

Naïve Realism and Diaphaneity

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1 Diaphaneity

Naïve Realism concerns genuinely perceptual experiences of ordinary mind-independent objects. The view involves a **Character Component**: the mind-independent objects of such experiences are constitutive of their conscious characters. Should we understand this in terms of Diaphaneity?

Strong Diaphaneity: the conscious character of an experience is entirely constituted by its objects such that:

Strong Difference Claim: Necessarily, if any two experiences have different conscious characters, then this is constituted entirely by them having different objects (or differences in their objects).

Strong Sameness Claim: Necessarily, if any two experiences have the same conscious character, then this is constituted entirely by them having the same objects (or qualitative sameness in their objects).

Weak Diaphaneity: the conscious character of an experience is such that:

Weak Difference Claim: Necessarily, if any two experiences have different conscious characters, then they have different objects (or differences in their objects) .

Weak Sameness Claim: Necessarily, if any two experiences have the same conscious character, then they have the same objects (or qualitative sameness in their objects).

2 Three Place Naïve Realism and Diaphaneity

(Case 1) Viewing a coin head on and then from a wide angle

(Case 2) Viewing the head side of a coin and then the tail side

(Case 3) Viewing a newly minted coin and then the same coin tarnished years later

(Case 4) Viewing a coin in bright light and in dim light

(Case 5) Seeing a coin and feeling a coin

From Brewer (2011, p. 95). These seem to challenge both the Strong and Weak Difference Claims. Call them **Challenge Cases**. Brewer argues that Challenge Cases pose no problem for his version of Naïve Realism, because (96):

perceptual experience is a matter of a person's conscious acquaintance with various mind-independent physical objects *from a given spatiotemporal point of view, in a particular sense modality, and in certain specific circumstances of perception (such as lighting conditions in the case of vision)*. These factors

effectively conjoin to constitute a third relatum of the relation of conscious acquaintance that holds between perceivers and the mind-independent physical direct objects of their perceptual experience. Thus, the experiential variations noted above, and any others along similar lines, may all perfectly adequately be accounted for by variations within this third relatum. For example, head-on v. wide-angle experiences, and those of the head side v. the tail side involve different spatial points of view. Experiences of the newly minted v. tarnished and battered coin involve different temporal points of view. Seeing v. feeling it clearly involve different sense modalities; and bright light v. dim light viewings involve different circumstances of perception.

Perhaps Brewer is saying that third relatum factors have a *character shaping role*: determinations of such factors are constitutive of character such that there can be aspects of character not constituted (entirely) by any object.

It's not obvious that this is how Brewer conceives of the role of third relatum factors. It looks as though he conceives of them as having a *determining-and-selecting role*. To see what this means, let's set out some key parts of his view:

1. Physical objects are constitutive of character. Some of the ways a perceived physical object is are *character shaping* in that they are constitutively relevant to how the perceived physical object shapes character: for they are part of what makes it the case that the physical object constitutes the specific modification of consciousness it constitutes.
2. Looks: Among the character shaping ways a physical object is. When a physical object looks *F*, it is in virtue of its visually relevant similarities to a paradigm *F*. Whether a physical object *O* has visually relevant similarities to a paradigm *F* is not simply a matter of how *O* is in itself, but also a matter of how *O* is in relation to the sorts of things that go into the third relatum. So, third relatum factors play a *determinative role*: which looks a physical object *has* is determined in part by third relatum factors.
3. Such factors also play a *selective role*. Illustration: one looks at a white piece of chalk in peculiar lighting such that it looks pink to one. Relative to the lighting conditions, the piece of chalk actually has a certain property: a pink look, a relational looks property (determinative role). But given that the chalk is *perceived* in those conditions, the pink look is selected as character shaping (selective role).

Perhaps, then, Brewer really wants to respond to Challenge Cases by exploiting third relatum factors in a determining-and-selecting and not a character shaping role. Here's how we might spell this out:

- None of the pairs differ in which physical object they involve. But this doesn't mean that the difference within each case cannot be located on the object side of the relatum. Just not in *which* physical object they involve. Yet we might still be able to locate the difference within each case wholly on the object side, in terms of a difference in the physical object's character shaping *properties*.
- Fairly obvious in Case (3). What about others? Take (Case 1). In each experience a single coin is seen, yet it looks one way in *e1*, seen from head on, and it looks a different way in *e2*, seen from a wide angle. The coin differs across these two conditions: it has one look in *e1*, a different look in *e2*. It varies in look because the third relatum factors play a *determinative role*. The *head on look* is character shaping in *e1* and the *wide angle look* is character shaping in *e2*. This is because the third relatum factors play a *selective role*: because the coin is seen from head on in *e1* the head on look is selected, because it is seen from a wide angle in *e2* the wide angle look is selected.
- Consistent with Strong Diaphaneity. Character differences entirely constituted by differences in the object.

Assigning third relatum factors a role in explaining conscious character does not entail that Strong (or even Weak) Diaphaneity fails. For one way to spell this explanatory role out is to assign third relatum factors a determining-and-selecting role, consistent with Strong Diaphaneity. Three Place Naïve Realism is not *per se* a non-diaphanous view.

It looks like Strongly Diaphanous Three Place Naïve Realism is a live option to be taken seriously. For it gives us some explanatory purchase on the Character Component, and it has resources to deal with some of what might lead one to worry about Strong Diaphaneity, e.g., Challenge Cases.

3 Against Diaphaneity

I see an apple in the fruit bowl on the table. There are two important aspects to the spatial structure of the conscious character of this experience: a *worldly aspect* and a *limitation aspect*.

- My experience involves a large cone of space which I am perceptually aware of, in which I see the apple as located and as spatially related to other things including subregions of the cone of space I am aware of. It seems as if we can specify this element of the spatial structure of my experience just in terms of what I perceive in the world: a space out there, and objects and features organized in this space.
- But if I reflect further upon the spatial structure of this experience, it seems to involve limitations: I have a sense that I can see only what falls within a space of such-and-such a size and shape, and that the space I see is a subregion of a larger space, which I would see more of if only I were to alter my point of view.

Can't we account for this limitation aspect simply in terms of the presentation of spatially organized aspects of the world, and regions of space? No, for as Soteriou (2013) suggests, we shouldn't think of 'the boundaries of the spatial sensory field of vision as boundaries of some thing one is sensing, like the frame of a painting, we should think of its boundaries in terms of one's sensory limitations' (118). I see the bowl with the apple in, on the table, in a certain part of the room. But this spatially structured *scene* doesn't set the limitation. And I am visually aware of a cone of *physical space* in which the objects and spaces that make up the scene are situated. But the chunk of physical space doesn't set the limitation. For *regardless* of my being presented with this scene and this chunk of space, my awareness would still be manifestly limited or spatially structured in the same way, confined to a region of space of such-and-such a size and extent. Instead, as Richardson (2010) puts it 'in vision having this feature, it seems to me as if *I*, am limited, sensorily' (239).

Further, as Soteriou notes 'changes in the boundaries of this spatial sensory field (e.g. when you close one eye) do not seem to you to amount to changes in the boundaries of some thing that you are visually aware of—some thing that you are visually aware of as changing size and shape' (118). Compare two visual experiences: looking at the apple with both eyes open (*E1*), and one eye closed (*E2*). *E1* and *E2* differ in character: *E2* is manifestly more limited than *E1*. But this cannot be fully accounted for just in terms of a difference in what I see. It derives from a manifest difference in my own sensory limitations. (Assuming that things are as they introspectively seem.)

Thus, the limitation aspect of the character of an ordinary visual experience is constituted by something other than any presented entity, it is manifestly a matter of the subject's sensory limitations. Strong Diaphaneity fails. But can we challenge Weak Diaphaneity too?

Consider Bálint's syndrome—a severe visuospatial disorder involving simultanagnosia, optic ataxia, and optic apraxia. Most relevant to us is *simultanagnosia*, the inability to see more than one object simultaneously. Robertson describes the condition in RM: 'Single objects popped in and out of view in RM's everyday life...an object continued

to be perceptually present for a while and then was replaced by another object or part of an object without warning.'

An individual with Bálint's syndrome cannot see multiple objects at a time, as in a large region of space, and as arranged in a spatial order. Rather, they see at most a single object at any given time. And it is not as if the single object they see is perceived as being in a larger space which is also perceived (just one devoid of other objects). Rather, the single object they see at a given time *dominates* their visual experience, including its spatial structure:

The patient's constricted field of visual attention was evidently bounded not in retinotopic co-ordinates, but rather by the contours of the object to which he was attending, whatever its size... (1995, p. 263).

Subjectively experienced space seems to collapse down to the space within the currently attended object. The size of this space varies with the size of the object that defines it... (1997, p. 313).

Given these descriptions, presumably, in looking at an apple the individual with Bálint's syndrome doesn't have a sense of the space they see as a subregion of a larger space, and as delimited by their own sensory limitations such that there is more for them to see if they alter their point of view. The spatial structure of their experience comes instead from the apple that they experience. And, presumably, it's not just that the spatial boundaries of their experience happen to *coincide* with those of the apple. The spatial boundaries of their experience are what they are because the perceived apple's boundaries are what they are. The apple *dominates* the visual experience. If you pulled away the apple and put a banana in front of an individual with Bálint's syndrome, it's not that the existing boundaries would stay fixed but now they'd be seeing a banana within those limits. Rather, the banana would pop into view, and it would take over, with new spatial boundaries set accordingly. And, though this is speculative, it is reasonable to suppose that the boundaries of their experience would seem to them to change accordingly.

Now compare the experience *I* have when I look at the very same apple. The limitation aspect is very different. It is manifestly set by my own sensory limitations, not perceived entities. In looking at the apple, I have a sense of the space I see as a subregion of a larger space, and as delimited by my own sensory limitations such that there is more for me to see if I alter my point of view. The spatial limits of my visual experience are not what they are because of any object I see. And so if you pulled away the apple and put a banana in front of me, the existing boundaries *would* stay fixed, but now I'd see a banana within those limits. It's not like the banana and its boundaries would come to dominate my experience. And the boundaries of my experience wouldn't seem to me to undergo any change.

This challenges the Strong but not the Weak Difference Claim. In line with the Weak Difference Claim, there *is* a difference in what is presented (I see more), even though, contra the Strong Difference Claim, the character difference isn't entirely constituted by the object difference. But we can challenge the Weak Difference Claim.

LIMITING DEVICE Consider a *limiting device* which fits across the eyes. It is a device which, like the closing of an eye, can modify the spatial boundaries of one's visual experience. And it is connected to an app whereby the subject can finely control the way in which the spatial boundaries of their visual experience are narrowed or limited. One might use the device to make exactly the same change in limitations that one would make by simply closing an eye. But various other configurations are possible too. Suppose that I am looking at an apple and the device is off. I see a whole spatially structured scene, the apple being one among other objects that I see. But then I turn the device on and start fiddling with it. There are manifest gradual changes. At one point it is as if I have an eye closed. And then eventually it happens to narrow the spatial boundaries of my visual experience so as to coincide with those of just the apple. So I see nothing but the apple and some of its features. Call this the *Crucial Stage*.

Compare my experience of the apple in the Crucial Stage and that of the individual with Bálint's syndrome. Our experiences don't differ in their objects. Yet they do differ in character. The limitation aspect to the character of the experience of the individual with Bálint's syndrome is as described above. But the limitation aspect of the character of my experience in the Crucial Stage is very different. And so it is not that the effect of the device is to induce something like Bálint's syndrome or simultanagnosia in me at the Crucial Stage. Two main points of difference:

First, even though in the Crucial Stage the spatial boundaries of my experience happen to be narrowed to the apple I see, I still have a sense of the space I see as a subregion of a larger space, and as delimited by my own sensory limitations, modified by the limiting device, such that there is more for me to see if I alter those limitations. Part of this comes from the fact that before the Crucial Stage, I had ordinary spatial vision, and then fiddled with the device and produced a manifest gradual limiting of the spatial boundaries of vision.

Second, the spatial boundaries of my visual experience coincide with those of the apple, but they are not set by it, nor do they seem to be: my experience is in no way *dominated* by the apple, it doesn't have the boundaries it does because of the boundaries of the apple, nor does it seem to. Even in the Crucial Stage, if you pulled away the apple and put a banana in front of me, the existing boundaries *would* stay fixed, and manifestly so, but now I'd see a banana within those limits. It's not like the banana and its boundaries would come to dominate my experience. The spatial boundaries of my experience come, and seem to come, not from any entity I perceive, but rather from my own sensory limitations, albeit modified by the limiting device.

4 Conclusions

Diaphaneity-involving versions of Naïve Realism are false. This doesn't mean that Naïve Realism is false.

But what is a Naïve Realist to say about non-diaphanous aspects of conscious: aspects of conscious character where there *is* more than what simply derives from the objects of experience, or where there is *nothing* about them that derives from the objects of experience? Various options: subject (Logue (2012)), relation (Soteriou (2013), French and Phillips (MS)), and third relatum factors (conceived as *character shaping*).

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