not be perceptually aware *of* perceptual representations at all.²⁴ More importantly, the standard representationalist holds that the subject is directly perceptually aware of – that is, she directly perceptually represents – *particular mind-independent objects and their property-instances*. The pluralist agrees. So

²³ As Campbell puts it, “On the [representationalist theory], all that experience of the object provides you with is a conscious image of the object – the image which bears the representational content. The existence of that conscious image is in principle independent of the existence of the external object. The existence of the image, though, is dependent on the existence of the subject who has the conscious image. So if your conception of the object was provided by your experience of the object, you would presumably end by concluding that the object would not have existed had you not existed, and that the object exists only when you are experiencing it. We cannot extract the conception of a mind-independent world from a mind-dependent image” (2002, p. 121).

²⁴ Although the *higher-order representationalist theory* holds that the subject perceptually represents *both* mind-independent entities *and* her own perceptual representations. See [cite].

the problem of deriving a conception of mind-independent entities from awareness of mind-dependent entities does not even arise.

Now consider a pair of related arguments. This first of these arguments runs as follows (*MI* stands for *mind-independence*):

- MI1. If perceiving objects is merely a matter of representing them, then perception is no more fundamental than other forms of thought for grasping what an object is.
- MI2. Perception is more fundamental than other forms of thought for grasping what an object is.
- MI3. Perceiving objects is not merely a matter of representing them.²⁵

The support for MI1 is that there are many forms of representation, from speech to facial expressions to signs, and the pure representationalist treats perception as merely one more form of representation.²⁶ MI2, meanwhile, is intended to be obviously true. It is one thing to form a demonstrative concept of a particular rabbit just by seeing its tracks in the garden. It is quite another to form such a concept on the basis of actually seeing the rabbit. Only the latter positions you to appreciate, in an especially direct way, what a rabbit is.

²⁵ As Campbell puts it, “Experience is what explains our grasp of the concepts of objects. But if you think of experience as intentional, as merely one among many ways of grasping thoughts, you cannot allow it this explanatory role At this point we do not have any way of explaining why there should be anything fundamental to our grasp of concepts about experience of objects.... And at this point the question whether something essentially mind-dependent could provide for the conception of a mind-independent world really does seem forceful” (2002, p. 122).

²⁶ As Campbell puts it, “To see an object is, on this conception, to grasp a demonstrative proposition. There are many ways in which you can grasp a proposition: you can grasp it as the content of speech or as the meaning of a wink or a sigh. One way in which you can grasp a proposition is as the content of vision” (2002, p. 121).

The pluralist has nothing to fear from this argument, for she accepts its conclusion. She says that perceiving an object requires not only representing it, but also having deep awareness that reveals part of the essence of certain qualities of the object. The latter is not found in ordinary thought, and it is what positions us to know *what the object is*, in a certain special way – that was the lesson of my discussion of strong singular character in chapter 4.

Here is a similar argument:

MI1*. If the first-personal perceptual appearance of objects as mind-independent is merely a matter of perceptually representing (or categorizing) those objects as mind-independent, then perception is no more fundamental than other forms of thought for appreciating the mind-independence of an object.

MI2*. Perception is more fundamental than other forms of thought for appreciating the mind-independence of an object.

MI3*. The first-personal perceptual appearance of objects as mind-independent is not merely a matter of perceptually representing (or categorizing) those objects as mind-independent.²⁷

²⁷ This is an alternative way of interpreting Campbell's remarks in the footnotes above. This interpretation is driven by the fact that, at times, Campbell seems to emphasize not just our grasp of objects themselves, but of their mind-independence. For example, at one point Campbell says, "The objection to the common factor view is that on it, experience of objects could not be what explains our having the conception of objects as mind-independent" (2002, p. 121). (Here Campbell is stating an objection that he takes from McDowell, but the argument from the footnotes above is intended to develop McDowell's objection.)

The premises can be supported much as before. Regarding MI1*, the idea is again that perceptual representation and categorization are each just further forms of representation, on a par with thought, speech, and signs. MI2*, meanwhile is meant to be obviously true.

My response to this argument depends on how the phrase *appreciating the mind-independence of an object* is to be understood.

Perhaps the idea is just that seeing a tomato positions the subject to know *which* object she is taking to be mind-independent. On this interpretation, what is special about perception is the way that it relates the subject to the object, not to the property of mind-independence. In that case, I would reject premise MI1*. I have already explained how the pluralist can explain this special feature of perception: this is a matter of the subject's having partly essence-revealing awareness of the object's properties.

But there is a bolder interpretation, on which seeing a tomato positions the subject to appreciate the mind-independence of objects in a much stronger sense. The idea is that seeing a tomato *presents* the subject not only with the tomato, but also with its mind-independence. If this is the idea, then I reject MI2*. Seeing a tomato presents the subject with the tomato and its instances of red*, but it does not even seem to present her with the mind-independence of the tomato. Here is a way of driving the point home. Recall, the example of the subject who begins to mistake her tomato-perceptions for tomato-sensations, and compare this subject to an ordinary subject who sees a tomato and correctly takes it to be mind-independent. Does the experience of the latter subject present her with an additional element, *mind-independence*? Surely not.

I conclude that these objections are unsuccessful.

Appendix 5E. Can categorization occur in experience proper?

I think that categorization sometimes occurs within our experiences themselves. To make this case, I will first argue that it is at least metaphysically possible for categorization to occur within experience proper. I will then sketch some empirical evidence that this possibility is realized in us.

On the metaphysical possibility of categorization. There is no obvious contradiction in the idea that categorization can occur within experience proper. Thus, I take it that our default assumption should be that this is a genuine metaphysical possibility, barring some good argument to the contrary. My approach, then will be to rebut some initially plausible arguments against this possibility. I see three constituencies – conservatives about hard character, non-conceptualists, and naïve realists – who might offer such arguments.

Start with conservatism about hard character. To understand the defining commitment of this view, consider the recent controversy over what happens when (and if) we perceive high-level features – for example, when we see a tree *as a pine tree* or hear a sentence *as being in Russian*. The controversy is over whether there is any *proprietary hard character* associated with perceiving high-level features. *Liberals about hard character* say that there is. For example, a liberal might say that there is some hard character associated with an arborist's seeing a pine tree that is something over and above the hard character associated with her seeing the pine tree's various shapes, colors, textures, and so on.²⁸

Conservatives about hard character dissent. They think that the hard character of perception is exhausted by the hard character associated with the low-level features (and perhaps objects) that we perceive; if there is such a thing as perceiving high-level features, then this results in changes in hard character only insofar as it causes changes in which low-level features

²⁸ See for example Bayne (2009); Fish (2013); McClelland (2016).

(and perhaps objects) we perceive.²⁹ A conservative about hard character might think that this commits her to holding that it is metaphysically impossible for categorization to occur within perception proper.

This is not so. Conservatism is a view about the *hard character* of perception.³⁰ It is perfectly compatible with the claim that categorizations can occur within perception proper, *as long as categorizations are not taken to generate any hard problems of consciousness*. This point is well-appreciated by hard-character conservatives themselves:

The initial nonconceptual outputs of early vision are monitored by a whole host of conceptual systems the relevant concept is attached to the nonconceptual representation in question and globally broadcast along with it, for other concept-wielding consumer systems to take note of and draw inferences from.... [However, from] the fact that a given concept is a constitutive *component* of a phenomenally conscious perceptual state it doesn't follow that the concept makes a constitutive *contribution* to the phenomenal qualities of that state. (Carruthers and Veillet 2011, p. 42)

But there is a second constituency, *non-conceptualists* about experience, who might think that they are committed to denying the metaphysical possibility of properly experiential categorization. Non-conceptualists think that experiences essentially have *non-conceptual content*. While there are importantly different ways of spelling out precisely what this means, the basic idea is that a subject can have an experiential state with a particular content $\langle p \rangle$ whether or not that subject has the concepts required to entertain $\langle p \rangle$.³¹

²⁹ See for example Byrne (2009); Pautz (2010); Carruthers and Veillet (2011).

³⁰ For example, hard-character conservatives Carruthers and Veillet assert that “[a] property is phenomenal ... only if it gives rise to an explanatory gap” (2011, p. 45).

³¹ Evans (1982) introduces the notion of non-conceptual content. See Heck (2000) for a discussion of how precisely this notion might be understood.

However, non-conceptualism is just the view that experiences essentially *have* non-conceptual content; perhaps some will also build it into the view that experiences do not essentially have conceptual content. All of this is compatible with the claim that some experiences *accidentally* have conceptual content that is layered on top of its non-conceptual content.

I would make a similar case to naïve realists. (This book has given many arguments against naïve realism, but set those aside for the time being.) A central commitment of naïve realism is that any perception essentially involves *non-representational* awareness. But categorization is evidently *representational*. So, naïve realists might reason, they should say that it is metaphysically impossible for categorization to occur within perception proper.

This reasoning is fallacious. Yes, naïve realism says that any perception *essentially* involves non-representational awareness, and some would add that no perception essentially involves representation. All of that is compatible with the view that some perceptions *additionally and accidentally* involve representation. This point has been recognized by naïve realists for decades:

[Naïve realism] simply consists in the insistence that perception essentially involves a mode of cognition of objects that is nonconceptual in character. Moreover it is that mode of cognition that gives perception its distinctive character vis-a-vis other modes of cognition—abstract thought, fantasy, memory, and so on. But this insistence does *not* commit [the naïve realist] to the denial of [the thesis that] ... perception is typically conceptually structured.... Indeed, I accept that ... [w]hen I look out my study window ... I see various parts of the scene *as* houses, trees, etc., employing the appropriate concepts in doing so. (Alston 1999, p. 184)

That concludes my argument that it is metaphysically possible for categorization to occur within experience proper. Briefly put, the argument was that this scenario seems to be perfectly

coherent, and there is no good reason – not even for hard-character conservatives, non-conceptualists, or naïve realists – to deny that this is metaphysically possible.

Still, is properly experiential categorization *actual*?

On the actuality of categorization. There are many empirical results that bear on this question.³²

In one telling experiment, subjects were presented with a word, such as “flowers,” and were then shown a series of images. Each image was presented for *just 13 ms*. For comparison, a single blink of the eye takes *at least* 100 ms, so these images were presented for about 1/8 of the time that it takes to rapidly blink your eyes. Moreover, these images were forward- and backward-masked to disrupt any further visual processing. The idea was to ensure that subjects’ visual systems really had only 13 ms to process the images. For each image presented in this way, subjects had to say whether or not it contained flowers. If the image did contain flowers *and* if subjects correctly noted this fact, then they were presented with two more images, both of which contained flowers, and they had to identify which of these images they had already seen. Astonishingly, despite these remarkably brief presentation times, subjects were able to perform this task at well above chance.³³

These subjects were presumably performing genuine *categorization* – that is, they were genuinely applying *concepts*. For they had to apply linguistically-presented information (the word “flowers”) to what they perceived and use that to guide their actions (pressing the “yes” or “no” buttons). The use of a single representation across such varied mental systems is a hallmark of

³² This evidence has been aptly summarized by Mandelbaum (2018). I will follow his presentation closely.

³³ See Potter et al. (2014).

categorization.³⁴ Moreover, it seems that this categorization was occurring *experientially* rather than cognitively. For *even within the visual system* it takes about 50 ms for feedback processing to occur, and feedback processing involving cognition proper would take much longer than that. Given that the presentation times in the current experiment were just 13 ms, there was simply not enough time for this categorization to have been cognitive.

This interpretation is reinforced when we examine overall response times on tasks that can be performed very quickly. For example, in another study subjects were presented with two images of a natural scene for just 20 ms per image. One image contained an animal in a landscape, while the other contained only a landscape. The subject's task was to saccade to the image containing the animal. Subjects were able to perform this task – which required perceiving, categorizing, and preparing and performing the saccade – in just 120 ms. Again, this is just too little time for the categorization of animals to have occurred cognitively.³⁵

This is just a taste of the relevant evidence. There is much more like it.³⁶ My conclusion is that categorization within experience proper is not just metaphysically possible. It is something that we routinely do.

³⁴ See Mandelbaum (2018, p. 268).

³⁵ Ibid, p. 275.

³⁶ Ibid.