

(Written in 2005 for a festschrift in honor of Jaegwon Kim)

TROUBLES FOR RADICAL TRANSPARENCY

With phenomenal characters, we seem finally to have come face to face with paradigmatic instances of *intrinsic* properties. The hurtfulness of pain, the acrid smell of sulphur, the taste and flavor of pineapple—these things are intrinsic qualities if anything is.¹

Jaegwon Kim

It is an honor to take part in this festschrift for Jaegwon Kim, from whose publications, presentations, and conversation I have learned so much during our time together as colleagues. This essay is dedicated to Jaegwon with thanks and appreciation.

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In a famous passage in “The Refutation of Idealism,” G.E. Moore said that consciousness is transparent or diaphanous.² His language is echoed by many contemporary writers, who have discussed the pros and cons of a thesis often called “the transparency of experience” and sometimes traced back to Moore. Yet what Moore himself meant by ‘transparency’ is different from, and in one important way more radical than, what contemporary writers usually mean by the term. In this essay, I do three things. First, I distinguish the Moorean from the contemporary doctrines that typically go under the label of ‘transparency’. Second, I discuss two contemporary philosophers—Campbell and Dretske—who *may* espouse a view like Moore’s, if only implicitly. Third, I identify two implications of the genuinely Moorean view that I regard as problematic. These

¹ Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), p. 176.

² G.E. Moore, “The Refutation of Idealism,” in *Philosophical Studies* (London: Kegan Paul, 1922), pp. 1-30 (originally in *Mind*, 1903).

implications may not give rise to decisive objections, but I believe we should give them due regard before accepting a thesis of radical transparency.

1. Contemporary transparency views

What is commonly meant in recent literature by the transparency of experience is that we seldom (if ever) notice the intrinsic features of our sensory experiences.³ We look past or through those experiences to the external things that are their objects. Here is a representative quotation, from Christopher Hill:

Belief-generating sensations are *diaphanous*—they mediate our awareness of extramental objects and extramental states of affairs, but normally they are not objects of awareness in their own right.⁴

Here is another, from Gilbert Harman:

When Eloise sees a tree before her, the colors she experiences are all experienced as features of the tree and its surroundings. None of them are experienced as intrinsic features of her experience. Nor does she experience any features of anything as intrinsic features of her experiences. And that is true of you too. . . . When you see a tree, you do not experience any features as intrinsic features of your experience. Look at a tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree.⁵

Others could be cited to similar effect.⁶

³ There are other meanings of ‘transparency’ with which I shall not be concerned here. Mental states are sometimes said to be transparent in either or both of these senses: you cannot be in them without believing that you are (self-intimacy), and, conversely, you cannot believe that you are in a given mental state unless you actually are in that state (infallibility). See Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 17-18.

⁴ Christopher S. Hill, *Sensations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 187.

⁵ Gilbert Harman, “The Intrinsic Quality of Experience,” in *Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by James Tomberlin, Vol. 4 (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1990), 52-79; reprinted in *The Nature of Consciousness*, edited by Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Guven Guzeldere (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 663-75. The quotation is from p. 667 of the latter.

⁶ For example, Michael Tye glosses ‘your experience is transparent to you’ as ‘you are not directly aware of any qualities of your experience.’ See his *Consciousness, Color, and Content* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000), p. 47.

Hill and Harman do not deny that experiences *have* intrinsic features. Their point is simply that we are not *aware* of any intrinsic features of experience. This comes out in Harman's concessions about what he calls "mental paint:"

But in the case of her visual experience of a tree, I want to say that she is not aware of, as it were, the mental paint by virtue of which her experience is an experience of seeing a tree. She is aware only of the intentional or relational features of her experience, not of its intrinsic nonintentional features.⁷

These lines come immediately after a paragraph in which Harman says that Eloise is "not aware of those intrinsic features of her experience by virtue of which it has that content." So it is clear that by 'mental paint', Harman means the intrinsic features of experiences in virtue of which they represent what they do. I think it is also clear that he does not (at least in this place) deny the existence of such paint. He merely denies that subjects are aware of it.

For Harman, then, the only *intrinsic* features we are aware of when we try to introspect our experiences are features of the presented object, and the only features of our experience that we *are* aware of are its relational or intentional features—its presenting an object of this or that kind.

The motives for transparency views such as the foregoing are multifarious. Sometimes the motive is to make room for direct realist theories of perception—theories according to which we are aware of external things and not merely goings-on in our own minds. Sometimes the motive is to make the world safe for materialism—if we are not aware of intrinsic features of our experiences, then we cannot claim that experiences have features that no brain state could have.⁸ And sometimes the motive is to pave the way for

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⁸ Such was the motive for Smart's thesis of "topic-neutrality," a version of transparency, in the early days of identity-theory materialism. Smart held that we can conceptualize our experiences only by descriptions along the lines of "it's like what goes on in me when I see ripe tomatoes." See J.J.C. Smart, "Sensations

a representationalist or intentionalist view of experience—a view according to which the character of experience is exhausted by its representational or propositional content.⁹

Intentionalism itself may be desired either for its own sake or as a means to the ends of direct realism or materialism. I shall not be concerned with these larger issues here, but shall concentrate on transparency in its own right.

Transparency views come in two strengths, depending on whether it is held to be impossible or simply rare and difficult to attend to our experiences and be aware of the intrinsic features of them. Amy Kind has usefully distinguished transparency views along these lines as follows:¹⁰

Strong transparency: It is *impossible* to attend directly to our experience; i.e., we cannot attend to our experience except by attending to the objects represented by that experience.

Weak transparency: It is *difficult* (but not impossible) to attend directly to our experience, i.e., we can most easily attend to our experience by attending to the objects represented by that experience.

Perhaps attending directly to our experience is not equivalent to being aware of intrinsic features of our experience. In that case, we may adapt Kind's distinction to present purposes as follows:

Strong transparency: It is *impossible* to be aware of the intrinsic features of our experience. We can only be aware of the intrinsic features of the objects represented by our experiences.

Weak transparency: It is *difficult* to be aware of the intrinsic features of our experiences. We are almost always instead aware of the intrinsic features of the objects of our experiences.

and Brain Processes," *The Philosophical Review*, 68 (1959), 141-156.

⁹ According to Ned Block, the split over whether conscious experiences have qualitative properties going beyond their intentional features is "the greatest chasm in the philosophy of mind." See Ned Block, "Mental Paint and Mental Latex," in *Philosophical Issues*, 7 (1995), 19-49.

¹⁰ Amy Kind, "What's so Transparent about Transparency?" *Philosophical Studies*, 115 (2003), 225-44.

Kind argues, incidentally, that transparency is plausible only in its weak form, but that some of its intended philosophical purposes (in particular, its use as a premise in arguments for a strong intentionalism) require the strong form.

Kind notes that Thomas Reid was an early proponent of weak transparency.

He compares sensations to “the words of a language, wherein we do not attend to the sound, but to the sense.”¹¹ And he repeatedly has occasion to say things like this:

We are so accustomed to use the sensation [of hardness] as a sign, and to pass immediately to the hardness signified, that, as far as appears, it was never made an object of thought, either by the vulgar or by philosophers There is no sensation more distinct, or more frequent; yet it is never attended to, but passes through the mind instantaneously, and serves only to introduce that quality in bodies, which, by a law of our constitution, it suggests.¹²

Reid would have been a staunch opponent of strong transparency, however. The analogy of sensations with the words of a language suggests as much, for there is nothing to prevent our becoming aware of the intrinsic qualities of the sounds that express various senses. Moreover, Reid held that by careful attention, we can become aware of the intrinsic nature of the sensations that causally mediate our awareness of primary qualities (such as figure, extension, and hardness); one of his key arguments against Hume depends crucially on our having such an ability.¹³ Finally, he held that in the case of the sensations produced in us by secondary qualities (such as color, heat, and fragrance), not only are we aware of the sensations, but we can conceive of the qualities *only* as the causes of the sensations.¹⁴

¹¹ Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, edited by Derek R. Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 43. This work was first published in 1764.

¹² Reid, *Inquiry*, p. 56.

¹³ I refer to the *experimentum crucis* of Inquiry 5.5 and 5.6, in which Reid combats concept empiricism by arguing that our conceptions of primary qualities do not have their origin in sensation.

¹⁴ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, edited by Derek R. Brookes (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), pp 200-211 (Essay II, Chapter 17). This work was first published in 1785. In *The Case for Idealism* (London: Routledge, 1982), John Foster takes Reid’s thesis to an extreme, in effect maintaining that what Reid said about secondary qualities is true of everything in the

2. Moore's radical transparency

In his 1903 article, Moore's goal was to refute the idealist tenet that *esse is percipi*—the doctrine that any sensible thing (a patch of blue, for instance) necessarily depends for its existence on someone's awareness of it. To this end, he argued that we should distinguish within sensation two elements, the object and the act. Blue is one thing, the consciousness of it another, and once we distinguish them, there is no reason to think that the former (the object) depends for its existence on the latter (the act).

To get us to accept the distinction, Moore observes that the sensation of blue differs from, yet has an element in common with, the sensation of green. That in respect of which they differ he terms the *object*; that which is common to them he calls *consciousness*.¹⁵

Why is the distinction so seldom noticed, Moore asks? It is in response to this question that he makes his famous remarks about transparency and diaphanousness:

The term "blue" is easy enough to distinguish, but the other element which I have called "consciousness"—that which sensation of blue has in common with sensation of green—is extremely difficult to fix. . . . [T]hat which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us: it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent—we look through it and see nothing but the blue.¹⁶

[T]he moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see *what*, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous.¹⁷

physical world. Foster says that we have "transparent" conceptions of experiences, meaning that we know what they are like intrinsically, but only "opaque" conceptions of physical things, meaning that we know them only as things that bear some relation to our experiences (p. 63). Note that Foster uses the language of transparency to express the exact opposite of the thesis espoused by Harman and company!

¹⁵ Moore, p. 17.

¹⁶ Moore, p. 20.

¹⁷ Moore, p. 25.

Here we do indeed find one of the themes contemporary writers have in mind when they speak of transparency: experience is elusive, and when we try to attend to it, all we find are features of its objects. But that is not all there is to Moore's view. His total view sets him very much apart from contemporary transparency theorists, strong or weak.

One difference, as others have remarked, is that Moore, unlike many contemporary transparency theorists, is not an intentionalist. He believes that the nature of an experience is exhausted by what it is *of*, but unlike contemporary intentionalists, he believes in an objectual rather than a propositional form of intentionality. He speaks of experiences of a bit of blue, not of experiences that represent something or other as being blue. Moorean experiences are acts of acquaintance, not propositional attitudes.

Another difference, also remarked by others, is that Harman and others enlist transparency as an argument against sense data, whereas Moore was a leading advocate of sense data. I shall say more about this difference below.

Neither of these differences is the difference I wish to focus on, however. I believe there is a third difference that makes Moore's view more radical than that of many who nowadays appropriate his language. As noted above, Hill, Harman, and company say that subjects are not typically (if ever) aware of the intrinsic features of their experiences, but they do not deny that experiences have intrinsic features—what Harman calls mental paint. *Moore denies that experiences have intrinsic features.* Instead, they owe everything they are to their relation to their objects. There is no mental paint, but only a clear pane of glass through which we apprehend objects. The glass differs from one episode of consciousness to the next only in what lies on the other side. On this point, Moore's views are comparable to those of Sartre, who held that consciousness itself is

virtually nothing, differentiated from one instance to another only by its objects.¹⁸

Moore's transparency really is a matter of our looking *through* our experiences, whereas Reid's is a matter of looking *past* them. This is the side of Moore's views that is often overlooked.

The distinction I am drawing between Moore's transparency doctrine and that of our contemporaries is not the same as Kind's distinction between strong and weak transparency. Moore's transparency is stronger than strong--more radical, I believe, than anything envisioned by Harman or Hill. The reason is simply that even strong transparency is compatible with the existence of mental paint, whereas Moore's doctrine rules it out. Moore's radical view entails strong transparency and could perhaps be cited as the explanation of it: we are not aware of any intrinsic features of experience because there aren't any. But strong transparency does not entail Moore's radical transparency.

Evidence for construing Moore in the radical way is provided by his insisting that consciousness, as the element that makes experiences mental, is the element common and peculiar to all experiences, an ingredient in them wherever they occur.¹⁹ If we say (as I believe Moore intends) that the common element is *specifically* the same in all its occurrences, not merely the same in some generic way, it appears to follow that consciousness itself must be devoid of any qualitative character.

In later work, Moore reaffirms his view that the relation of consciousness is the same wherever it occurs, even in different sensory modalities:

I do now see certain blackish marks on a whitish ground, and I hear certain sounds which I attribute to the ticking of my clock. . . .It seems to me quite evident that the

¹⁸ See Panayot Butchvarov, *Skepticism about the External World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 24-25, for the comparison of Moore to Sartre.

¹⁹ Moore, p. 29.

relation to the marks which I express by saying that I *see* them is not different from the relation to the sounds which I express by saying that I *hear* them²⁰

Evidence of another sort for construing Moore in the radical way is provided by his taking pains to deny that the relation of blue to the awareness of it is simply that of a quality to its bearer. In that case, he says, an awareness of blue would itself be blue. He insists that the relation is something else, or at least something more: it is that of an object to the cognition of it; the sensation is *of* blue. In saying that the awareness is *of* blue rather than being blue, he is draining qualitative character away from the awareness and leaving the awareness just with intentional features.²¹

Kind suggests that Moore held only a doctrine of weak transparency. She bases this suggestion partly on the fact that in his 1925 “A Defense of Common Sense,” Moore gives directions for noticing sense data, implying that it is at most difficult, not impossible, to be aware of them.²² But Moore would have regarded sense data as *objects* of consciousness, and it is consciousness, not sense data, that he claimed to be diaphanous in 1903. I therefore find nothing in Kind’s observations to stand in the way of attributing to Moore both strong and radical transparency.

3. Campbell’s relational view of experience

²⁰ Moore, 1913 [?], p. 173, quoted in Tye, p. 47.

²¹ My exegetical argument would be on stronger ground had Moore *repudiated* the suggestion that the awareness is blue. What he actually says is that even if the awareness is somehow qualified by blue, it is also *of* blue. I am surprised to find him allowing the possibility that an act of awareness might be both of blue and qualified by blue. (Incidentally, those who do hold that awarenesses are qualified by phenomenal properties would not have to say that they are blue—they could take place bluey, as in adverbial theories, or they could possess one of the properties expressed by Peacocke’s primed predicates. See Christopher Peacocke, *Sense and Content* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), chap. 1.)

²² G.E. Moore, “A Defense of Common Sense,” in *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier Books, 1959), pp. 32-59.

I wish now to discuss a contemporary view that does strike me as involving, at least implicitly, the Moorean variety of diaphanousness. I have in mind the view John Campbell has advanced first under the banner “radical externalism” and later under the banner “the relational view of experience.”

Campbell’s views were first set forth in an article on Molyneux’s question.²³ The question (as propounded by Molyneux to Locke in the 1690s) is this:

Suppose a Man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a Cube, and a Sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and t’other, which is the Cube, which the Sphere. Suppose then the Cube and Sphere placed on a Table, and the Blind Man to be made to see. Quaere, Whether by his sight, before he touch’d them, he could now distinguish, and tell which is the Globe, which the Cube?²⁴

Campbell makes a simple and bold case that the answer to Molyneux’s question is *yes* by appealing to the view he calls radical externalism. He notes that Molyneux’s question is bound up with the question “whether there is a difference between the phenomenal characters of shape experience in sight and in touch.”²⁵ His thought is presumably that if there is no difference between the phenomenal characters of touching a globe and seeing a globe, then the newly sighted man in Molyneux’s thought experiment ought to be able to tell, solely on the basis of his visual experiences of the globe and the cube, that *this* is the object he formerly knew by touch as a cube and *that* is the object he formerly knew as

²³ John Campbell, "Molyneux's Question," in *Philosophical Issues*, Vol. 7, edited by Enrique Villanueva (Atascadero CA: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1996), , pp. 301-18.

²⁴ These are Molyneux’s words as quoted by Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.9.8.

²⁵ Campbell, “Molyneux’s Question,” p. 301.

a globe.²⁶ He then argues that according to radical externalism, the phenomenal characters of seeing touching a globe and seeing a globe are indeed the same.

What, then, is radical externalism? It is the view that experiences are to be sorted into phenomenal types depending on what objects or properties in the environment they are experiences *of*. It may be boiled down to the following principle of type-individuation: if e1 and e2 are shape-experiences, then e1 is of the same type or phenomenal character as e2 iff the object of e1 (i.e., the shape apprehended by e1) has the same geometrical properties as the object of e2.²⁷

Campbell elicits the consequences of radical externalism for Molyneux's question as follows:

For the radical externalist . . . there is no difference in the phenomenal character of shape experience in sight and in touch. The sameness of property perceived in sight and touch is transparent to the subject, and cross-modal transfer is a rational phenomenon.²⁸

On the radically externalist view of primitive consciousness of shape, the phenomenal experience of shape is the same in sight and in touch. It will be in consequence of this amodal character of shape perception that this cross-modal transfer occurs, and cross-modal transfer will be a rational phenomenon.²⁹

I assume that the word 'transparent' as it occurs in the first of these passages is simply a synonym of 'obvious'; it is not necessarily meant to be an echo of Moore.

On the strength of these passages, I attribute to Campbell the following argument:

²⁶ Following Diderot, Gareth Evans has suggested recasting Molyneux's question in terms of circle versus square rather than globe versus cube so as to abstract from questions about whether three-dimensional shapes are originally given to vision. The differences between the two and three-dimensional versions of the question do not matter for present purposes. See Gareth Evans, "Molyneux's Question," in *Collected Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 364-99.

²⁷ I think we are to take it that the object of a shape-experience is the apprehended shape rather than the object possessing the shape. Otherwise, Campbell's principle of type-individuation would imply that seeing a spear point first has the same phenomenal character as seeing a spear presented sideways.

²⁸ Campbell, "Molyneux's Question," p. 304.

²⁹ Campbell, "Molyneux's Question," p. 317.

1. If radical externalism is correct, seeing a cube and touching a cube are the same in phenomenal character.
2. If seeing a square and touching a square are the same in phenomenal character, then
 - (a) the sameness of the properties perceived will be transparent (obvious) to the subject, (b) cross-modal transfer will occur, and (c) it will be rational.³⁰
3. Therefore, if radical externalism is correct, cross-modal transfer will occur, and it will be rational.

In other words, if radical externalism is correct, the answer to Molyneux's question is *yes*. Campbell leaves little doubt that he would complete the argument by employing *modus ponens*.

Let us explore further the manner in which radical externalism must be understood if it is to underwrite an affirmative answer to Molyneux's question. I begin with an understanding of it—a misunderstanding, no doubt—under which it will *not* do what is wanted. Consider the view that seeing and touching each have their own distinctive phenomenology or “what is it like” to undergo them, but that for certain purposes of classification, relations to objects in the environment trump any such differences. An astrologist, for example, might consider two experiences to be of the same type if they both occurred under the same sign of the zodiac, however dissimilar the experiences seemed to the subject of them. Plainly, such a principle for sorting experiences into types would not be a principle for sorting them by phenomenal character--unless by sheer stipulation. But if the principle were put forth as a stipulation, there would be no reason to accept the *second* premise of Campbell's argument. There would be no reason, that is,

³⁰ Perhaps Campbell thinks that the antecedent of 2 implies (a) and that (a) in turn implies each of (b) and (c). However that may be, it is clear that he thinks the antecedent of 2 does imply each of (a), (b), and (c).

to expect the sameness of a seen cube and a felt cube to be manifest to the subject just because the experiences of them were phenomenally alike in the sense of occurring under the same astral sign.

Now go back to typing experiences not by their astral signs, but by their objects. If the experiences were significantly different in their intrinsic properties, then even if the objects of the experiences were the same, it seems to me there would be no reason to expect this sameness to be manifest to the subject.

The challenge for Campbell, then, is to make premises 1 and 2 simultaneously plausible. He must secure both transitions in the sequence *sameness of object* → *sameness of phenomenal character* → *sameness manifest to the subject*. If Campbell is to have any hope of doing that, I think he must hold that there are no intrinsic differences between the experiences of seeing a cube and touching a cube. He must hold that *all there is* to phenomenal character is what object or shape is presented. He must, in other words, subscribe to Moore's doctrine of radical transparency, at least for shape experiences.

I find confirmation of the hypothesis that Campbell is committed to radical transparency in later work promoting what he calls "the relational view of experience."³¹ In the relational view, "experience of an object is a simple relation holding between perceiver and object" and "the qualitative character of the experience is *constituted* [my italics] by the qualitative character of the scene perceived."³² He characterizes the relational view further by saying

[T]wo ordinary observers standing in roughly the same place, looking at the same scene, are bound to have experiences with the same phenomenal character. For the

³¹ John Campbell, *Reference and Consciousness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), chap. 6.

³² *Reference and Consciousness*, pp. 114-15.

phenomenal character of the experience is constituted by the layout and characteristics of the very same external objects.³³

It looks for all the world in such passages as though Campbell is saying that the qualitative or phenomenal character of experiences is totally determined by what their objects are, without any contribution from the act other than its direction of pointing.³⁴ That is precisely the Moorean view.

4. First trouble: objects are not the sole determinants of experience

In this section and the next, I wish to identify two difficulties for the doctrine of radical transparency. These difficulties may not amount to fatal objections to the doctrine, but I think they are considerations that should give us pause before accepting it.

Radical transparency is a thesis about perceptual experience, and perceptual experience is experience in which things appear to us have various features. We might say, then, that Moore was giving us an account of what it is for x to appear F to S , and his answer is this: *x appears F to S iff (i) S is conscious of x & (ii) x is F .* In clause (i), we refer to what Moore calls the act; in clause (ii), we characterize the object. What is distinctive about Moore's account is that clause (i) is constant in all types of experience, any differences in how things appear (or what the experience is like) consisting only in

³³ *Reference and Consciousness*, p. 116.

³⁴ I must add, however, that there are subsequent passages in which Campbell seems to disown the thesis I have just attributed to him. On p. 119, he acknowledges that a jaundiced eye may make the character of one's experience different from that of a normal observer viewing the same scene. On p. 126, he says that it is "undeniable" that "two people could be seeing the very same object, and yet the intrinsic character of their experiences be quite different." I am at something of a loss how to understand Campbell's overall view in the light of these concessions. Perhaps his language of 'constituted by' only means that sameness of object is necessary but not sufficient for sameness of experience.

what features are possessed by the object of the experience as characterized in clause (ii).

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Though he is not explicit about it, Campbell's account of perceptual experience seems in this regard to be like Moore's. He gives the impression that *all* we have to do to explain why we are aware of a certain feature (or why a certain feature is manifest to us) is to say that our experience consists in a relation to (or contains as a constituent) an object having that feature. If the object of an experience is the sole determinant of what it is like to have the experience, Campbell agrees with Moore.

And yet there is a conspicuous difference. In the 1903 article, the only objects of experience Moore mentions are the things he calls *blue* and *green*. In most of his subsequent writings on perception, Moore takes the objects of perceptual experience to be *sense data*—objects that are not identifiable with ordinary physical objects, but at best with the facing surfaces of them, and which in some accounts inhabit the mind rather than the world. For Campbell, by contrast, the character of experience is constituted by one's relation to *objects in the environment*—walls and desks and mountainsides. So despite their agreement about experience being constituted by its object, Moore and Campbell belong to very different camps, Moore being a sense-datum theorist and Campbell a Naïve Realist.³⁶

I am now ready to present the first difficulty. What unites Moore and Campbell is the idea that experience owes its character entirely to the character of the object presented.

³⁵ The formula *x appears F to S iff (i) S is conscious of x & (ii) x is F* does not apply if x is a complete physical object. A tabletop may appear trapezoidal by virtue of presenting a

³⁶ Campbell is a Naïve Realist in the sense set forth by A.D. Smith on pp. 43-44 of *The Problem of Perception* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002). Naïve Realists and sense datum theorists are two species of act-object theorists, both locating the character of experience entirely in the object of it, but one taking the object to be a public physical object and the other taking it to be a mental (or at least not straightforwardly physical) object. See also Smith's note 67 on p. 281.

Being aware of quality F, or having something appear F to one, is a matter of standing in the awareness relation to an object that is F. So you might be aware of greenness by virtue of seeing a green leaf. The leaf, however, may be white and fuzzy on its underside without your being aware of these qualities at all. Evidently, being aware of an (ordinary) object that is F is not sufficient for something's appearing F to you (or your being aware of Fness). If we are to insist that the character of experience derives solely from the character of its objects, the objects must arguably be objects of a special restricted kind—objects with no backsides and no hidden aspects, objects with all of their goods in the shop window. Such, of course, were classical sense data, of which Moore was a leading exponent. Yet in his own development of the relational view, Campbell seems to take over the “sheer relation” aspect of Moore’s view without the sense datum view that is arguably a concomitant of it. Can one really do this? That is the first difficulty I wish to raise for the doctrine of radical transparency: there is pressure for anyone who accepts it to adopt a sense datum view, along with whatever adverse consequences that may have for a direct realist theory of perception or a materialist theory of the mind. Those who wish to espouse radical transparency *without* special sensory objects owe us some account of why some of an object’s features and not others enter into our experience of it.³⁷

The difficulty I have just raised for Naïve Realism should be distinguished from another that is more commonly acknowledged and addressed—the problem of accounting for hallucination. How can relation to objects be what confers phenomenal character on experiences, it may be asked, if in hallucinations there can be the same character without

³⁷ On p. 120 of *Reference and Consciousness*, Campbell himself affirms the point I am raising: “Hidden characteristics of the object will play no role in constituting one’s experience of them.” But then what makes some characteristics hidden and others manifest? That is the question to which I find no answer in Campbell. Could it be, perhaps, that his “scenes” have no hidden aspects, that they are all surface?

the objects? The answer of the classical sense-datum theorist is that the same *attenuated* object—a daggery sense datum, visible to Macbeth’s eye but not clutchable by his hand—is there even in the hallucinatory case. Campbell’s answer is that hallucinations do *not* have the same phenomenal character as veridical experiences, since the requisite character-conferring object is absent. Rather than having a character or a state or an object in common, veridical and hallucinatory experiences have nothing in common but the fact that both are either veridical experiences of something F or hallucinatory experiences as of seeing something F. Relational theorists are often led thus nowadays into a disjunctivist response to the problem of hallucination. I do not propose to go into the dialectics of disjunctivism here; I mention the problem of hallucination only to distinguish it from the problem raised in the preceding paragraph.

The difficulty to which I am drawing attention may be highlighted by comparing Campbell’s views with those recently defended by Alston, who is sometimes reckoned (though I think too hastily) to be in the same camp with Campbell.³⁸ Like Campbell (and unlike adverbial theorists), Alston takes perceptual experience to incorporate an object as relatum or constituent. Again like Campbell (and unlike sense-datum theorists), he takes the object to be a physical object in one’s environment. But here is an important difference: unlike Moore and Campbell, Alston allows that for each feature F in an object of perceptual awareness, there is a distinct relation of appearing F. A billiard ball may stand to me in any or all of the relations of looking red, looking round, and feeling hard, and these relations do not have any common factor.³⁹ This clearly distinguishes

³⁸ William P. Alston, “Back to the Theory of Appearing,” *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13 (1999), 181-203.

³⁹ This comes out (among other places) in his saying on p. 183 that objects need not appear only as they are. The possibility of an object’s appearing as it is not does not arise unless there is a distinctive relation of appearing F.

Alston from Moore, for whom the same undifferentiated relation of consciousness is involved in all sensory experience. For Alston, the relation itself (and not just its worldly relatum) is susceptible of variegation: there are relations of looking red, tasting tart, and a million more. In no case can ‘x appears F to S’ be analyzed simply as ‘S is conscious of x & x is F’. So Alston does not face the problem with which I have confronted Campbell. Since he does not try to ground the phenomenal character of experience solely in the character of the object and a single ubiquitous relation, he need not be troubled by the fact that ordinary objects of perception have properties that far outstrip any of which we are aware.⁴⁰

In effect, I am offering the relational theorist two options. One is to let the objects whose properties determine the character of our experience be special objects with no hidden aspects, a la Moore. The other is to let the differences among different experiences be accounted for at least partly in differences in the relation of appearing to (or its converse, being conscious of), a la Alston. But Campbell does not unequivocally take either option. Is there a third option? Perhaps: there might be a *selective* relation, the same wherever it occurs (like Moore’s consciousness), but capable of settling on just some of the qualities in an object. I think this idea could be developed most promisingly in conjunction with an ontology of tropes or property instances. Objects might be construed either as substances exemplifying tropes or as bundles of tropes; in either case, tropes would be items capable of being singled out for attention in isolation from their fellows in the same object. I lack the space to explore this option adequately here.

⁴⁰ Since Alston (like Campbell but unlike adverbialists) insists that perceptual experience incorporates a physical object as constituent, how would he account for hallucinations? There is a hint of disjunctivism on p. 190. That may explain why he is sometimes classified together with Campbell.

5. Second trouble: change in experience is not merely relational change

For the transparency theorist, being aware of an object is an irreducible relation between a subject and an object. The relation is an intentional relation: one has an experience that is *of* the object. Moreover, the character of the experience (or of oneself in having it) derives entirely from the character of the object. An exhaustive specification of the subject's experience could be given by specifying the features of the object to which the subject is intentionally related.

This view has a consequence to which I now wish to draw attention. Since experience is through-and-through a relational affair, any change in one's experience is only a relational change. If you stop having one kind of experience and start having another kind of experience, all that has changed is *which objects you are related to*. You yourself have not changed in any intrinsic way. This is a consequence I find problematic.

Before developing this point further, I wish to note an equivalence between speaking of intrinsic features of one's experience and speaking of intrinsic features of oneself. If an experience has some intrinsic feature F, then there is a correlated feature F* that anyone who undergoes the experience has, and F* must surely be intrinsic if F is. Conversely, for any intrinsic feature I have by virtue of undergoing some experience, there is a correlated intrinsic feature that may be predicated of the experience itself—if only in the way in which my grin is sheepish because I grinned sheepishly. I shall therefore take it for granted in what follows that if a subject has an intrinsic property by virtue of having a certain experience, then the experience itself must have some intrinsic property.⁴¹

⁴¹ See Charles Siewert, "Is Experience Transparent?," *Philosophical Studies*, 117 (2004), 15-41, for a similar claim at p. 22.

To return, then, to the problematic consequence of radical transparency: since the nature of experience is exhausted by a relation between subject and object, a change in the character of one's experience (say, from seeing red to seeing green) is merely a change in one's relations to objects, comparable to what happens to you when the red car next to you in a line of traffic is replaced by a green car. It is not in any way an intrinsic change.⁴²

Such a view of the matter is not out of the question, and there are noteworthy thinkers who have embraced it. Something like it is involved in classical Indian views on the nature of consciousness and conscious subjects. To be conscious of this rather than that is entirely a matter of what relations the subject stands in to other things, in no way involving the intrinsic nature of the subject itself. The subject stands aloof as pure witness. Its pains and sorrows, its triumphs and tragedies, are only things that pass before its gaze--things that it beholds rather than things that befall it or characterize it in any intrinsic way.

Such a view has its consolations, but I find it hard to believe. It seems to me that a change in what I perceive is *ipso facto* a change in *me*—that I am different in some *intrinsic* way when I stop seeing red and start seeing green, or stop tasting sour and start tasting sweet.

⁴² In the early phases of thinking about this project, I had hoped to make a stronger connection with Kim's work by putting the point in terms of supervenience, a notion that Kim has done more than anyone else to clarify. The claim was to have been that radical transparency is at odds with a plausible doctrine of supervenience: that intentional relations supervene on intrinsic qualities of their relata. The qualities on the side of the subject would be qualia or adverbially qualified states, thus investing experiences with features denied them by radical transparency. On further thought, however, it became clear that a doctrine of supervenience would be both too strong and too weak for my purposes. Too strong, because the intrinsic features of subject and object alone do not suffice for the holding of an intentional relation between them; too weak, because the requirements of supervenience are still met if intrinsic qualities on the side of the object do all of the work.

What, then, is the intrinsic property I have when I am seeing red, but no longer have when I am seeing blue? To use old-fashioned terminology, it is a modification of my mind—some manner in which I am sensing or perceiving. In other words, the intuitions I am now indulging lead us in the direction of an adverbial theory of conscious states as opposed to an act-object theory. To have the experience of seeing red is to sense redly; it is not, or is not merely, to stand in some special relation to a red object.⁴³

We have now reached a view quite at odds with radical transparency. Objects no longer play an essential role in contributing qualitative character to experiences.⁴⁴ The experiences (or their subjects) are the way they are intrinsically, object or no object. The same experience may occur regardless of whether I am seeing an apple that is really there or hallucinating one, which implies (for better or worse) that the difference between veridical experience and hallucination must lie in factors extraneous to the experience itself, such as causal relations of the experience to environmental objects.

The dialectical path on which we are now embarked may be compared to another that I have explored elsewhere.⁴⁵ Consider Platonic realism as a theory of predication: for an object to be red is for it to stand in a special relation, Exemplification, to a special entity, Redness. One could complain that this theory does not do justice to the thought that being red (or being square, in case you take a traditional line about secondary qualities) is an intrinsic feature of an object, not merely a relation of it to something else. The

⁴³ For a classical defense of the adverbial theory, see C.J. Ducasse, “Moore’s ‘The Refutation of Idealism,’” in *The Philosophy of G.E. Moore*, edited by P.A. Schilpp (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1942), pp. 225-51.

⁴⁴ This remark has prompted one reader to ask whether my “intrinsicism” is compromised by the fact that “appearing F-ly” is sometimes characterized as “appearing the way F things normally appear.” Here I note two things. First, as Chisholm insists, there is in addition to characterizations such as the foregoing a non-comparative sense of ‘appear’-words. See Roderick M. Chisholm, *Perceiving* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1957), GET PP. Second, as Kim notes, even when we use extrinsic descriptions, we sometimes thereby pick out intrinsic properties (*Philosophy of Mind*, p. 176).

⁴⁵ James Van Cleve, “Predication without Universals? A Fling with Ostrich Nominalism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54 (1994), 577-90.

Platonic realist makes *all* predicational facts relational. In so doing, he makes the subjects of predication in one sense *bare*: they are devoid of intrinsic properties. A better alternative, it seems to me, is a view in which to be red or square is to be some *way*—a monadic rather than a relational fact about it.

I sometimes wonder whether my misgivings about Moorean transparency and Platonic realism could both be met by the same metaphysical maneuver. The worry in one case is that the theory leaves out what it is like (intrinsically) to see red; in the other, that it leaves out what it is like (intrinsically) to be red. But perhaps one could say that there is something special about the two fundamental relations of Intentionality and Exemplification—that they are both *quality-making relations*. When something stands in the Exemplification relation to Redness, it thereby acquires the quality or intrinsic character of being red, and when someone stands in the Intentional relation to a red object, the person thereby acquires the intrinsic character of seeing red.⁴⁶ But I must leave the further exploration of these ideas to another occasion.

⁴⁶ Perhaps one more class of relations should be admitted into this elite family. In substantial theories of space, the spatial characteristics of material objects are analyzed in terms of their relations to a special entity, space itself. An object has a certain shape or size because it occupies a region of space having that shape or size, and a hand (in Kant's 1768 view) is left or right in virtue of some relation it stands in to absolute space. Does this view convert the sizes and shapes of material things into mere relations, or does it make relations to space one more species of quality-making relations?

6. Dretske's phenomenal externalism

I turn now to another contemporary view that invites comparison to Moore's radical transparency--Dretske's phenomenal externalism. The juxtaposition of Dretske with Moore may seem unlikely. Moore seems to conceive of consciousness as some sort of pure searchlight or ray, invisible in itself, but revealing the features of whatever it lands upon. Dretske advocates a thoroughly naturalist view of the mind, which hardly seems hospitable to such a searchlight. Nonetheless, there are certain affinities among the views of Dretske on one side and Moore and Campbell on the other that merit a closer look.

Dretske begins his article "Phenomenal Externalism" by characterizing what he takes to be orthodoxy in the philosophy of mind: beliefs and other intentional states are individuated by what they are about (typically, objects in the environment), but sensory experiences are *not* so individuated.⁴⁷ According to the orthodox view, the phenomenal character of experience, or what it is like for things to seem a certain way to you, is not determined by relations to external objects, but simply by the intrinsic character of the experience. Dretske challenges this second element in the orthodox combination. In particular, he challenges the following thesis of supervenience: beings alike in their intrinsic physical characteristics must also be alike in what experiences they are having. Given Dretske's physicalism (which admits no intrinsic characteristics but physical characteristics), the thesis he challenges is equivalent to this: beings alike in their intrinsic characteristics must be alike in what experiences they are having. To deny this is to hold that beings can differ in their experiences without differing in any intrinsic characteristics.

⁴⁷ Fred Dretske, "Phenomenal Externalism," in *Philosophical Issues*, Vol. 7, edited by Enrique Villanueva (Atascadero CA: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1996), 143-58. This paper was presented at the same conference as Campbell's paper on radical externalism, discussed above.

Dretske describes his position as follows:

The qualities that make *seeing* so much different from *hearing*, and seeing *red* so much different from seeing *green*, are (or need be) nowhere in the person wherein resides the experiences of these qualities. . . . How is this possible? . . . One possible answer is the answer externalism provides: the qualities by means of which we distinguish experiences from one another are *relational* properties—perhaps (on some accounts of these matters) *intentional* properties—of the experiences.⁴⁸

Dretske's views are developed further in his book *Naturalizing the Mind*, where his phenomenal externalism is underwritten by a representational theory of the mind together with an analysis of representation in terms of indicator functions. The gist of the overall position is as follows: one's experience of an object is the totality of ways in which it appears to one; how an object appears to one is a matter of what properties it is represented as having; and a system of states represents a property F iff the system has the function of indicating what determinate value of F is possessed by some object. The states of a speedometer have (by design) the function of indicating the speed of a vehicle, and the states of a heat-sensitive organism have (by evolution) the function of indicating the temperatures of nearby objects. The speedometer "senses" speed and the organism senses heat.⁴⁹

Dretske summarizes his view as follows: "[M]ental facts are constituted, not by the intrinsic character of the events occurring inside, but by the relations these internal events bear to external affairs (e.g., by their indicator function)."⁵⁰ As far as I can tell, his 'e.g.' might just as well have been an 'i.e.'.

⁴⁸ "Phenomenal Externalism," pp. 144-45.

⁴⁹ Why the scare quotes in the first case but not the second—why don't speedometers have experiences? I gather that Dretske's answer is that representational states qualify as experiences only when their indicator function is natural rather than contrived (pp. 7-8) and only when the states are inputs to a system of conceptual states (pp. 19-20 and n. 17, p. 178). I take Dretske's view to have the following implication: if human beings were products of intelligent design, their indicator states would not be conscious states.

⁵⁰ *Naturalizing the Mind*, p. 40.

Dretske applies these views to the question whether it is possible to know the quale or “what it is like” of another creature’s experience. His answer is yes—we know what another creature’s experience is like whenever we know what properties the creature’s experience represents. In an imaginary example, he describes a simple parasite that has evolved an acute thermal sense, attaching itself to a host if and only if it represents the host as being 18°C. He notes, “If you know what it is to be 18°C, you know how the host “feels” to the parasite.”⁵¹ In a real example, he notes that dogfish detect their prey by sensing distortions in the electric fields around them. He maintains that a scientist who knew the shape of the distortion caused by an object in the vicinity of the fish would thereby know what it is like for a dogfish to sense an electric field of this shape:

Mary, in knowing what the shape of the field is, knows what an experience of a field of this shape is like. . . . She knows this quale of the dogfish’s experience. There is nothing more to know about how an electric field of that shape seems to the dogfish.⁵²

I trust that by now the reader, too, will sense affinities between the views of Dretske and those of Moore and Campbell. Here, perhaps, is one: if Campbell’s radical externalism paves the way for an answer of yes to Molyneux’s question, does not Dretske’s phenomenal externalism do likewise? At any rate, the two views have the following implication in common: a Molyneux man seeing a square for the first time would be having an experience with the same quale as certain of his previous tactile

⁵¹ P. 83.

⁵² P. 85. I question one of the arguments by which Dretske supports his conclusions about the parasite and the dogfish. He claims (on pp. 83-84) that he is simply drawing out the consequences of two facts that nearly everyone accepts apart from his own representational view. The first is that qualia are the ways things seem; the second is that when perception is veridical, the way things seem is the way they are. From these two facts, Dretske concludes that qualia are the way things are in veridical perception. So 18°C is the quale of the the parasite’s experience when it senses veridically. What I question is the first of Dretske’s allegedly noncontroversial facts. Qualia are often explained in terms of the way things appear, yes. But that is only to say that qualia are necessarily correlated with the way things appear (two experiences having the same qualia when they are experiences in which things appear the same way). It is not to say that qualia may be *identified* with the way things appear. If a tomato looks red, that is not to say (as Dretske’s does on p. 83) that redness is the quale of the experience. Compare what was said earlier in footnote ## [the one that mentions Peacocke].

experiences, and even before he had any visual experiences, the blind man knew what it is like for things to look square. Dretske says as much a little later:

A blind person may know what it is like to visually experience movement. If he knows what movement is, that is enough. An experience of movement—whether it be visual, tactile, or kinaesthetic—has its qualitative character defined by what it is an experience (representation) of, and if these experiences are all of the same property, they are, subjectively, with respect to this single property, the same kind of experience.⁵³

Despite agreeing with Campbell on this point, however, it appears that Dretske would withhold an answer of yes to Molyneux's question.⁵⁴

There are other surface similarities between the views of Dretske and those of Moore and Campbell, but are the views at bottom the same? To answer this question, let us ask whether Dretske's view is open to the objections I raised in the previous two sections.

Recall what these were: the objects of an experience are not the sole determinants of what the experience is like, and a change in one's experience must be an intrinsic change.

I think it is clear that Dretske does not incur the first objection. In his view, one does not represent an object *simpliciter*; one represents an object as being F. He is therefore in a position to say, "The type of experience one has is determined, not by the object experienced . . . but by the properties one's experience represents something to have."⁵⁵

⁵³ P. 94.

⁵⁴ He makes the following disclaimer: "To know what the quality of an experience is is not necessarily to be able to recognize something as having that quality when you experience it yourself" (p. 85). Recognitional ability, says Dretske, is a kind of knowing how not guaranteed by any amount of knowing what.

In note 20 on p. 179, he also says that knowing what it is like for something to look square is not sufficient for knowing what it is like to see a square, since in seeing a square many more properties than four-sidedness are represented. But why is that, on Dretske's view? A seen square must no doubt have properties in addition to shape (e.g., color), but why, on Dretske's view, must any of these further properties be represented by one who sees it?

⁵⁵ *Naturalizing the Mind*, p. 103. In section 4 of chapter 1, Dretske discusses separately the conditions that make a representation of something a representation of something *as F* and the conditions that make a representation of something as F a representation *of k as F*. The former have to do with the indicator function of the representation, the latter with its causal relations to environmental objects. I wonder how he would state these two sets of conditions in such a way that their joint satisfaction by a state would make it a representation *of k as F*. In other words, I wonder how he would solve the binding problem.

What about the second objection, that change in experience is intrinsic change? Here it may seem at first that Dretske is in Moore's camp. Recall that he sets himself the task of contesting the following supervenience principle: minds alike in their intrinsic properties must be alike in the quality of their experience.⁵⁶ To deny that principle is to hold that minds can differ in their experiences without differing in any intrinsic way. Is that not just what we found in Moore? First I experience blue and then I experience green, without thereby having changed in any intrinsic way at all.

That verdict would be too hasty. We must distinguish between two propositions: there can be *differences* between the experiences of two subjects without there being any intrinsic differences, and there can be *change* in the experiences of a subject without there being any intrinsic change. Not all differences are changes; changes are only those differences that are differences in the states of the same subject at different times.

Dretske is indeed committed to the first proposition. He holds that two minds that do not differ in any intrinsic way might nonetheless differ in the quality of their experiences. If they have evolved in significantly different environments, their experiential states might have different indicator functions and therefore different phenomenal characters. If one of the minds came into being through some miraculous materialization rather than through natural evolution, its states might not have any indicator function at all (even though they do indicate various things), in which case they would have no phenomenal character at all. In either case, the minds would differ in the quality of their experiences.

But Dretske is not necessarily committed to the second proposition—that there can be change in experience without change in anything intrinsic. Suppose I go from a state that indicates one determinate value of F to a state that indicates another—say, from a state

⁵⁶ On p. 145 of *Naturalizing the Mind*, this principle is called the Internalist Intuition.

that indicates an ambient temperature of 65°F to one that indicates a temperature of 70°F. I feel warmer. Have I undergone an intrinsic change? I think Dretske *could* say yes. In fact, if he did *not* say yes, he would be landed in the absurdity of states that differ only in what they indicate. (Think of a thermometer whose states differ *only* in what temperatures they are correlated with—the mercury never expands or contracts.) But he would insist that the intrinsic difference between my earlier and later states (a difference at the neural level, presumably) is irrelevant to what it is like to be in them. All that matters to that is their indicator function.

It appears, then, that Dretske's views are not affected by the difficulties I have raised for radical transparency. They do nonetheless have an implication that some would find problematic, as I shall try to evoke by again citing Thomas Reid.

In Reid's view, our perceptions of external qualities are triggered by sensations. A given type of sensation informs us of a certain external quality in virtue of two things: the sensation reliably indicates the presence of that quality (or in Reid's terms, *signifies* the quality), and the sensation also induces us to conceive of and believe in the quality (or in Reid's terms, *suggests* the quality).⁵⁷ Perception proper consists in the conception and belief, but the occasioning sensation contributes to what it is like to have the total experience. Now a point on which Reid repeatedly insists is that the connection between a given type of sensation and the external quality it signifies and suggests is contingent.⁵⁸ We might have been so made that the same sensations that signify and suggest color signified and suggested instead some quality now signified by sensations belonging to a different sensory modality. For example, the sensations that now signify redness might

⁵⁷ See Reid, *Inquiry*, pp. 38, 60, 177, and 261.

⁵⁸ See Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, p. 227.

have signified hardness instead and served as the occasion for our perception of that quality. In that event, would the phenomenal character of our experience have been the same? I believe Reid would say yes; Dretske would say no. The issue no doubt requires further threshing out, but my initial intuitions are on the side of Reid.

7. Summary

In Moore's doctrine of radical transparency, experiences are thoroughly relational in a sense implying that a subject's experience is exhausted by what object it has. It is a corollary that a subject has no intrinsic properties whatever just in virtue of undergoing one rather than another kind of experience.

I find Moore's view troublesome for two reasons. First, it is impossible to account for the character of experience solely in terms of the object it incorporates as relatum unless the object is of a special kind—an object like a classical sense datum with none but manifest properties. Second, if you accept Moore's view, you cannot respect the intuition that when your experience changes, you (or your experience) changes in some intrinsic way.

Contemporary writers who appropriate Moore's language typically do not hold his radical view—they do not deny that experiences have intrinsic features, but only that we are aware of these features.

Nonetheless, there are contemporary philosophers who do hold views at least initially suggestive of a Moorean view, Campbell and Dretske being the two I have discussed

here. On closer scrutiny, it appears that Campbell (though not Dretske) holds a view like Moore's.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ I wish to thank Matt Davidson, Christopher Hill, Janet Levin [and others to be named] for their comments on earlier versions.