

**Acquaintance with Colours:**  
*An Essay on Frank Jackson's Knowledge*  
*Argument*

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I, Michael Ernest Markunas, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis, I outline and defend an acquaintance response to the knowledge argument. The knowledge argument was first presented by Frank Jackson in "Epiphenomenal Qualia" (1982). The argument seeks to demonstrate that physicalism is false. There have been numerous different responses defending physicalism, but which, if any, is sufficient, remains highly controversial and unsettled (Nida-Rümelin, 2015).

I focus on one particular response on behalf of the physicalist: the acquaintance hypothesis. Recently, Michael Tye (2009) has provided a very sophisticated account of the acquaintance hypothesis. Tye argues that a proper theory of knowledge by acquaintance provides a cogent response to the knowledge argument. Tye's view is informed by Russell's theory of knowledge by acquaintance, which distinguished between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description (1910-11), but nevertheless Tye provides a large-scale overhaul. Perhaps most importantly, Tye argues that a proper theory of knowledge by acquaintance requires a proper theory of perception, which Russell lacked.

While I agree with Tye that a proper understanding of knowledge by acquaintance provides the physicalist a way to respond to the knowledge argument, I disagree that Tye himself has given us that understanding. I argue that his theory of acquaintance rests too heavily on a faulty theory of perceptual content. But rejecting Tye's view does not force one to give up on the acquaintance hypothesis. Indeed, Tye seems on the right track in thinking that a theory of knowledge by acquaintance and a theory of perception are interdependent. To that

end, I attempt to construct a theory of perception that does justice to the theory of acquaintance. To do this, I rely on relationists (or sometimes called 'naive realists') theories of perception. I argue that an understanding of a relationist theory of perception provides the best grounds for a theory of knowledge by acquaintance, and thereby provides the best response to the knowledge argument.

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# Chapter 1: The Knowledge Argument

## 1.1 Qualia and Physicalism

The Knowledge Argument was first presented by Frank Jackson in his 1982 paper, "Epiphenomenal Qualia". It is an argument that purports to show that (i) qualia exist and (ii) physicalism is false. Before discussing the argument, I would like to begin by spelling out some of the details of the metaphysical view of consciousness that Jackson is trying to establish with the knowledge argument. In particular, I will elaborate on Jackson's theory of qualia and physicalism. This will provide some context to better understand the knowledge argument itself.

### 1.1.1 Qualia

Jackson calls himself a "qualia freak", and offers the knowledge argument as a "polemic" against those who deny qualia (Jackson, 1982). On Jackson's theory, qualia are *features of mental states* that cannot be known by knowing all the physical information about that mental state. According to Jackson, qualia are most conspicuous in cases of bodily sensations:

Tell me everything physical there is to tell about what is going on in a living brain, the kind of states, their functional role, their relation to what goes on at other times and in other brains, and so on and so forth, and be I as clever as can be in fitting it all together, you won't have told me about the hurtfulness of pains, the itchiness of itches (1982, 127).

While qualia may be most conspicuous in bodily sensations, they also occur in all perceptual experiences and at least some emotional states, at least according to Jackson (Jackson, 1982, 128). Consequently, we can give the following working

definition of Jackson's theory of qualia: *the features of some mental states which cannot be known by knowing all the physical information about that state.*

Jackson thinks reflection on the nature of bodily sensations like pain and itchiness intuitively lends support to the belief in the existence of qualia. The knowledge argument is "polemic" because he thinks reflection on one's experience is by itself sufficient to demonstrate the existence of qualia. The knowledge argument is only to convince the heretics, as it were, for the true believers of qualia need no such argument, for them it is just intuitively obvious. For instance, according to Jackson, if you reflect on an experience such as smelling a rose, it is intuitively obvious that what it is like to smell that rose is not information that can be acquired by knowing all the physical information about the rose (1982, 128). Thus, according to Jackson, knowing what it is like to have a certain experience is not something you can know merely by knowing all the physical information about that experience.

Discussions of experience are often couched in terms of 'what it is like', as in discussing 'what it is like' to hear Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, 'what it is like' to taste vegemite, and 'what it is like' to see red. The locution 'what it is like' originates with Thomas Nagel (1974), and many philosophers since have used the locution to refer to qualitative aspects of experience (among other things).<sup>1</sup> It is important to note at the outset that Jackson and Nagel have different conceptions of the nature of experience, and this can engender confusion when philosophers use the locution 'what it is like' to have a certain experience.

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<sup>1</sup> In the literature on conscious experience, 'what it is like' has been used in different ways by different philosophers to talk about different things. This somewhat engenders confusion as to what is at issue. For a discussion of the use (and abuse) of this locution see Snowdon (2010).

Jackson claims that he is *not* discussing qualia in terms of Nagel's 'what it is like' properties. Jackson says that Nagel's concern is with the total experiential state of a particular organism from a particular point of view. Thus, Nagel is concerned with what it is like *to be* a particular subject undergoing a particular experience, such as a bat navigating by sonar (Nagel, 1974). In a passage where Jackson elaborates on how he thinks his concerns differ from Nagel's, Jackson says,

When I complained that all the physical knowledge about Fred was not enough to tell us what his special colour experience was like, I was not complaining that we weren't finding out what it is like *to be* Fred. I was complaining that there is something *about* his experience, a property of it, of which we were left ignorant (1982, 132).

Jackson's point is that what it is like to experience a certain thing from a certain point of view is not the same issue as whether or not there is a *property* of our experiences of which we are ignorant.

The view Jackson attributes to Nagel might not be the most accurate and is perhaps open to debate. But what is important for our purposes is not how Jackson understands Nagel's views of experience, but rather how Jackson demarcates his own view in contrast to Nagel's view. Jackson thinks that a quale is a mental property of a subject. On Jackson's account, seeing a red object is having an experience with a red quale. The experience is modified by the property of the red quale. This is the issue Jackson is concerned with. The experience's quale *may* also affect what it is like *to be* a certain subject having a certain experience, but the issue of qualia are not themselves what it is like *to be* a particular individual, at least according to Jackson.

Jackson's metaphysics of experience seems more controversial than Nagel's. If we adopt a conception of experience similar to Nagel's, that is, if we

think of experience as having a *viewpoint* on a qualitative property like the redness of a strawberry, then it doesn't seem too controversial that no amount of physical information, by itself, and from a third person point of view is necessarily going to tell someone what it is like *to be* someone *else*. To know what it is like to be someone else, you (plausibly) have to inhabit the person's viewpoint. But this does not (at least not obviously) establish qualia or non-physicalism. What Jackson wants to show is not that what it is like to be a certain conscious subject cannot be known without inhabiting the subject's viewpoint, but that there is a particular *property* of an experience which we cannot know by knowing all the physical information:

One thing he knows is the way his experience of it differs from his experience of seeing red and so on, *another* is that he himself is seeing it...My complaint concerned the first and was that the special quality of his experience is certainly a fact about it, and one which physicalism leaves out because no amount of physical information told us what it is (Jackson, 1982, 133).

So it is important to remember that the knowledge argument is about these mental properties—qualia—and our epistemic access to them. Discussions of 'what it is like' to undergo a certain experience are about something else, at least according to Jackson's reading of Nagel. This is important because many philosophers to be discussed in this thesis switch back and forth between these two ways of talking—qualia and 'what it is like'—and it is not always clear which they mean. I will avoid the phrase 'what it is like' as much as possible, and when it is necessary to use it in discussing some other philosopher, I will flag the differences. In this way, we can do our best to avoid confusion and stay focused on the issue that Jackson himself was concerned about—namely the existence of non-physical qualia.

### 1.1.2 Physicalism

The metaphysics of experience that Jackson defends is interdependent with how he views the metaphysical doctrine of physicalism. Physicalism is standardly taken to be a metaphysical doctrine that everything that exists is physical or supervenes on the physical (Stoljar, 2015). Jackson however, is somewhat resistant to trying to define physicalism (1982, 127). The most direct statement he gives of physicalism is the following:

Physicalism is not the noncontroversial thesis that the actual world is largely physical, but the challenging thesis that it is entirely physical. This is why physicalists must hold that complete physical knowledge is complete knowledge *simpliciter* (1986, 291).

As Jackson understands it, physicalism is a metaphysical doctrine with an epistemic consequence. He asserts physicalism is false because there are mental properties that are non-physical, i.e. qualia (Jackson, 1982, 1986). He argues that he can show that physicalism is false by demonstrating that no matter how much physical information we know, we cannot know about qualia (Jackson, 1982). This raises the question as to what Jackson thinks counts as physical information.

For Jackson, physical information is a certain *kind* of information about our world and ourselves that is provided by the physical, chemical, and biological sciences (1982, 127). It includes not only the information given by these sciences, but also any information it is possible to infer from this information. For instance, take the example of a human being seeing a snake. I may know that the appearance of a snake to a human causes that human's autonomic nervous system to be more active, causing their heart to beat faster and their skin to sweat more. Such activation of the nervous system may cause that human to run away if possible or, if not, reach for some object for defence. Thus, if I know object *X*, when experienced

by subject *Y*, results in a certain pattern of neuronal firing in the subject, pattern *Z*, which causes the subject to perform action *A*, then I can infer that a subject with a nervous system similar enough to a human will produce a similar response in relation to seeing a snake. Thus, information that can be inferred from physical information also counts as physical information in Jackson's view.

It must be noted that the physical information Jackson has in mind is the information given by the *completed* physical sciences of physics, chemistry, and biology. Obviously, we do not have that amount of scientific understanding yet. Nevertheless, Jackson thinks that all such information in the completed physical sciences, plus all inferences to be made from that information, would still not provide us with knowledge of qualia (Jackson, 1986).

We should also note that there is something peculiar in the disciplines that Jackson chooses to demarcate the metaphysical doctrine of physicalism. In talking of mental phenomena, it is strange that other sciences, for instance psychology, are not included in the list. Of course, Jackson is resistant to offering anything like a definition of physicalism and physical information because of the difficulties he thinks formulating such definitions bring:

I do not mean these sketchy remarks to constitute a definition of 'physical information', and of the correlative notions of physical property, process, and so on, but to indicate what I have in mind here. It is well known that there are problems with giving a precise definition of these notions, and so of the thesis of physicalism that all (correct) information is physical information. (1982, 127).

But even granting him his reservations, his choices seem to betray a certain picture of the world that we might find questionable. For what these "sketchy remarks" seem to "indicate" is a certain picture of the mind and its relation to the world. In

particular, it seems to suggest a Cartesian picture of the mind in which mental phenomena are separate from the physical world. Of course, this is what he argues for by presenting the knowledge argument. But by demarcating physicalism in the way he does, he seems to build into the set-up the metaphysical picture he is trying to establish.

This does not mean that accepting or rejecting Jackson's understanding of physicalism and physical information forces us to accept or reject the knowledge argument. We can perhaps reject Jackson's set-up and yet still find the argument persuasive or vice versa. Nevertheless, it is something to note and be wary of.

## 1.2 The Thought Experiment, The Argument, and the Responses

Jackson's argument that physicalism is false is presented in the form of a thought experiment about Mary the super neuroscientist. The story is as follows:

Mary is confined to a black-and-white room, is educated through black-and-white books and through lectures relayed on black-and-white television. In this way she learns everything there is to know about the physical nature of the world. She knows all the physical facts about us and our environment, in a wide sense of 'physical' that includes everything in *completed* physics, chemistry, and neurophysiology, and all there is to know about the causal and relational facts consequent upon all this, including of course functional roles. If physicalism is true, she knows all there is to know. For to suppose otherwise is to suppose that there is more to know than every physical fact, and that is just what physicalism denies....It seems, however, that Mary does not know all there is to know. For when she is let out of the black-and-white room or given a colour television, she will learn what it is like to see something red, say. This is rightly described as *learning*—she will not say "ho, hum". Hence physicalism is false. This is the knowledge argument against physicalism (Jackson, 1986, 291).

From this, we can lay out the argument as follows:

Premise One: Mary knows all the physical facts about the world.

Premise Two: If physicalism is true, then Mary knows all the facts about the world.

Premise Three: When Mary sees colours for the first time she comes to know something new.

Premise Four: What she comes to know is a new fact.

Conclusion: There are non-physical facts in the world and physicalism must be false.

If Jackson's goal was to be polemical, then he succeeded. The knowledge argument has elicited numerous responses from physicalists, but there is no consensus on which, if any, of these physicalist responses is successful (Nida-Rümelin, 2015). One way to get a grip on this argument is to ask the following two questions (Ludlow et al., 2004). First, whether or not Mary, upon leaving her room, acquires new knowledge about the world. Second, what kind of knowledge that new knowledge is. Some physicalists try to block the knowledge argument by digging in their heels in and answering "No" to the first question—Mary acquires no new knowledge upon her release (Dennett, 1991). Most philosophers, physicalists included, find that answer hard to defend.<sup>2</sup> Most think it virtually undeniable that Mary does in fact acquire *some form* of new knowledge upon her release (Ludlow et al. 2004). Consequently, physicalist responses to the knowledge

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<sup>2</sup> For a response to Dennett (1991), see Robinson (1993).

argument tend to focus on what *type of knowledge* Mary acquires when she sees colours for the first time.

It has become somewhat standard to group the many physicalist responses into four categories (Ludlow et al., 2004). These categories can be described as follows: (i) the ability hypothesis (ii) the acquaintance hypothesis (iii) the phenomenal concept strategy and (iv) what I will call the “misdescription fallacy”, which questions whether it is an accurate description to say Mary knew all the physical facts in her black-and-white room. All four strategies reject one of the premises of the argument laid out above. In this thesis, I will be concerned only with the second option, the acquaintance hypothesis. However, to facilitate deeper understanding of the issues at play, I will briefly sketch out the nature of these four options below, before fully exploring the acquaintance hypothesis.

*The Ability Hypothesis* - Physicalists who embrace the ability hypothesis reject premise four, that when Mary sees colours for the first time she learns *a new fact* about the world. This view is famously defended by Laurence Nemirow (1990) and David Lewis (1990), among others. According to these philosophers, while it is true that Mary does acquire *new knowledge* when she is released, this new knowledge is not knowledge of facts (Lewis, 1990). Instead, what Mary acquires is *the ability* to recognize, remember, and imagine colours from a first person point of view. Lewis (1990) argues that these are abilities that cannot be acquired without experiencing colours. But these abilities are not knowledge of a new fact. Lewis argues that the distinction between *knowing-that* and *knowing-how* is vital to understanding the knowledge argument. Mary, according to Lewis, does not learn propositional knowledge of the form ‘that such and such is the case’, but rather knowledge of how to recognize, imagine, remember, and so on, colour

experiences. Thus, for Lewis, and other proponents of the ability hypothesis, the knowledge argument is unsound because there is an equivocation on “knowledge” between “knowledge-that” and “knowledge-how”. Accordingly, physicalists who embrace the ability hypothesis argue that while Mary does acquire new knowledge, this new knowledge is not knowledge of non-physical facts, but rather knowledge of a new ability. Consequently, the new knowledge she acquires is no threat to physicalism.

*The Acquaintance Hypothesis*- Similar to philosophers who embrace the ability hypothesis, philosophers who embrace the acquaintance hypothesis also reject premise four—that Mary learns a *new fact* (Conee, 1994; Tye, 2009). Furthermore, proponents of the acquaintance hypothesis also claim the knowledge argument is unsound because it equivocates on “knowledge” (Tye, 2009). But unlike proponents of the ability hypothesis, who claim the equivocation is between knowing-that and knowing-how, proponents of the acquaintance hypothesis claim the equivocation is between *knowledge by description* and *knowledge by acquaintance* (Conee, 1994; Tye, 2009). The distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance goes back at least to Bertrand Russell (1910-11). Knowledge by description, according to Russell, is knowledge of truths. The truth that Paris is 105 km<sup>2</sup> big is a truth I can know without myself measuring the size of Paris or even having ever been to Paris. By contrast, knowledge by acquaintance requires some kind of cognitive “contact” with the thing known. Knowledge by acquaintance cannot be acquired simply by knowing many descriptions about a thing.

One of the first defenders of the acquaintance hypothesis with respect to the knowledge argument was Earl Conee (1994). He argues that knowledge by

acquaintance is not knowledge of facts, nor know-how, but a third type of knowledge that requires only a “maximally direct cognitive relation to the experience” (1994, 197). According to Conee, the knowledge acquired is knowledge of a property. But knowledge of a property is not knowledge by description because it is not knowledge of a fact, but of a property. Thus, in her room, Mary knew the fact that red strawberries have the property red, but she did not have knowledge by acquaintance of that property because she had not yet seen red. So the knowledge Mary acquires when she first sees red is knowledge of the property itself, not knowledge of some fact. Accordingly, physicalists who embrace the acquaintance hypothesis argue that while Mary does acquire new knowledge, this new knowledge is not knowledge of a non-physical fact. Rather, it is *knowledge by acquaintance* of a physical item. Since the knowledge acquired is of a physical item, it is no threat to physicalism.

*The Phenomenal Concept Strategy* - In contrast to the two previous responses, the phenomenal concept strategy admits that the knowledge Mary acquires is knowledge of facts. Nevertheless, defenders of the phenomenal concept strategy think her knowledge is not knowledge of a *new* fact, but an ‘old fact in a new mode’ (Loar, 1990). Thus, they too reject premise four, that Mary learns a new fact about the world, but not because her learning is not factual, but rather, because it is not learning of a *new* fact. According to Loar, the essential point missed by Jackson is a difference between properties and concepts. Loar argues that phenomenal qualities are reducible to brain states, but phenomenal concepts are irreducibly first person: “phenomenal concepts are conceptually independent of physical-functional descriptions, and yet pairs of such concepts may converge on, pick out, the same properties” (Loar, 1990, 227). What accounts for this is the difference between recognitional concepts and theoretical concepts. According to Loar,

phenomenal concepts are a subclass of recognitional concepts, which Loar conceives of as type-demonstrative (1990). In other words, they let the subject classify a particular thing as *that* thing or *that kind* of thing. They are essentially first person perspectival and rely on perceptual discriminations. So Mary gains a new phenomenal concept that is propositional knowledge—*that* is what red looks like—but this knowledge is not knowledge of a new fact, but a new way or mode of knowing an old fact.

*The Misdescription Fallacy* - The fourth type of physicalist response is given by those who claim that Jackson misdescribes physicalism. Daniel Stoljar (2001) is a recent defender of this approach. He argues that we should reject premise one of the knowledge argument because there is an ambiguity in the concept of “physical” between (i) the theory-based conception and (ii) the object-based conception. On the theory-based conception, a property is physical if it is either

the sort of property that physical theory tells us about or else is a property which metaphysically (or logically) supervenes on the sort of property that physical theory tells us about (Stoljar, 2001, 312).

By contrast, on the object-based conception, a physical property is either:

the sort of property required by a complete account of the intrinsic nature of paradigmatic physical objects and their constituents, or else is a property which metaphysically (or logically) supervenes on the sort of property required by a complete account of the intrinsic nature of paradigmatic physical objects (Stoljar, 2001, 312).

Stoljar argues that this matters because the class of properties picked out by the theory-based conception is not coextensive with the properties picked out by the object-based conception. The reason why is that physical theories pick out only

dispositional properties whereas object theories often pick out categorical properties.

This brief summary of the responses was intended to provide background. The rest of the discussion will focus on the acquaintance hypothesis because I find it the most interesting and plausible refutation of Jackson's knowledge argument. Moreover, it has been one of the least explored physicalist responses to the knowledge argument, despite the fact that the concept of conscious acquaintance has undergone something of a renaissance of late (Fumerton, Richard and Ali Hasan 2014).

In the rest of this thesis, I examine Michael Tye's version of the acquaintance hypothesis because it is one of the more sophisticated accounts in the literature. Moreover, I think there is much he gets right about how the acquaintance hypothesis can provide a physicalist response to the knowledge argument. In particular, I think the motivations Tye cites for adopting an acquaintance hypothesis are the right motivations. Ultimately though, I will argue that his attempt to work out how those motivations can play a role in perceptual content ultimately fails and undermines his theory of knowledge by acquaintance. I will then suggest an alternative theory of perception and argue that it fits better with the acquaintance hypothesis. The overall argument of this thesis is that, if we want to defend an acquaintance hypothesis to the knowledge argument, then we should adopt a relationist theory of perception.

## Chapter 2: Michael Tye's Acquaintance Hypothesis

### 2.1 Introduction

Recently, Michael Tye (2009) has provided a sophisticated and lengthy discussion of the acquaintance hypothesis. He argues that understanding the distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description provides the key to resolving many longstanding puzzles of consciousness, the knowledge argument among them. Though he begins his discussion of knowledge by acquaintance by discussing the views of Russell, Tye presents a very unique approach to the acquaintance hypothesis. Ultimately, I will argue his approach does not do justice to either the knowledge argument nor the acquaintance hypothesis. However, I think that in examining both what is right and what is wrong in Tye's theory, we gain a deeper understanding not only of the acquaintance hypothesis, but also the initial appeal of the knowledge argument.

Let me begin my presentation of Tye's views by restating the structure of the knowledge argument that I laid out in the previous chapter:

Premise One: Mary knows all the physical facts about the world.

Premise Two: If physicalism is true, then Mary knows all the facts about the world.

Premise Three: When Mary sees colours for the first time she comes to know something new.

Premise Four: what she comes to know is a new fact.

Conclusion: There are non-physical facts in the world and physicalism must be false.

As is true with other philosophers putting forth the acquaintance hypothesis, Michael Tye defends physicalism by rejecting premise four. He argues that there is an implicit assumption in the knowledge argument that we should reject. That assumption is that all knowledge is knowledge of facts. As we saw in the previous chapter, there are other physicalist responses to the knowledge argument that reject premise four. Indeed, philosophers who defend the ability hypothesis also reject premise four for a similar reason as acquaintance theorists, namely because there is an implicit assumption in the knowledge argument that all knowledge is knowledge of facts. But unlike those who advocate the ability hypothesis, acquaintance theorists do not argue that the new knowledge she acquires is know-how. Rather, what Mary acquires is knowledge by acquaintance.

According to Michael Tye, knowledge by acquaintance is knowledge, not of facts, but of *things*:<sup>3</sup>

Mary in her room knows all the physical facts *about* the subjective character of the experience of red. But there is a perfectly ordinary sense of 'know' under which she does not know the thing that is the subjective character of the experience of red. She is not acquainted with that *thing*. When she leaves the room and becomes acquainted with the phenomenal or subjective character of the experience of red, thereby she knows it. This is genuinely new knowledge, logically distinct from her earlier factual knowledge (2009, 131-132, my emphasis).

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<sup>3</sup> Following Tye, I will use the expressions (i) knowledge of things, (ii) thing-knowledge, and (iii) knowledge by acquaintance interchangeably. The meanings are equivalent and any variation is strictly for stylistic purposes.

Tye's distinction between knowledge of things and knowledge of facts is a version of Bertrand Russell's (1910-11) distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Tye argues that Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description is the key to understanding many puzzles of consciousness, in particular the knowledge argument. But Tye does not uncritically accept Russell's distinction and apply it to the knowledge argument. Rather, Tye thinks that, by itself, Russell's distinction is insufficient: "what Russell needed when he advanced his distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description was a better grasp of the nature of perceptual content" (Tye, 2009, xii). According to Tye, knowledge by acquaintance needs to be supplemented with a theory of perceptual content, namely representational content that is non-propositional and non-conceptual:

What needs to be appreciated is that knowledge by acquaintance of an entity is a kind of non-conceptual, non-propositional, thing knowledge. I know the shade red<sub>29</sub> simply by being acquainted with it via my consciousness of it...Our consciousness of things, both particular and general, enables us to come to have factual knowledge of them, but that consciousness is not itself a form of factual knowledge at all. It serves as the ground or warrant for beliefs about what we experience, but is not itself a kind of belief. Knowledge by acquaintance is the foundation for knowledge by description, but it is a completely different kind of knowledge (Tye, 2009, 135).

For Tye, knowledge of things is a type of knowledge that is non-propositional and non-conceptual in form. In this way, it is a type of knowledge that is fundamentally different from knowledge of facts, which is propositional and conceptual. Knowledge of things does not consist in knowledge of facts, and, for that reason, it is not acquired by learning propositions. Tye believes that when

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<sup>4</sup> See especially Russell (1910-11, 1912, 1992).

Mary sees red for the first time she acquires new knowledge by acquaintance of red. This new thing knowledge is *genuinely new knowledge* about the world. But the new knowledge she acquires is not propositional knowledge, but rather, knowledge by acquaintance. Thus, when Mary sees red for the first time, she does not acquire knowledge of a new fact because she does not learn a new proposition.

Tye claims that the best way to understand the distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description is to model it on another distinction—the distinction between seeing *things* and seeing *facts*. Consequently, I will look at what Tye says about the distinction between these two types of seeing before moving on to discussing the distinction between types of knowing. My hope is that presenting things in this way will give the reader a better grasp of Tye's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description.

## 2.2. Seeing Things

Tye claims there is a distinction between seeing things and seeing facts in that seeing things cannot be explained in terms of seeing facts. Tye claims we can see an object without thereby seeing some fact about it.

In ordinary English, we use the term 'see' both with respect to objects and with respect to facts. We talk of seeing tables, chairs, trees, stars, and people, for example. We also describe one another as seeing that the table is covered with books, that the table is made of wood, that the tree has acorns on it, and so on...there is a genuine distinction reflected in our talk here: seeing things is not reducible to seeing that things are thus-and-so (Tye, 2009, 95).

To illustrate this point Tye uses cases of ubiquitous illusion. Suppose a subject is standing looking at a red cube before them. Unbeknownst to them, the cube is actually white, but illuminated in red light (Tye, 2009, 95). The subject fails

to see that the cube is white, but nevertheless sees the cube. He sees the thing—the cube—without thereby seeing the fact that it is white. We can complicate the example further so that the subject knows none of the object’s properties, but nevertheless still sees the object. For example, suppose the same white cube that appears red, is actually not in front of the subject but is off to the side of him or her, and reflected in a mirror that makes it appear that it is right in front of the subject. Suppose further, that it is a funny or distorted mirror such that the cube is actually an oblong rectangle, but nevertheless appears like a cube to the subject (Tye, 2009, 95). In this situation, the subject misperceives the colour, shape, and location of the object. There is no property of the object *that* the subject can see. Nevertheless, the subject still sees the object. It is just that he or she cannot see that the cube is white, off to the side of them, and actually not cubical in shape. But the object is still seen.

The general point here is that one can see an object *O* without there being any property *P* such that one sees that *O* has *P*, or without there being any property *P* such that one sees with respect to *O* that it has *P*. This is indicated by the cube example and other such cases of ubiquitous error (Tye, 2009, 95).

Thus Tye concludes that,

To see a thing, it suffices that the thing looks some way to the perceiver; and something can look some way without the perceiver’s noticing that it is that way, and thus without the perceiver seeing that it is that way (Tye, 2009, 95).

What Tye is claiming in these passages is that the verb “see” has different senses, and these different senses indicate a difference in types of *mental states*. When we say of a certain subject that they see the books, we are ascribing to them a mental state or event in which the subject is related to a visual entity such as the books. When we say of a certain subject that they *see that* the books are on the table, we are ascribing to them a mental state or event in which they are related to a

proposition. Thus, Tye's claim is that there is, at a minimum, a two types of seeing. The first type of seeing is a relation to mind-independent objects. The second type of seeing, *seeing-that*, is a relation to a proposition. According to Tye, this is a genuine distinction between *types of mental states*.

This is not just applicable to mental states of 'seeing' either. Tye thinks this distinction applies to many intentional states:

In ordinary English, we talk of liking, loving, and fearing *things*. I like the songs of Neil Young, for example. My mother loves me. My great aunt used to fear spiders. It is not in the least obvious that in *any* of these cases the mental state is one that relates its subject via the liking, loving, or fearing relation to the content of a 'that' clause, where the content involves the relevant object or is about that object (Tye, 2009, 100).

Thus, according to Tye, ordinary English importantly highlights this distinction between types of mental states. When we use English sentences where the grammatical object of the verb denotes a perceptible visible entity like *books*, we are ascribing to the subject a mental state in which they are related to objects. When we use ordinary English sentences where the grammatical object of the verb denotes a proposition (that is, when the grammatical object of the verb is something like a 'that-clause'), we are ascribing to the subject a mental state in which they are related to a proposition.

But while Tye calls our attention to two types of senses for "see", French (2013) distinguishes between at least three senses of "see". To get a better grasp of how the semantics of "see" interact with theories of mental states, I will need to explain French's (2013) three types of "see". This is important as it highlights how Tye is thinking of seeing in contrast to *seeing-that*.

According to French (2013), "see" is polysemous, and the different senses of "see" have different semantic restrictions. For instance, we have sentences of the

form 'John sees the book', where the verb "see" has as its grammatical object a term that denotes a particular visual entity (French, 2013, 1741). But we also have sentences of the form 'John sees that the books are on the table' where the object of the verb is a 'that-clause' which denotes a proposition (or a similar entity) (French, 2013, 1742).

We can differentiate these forms of sentences by differentiating between the types of arguments the verb can take (French 2013). In the former, we have sentences where the verb takes a grammatical object that denotes a particular visible entity such as the book or the tree. Following French (2013), we can call such types of seeing *object seeing*, where the object is not restricted to a material object, but includes, for instance, events as in 'I saw the coronation' and quantities as in 'I saw six swimmers'. On this sense of "see" then, see means something like *perceive visually*. This case of *object seeing* French calls the 'basic perceptual case'.

By contrast, sentences of the form seeing-that where the grammatical object of the verb is a 'that-clause', "see" does not (necessarily) mean *perceive visually* because propositions are not visible entities. For instance, one has sentences of the form 'I see that Jane's argument is valid', where the semantics of 'see' does not entail that what is denoted by the grammatical object is anything like a visually perceptible object. Of course, I *might* see that Jane's argument is valid *by looking* at it on the blackboard, but importantly I need not. For one can "see" Jane's argument is valid even if one is blind (French 2013). On the second sense of "see" then, see means something like 'understand' or 'grasp'. Thus, French (2013) calls this second sense the "purely epistemic" sense.

Furthermore, French argues, the pure epistemic sense is *factive* and *cognitive*.

In these examples 'see' is like 'believes' or 'thinks' on propositional readings of

those verbs: it ascribes a propositional attitude. But in these constructions ‘see’ doesn’t *just* mean *believes* or *thinks*, since it picks out a *factive* attitude—believing that *p*, and thinking that *p* aren’t factive attitudes, since a factive attitude is an attitude one can have only to truths, and one can believe, or think, that *p* when *p* is not true...[thus] paraphrase data reveals that there is more to the meaning of ‘see’ in these constructions than merely *believes* and *thinks*. Rather, ‘see’ in these constructions is closely connected in meaning to the meaning of ‘know’ on its propositional reading (French, 2013, 1742).

The purely epistemic sense picks out a factive attitude. This will have important consequences for Tye’s views on *seeing-that*, as I will argue below. Before that though, I will spell out the third and final sense of “see” in French (2013).

A third sense for “see” that French points out is what he calls the “epistemic perceptual sense”. It is a subtle distinction and may even be categorized as a hybrid of the two. Consider, for example, the following the sentence: ‘by the position of the sun, I see that the day is almost over’ (adapted from French 2013). The sense of “see” in this sentence shares features with both of the two senses discussed above. On the one hand, it ascribes the subject a visual perception—that is, the subject is in the state of visually *seeing the sun*. On the other hand, it also ascribes to the subject a factive propositional attitude—that is, *that* the day is almost over.

How best to explain the epistemic perceptual sense is a matter of debate (French 2013). One view would be to claim that the subject is in a perceptual state with propositional content. Another, would be to claim that the subject is in an *epistemic state* with propositional content. But that this epistemic state is *based on* a perceptual state, which need not be propositional itself. This latter view leaves open the nature of the perceptual state itself. The importance of this is that there is a way to explain *seeing-that* without ascribing propositional content to the *perceptual state* itself. Thus, in cases of *seeing-that*, how we are related to the

proposition is a matter of debate. It is not necessarily by being in a perceptual state with propositional content.

This is important for our discussion of Tye because Tye thinks we can have non-propositional perceptual states. Indeed, according to Tye, all that is required *to see* an object is that it enables the subject to wonder “what is that?” (2009, 20). He calls this requirement that of being *epistemically enabling*. In order for a subject to count as seeing some object, they must be able to have the thought ‘what is that?’ about the object. Cases of failure of an experience to be epistemically enabling will help elucidate this requirement. Suppose you are hiking in the woods and on a tree in front of you there is a brown camouflaged moth. You are looking right at the moth but do not see it. In such a case, your experience does not enable you to ask ‘what is that?’ with respect to the moth because you cannot see it.

What matters is whether my experience directly (that is, non-inferentially) enables me to query what that is, where that is the moth. Since my experience does not enable me to do this the moth is hidden from me. I am blind to its presence. I am not conscious of it (Tye, 2009, 13).

On Tye’s view then, what counts as seeing is very minimal, for all that is required is your experience must be epistemically enabling with respect to the object. This does not require that you are in a state of *seeing-that* with respect to the object. It merely requires your experience to be epistemically enabling. This lends support to the idea that Tye conceives of states of seeing-that not as ones where the subject has a perceptual state with propositional content, but where the subject is in an epistemic state that is propositional *based on* the perceptual state. Thus, according to Tye, even in cases seeing that, there is an element of *seeing* that is non-propositional, namely at the level of *perceptual* content.

This analysis helps us to better grasp the cube example that Tye gives,

which I presented earlier. Importantly, it helps us to see that Tye thinks *seeing-that* are factive mental states. Recall that Tye claims that something can *look some way* without the subject *seeing-that* it is that way. The cube *looks* red but isn't red. Rather, on Tye's view, to *see that* an object *O* has some property *P*, the object must *actually* have the property *P*. This means that in order for a subject to be in the mental state of *seeing-that*, the state must be factive. For instance, in the case where the white cube appears red, Tye claims that (i) the cube *looks* red to the subject even though it is not, but (ii) the subject cannot *see-that* it is red: "Paul cannot see that the cube is red, for the cube is white" (Tye, 2009, 95). And Tye generalizes this point to say that of any object *O* the subject need not be in a mental state of *seeing-that* with respect to any of the objects properties. This indicates that Tye thinks that one cannot be in a state of *seeing-that* with respect to something that is not the case. So the subject cannot *see-that* about anything of the object. Thus, the subject is not in a mental state of *seeing-that* with respect to that object. Thus, he takes *seeing-that* to be a factive mental state.

This is important because it highlights that Tye thinks we can be in factive mental states with propositional content where the propositional content is not part of the perceptual experience. This will become important when we discuss Tye's theory of knowledge of things, a type of knowledge he claims is non-propositional, non-conceptual and can only be acquired through experience.

### 2.3 Knowledge of Things

According to Tye, the distinction between seeing and seeing-that is analogous to the distinction between knowing things and knowing facts.

Knowledge of a thing stands to certain kinds of factual knowledge in something like the relationship in which seeing a thing stands to certain kinds of seeing-that (Tye, 2009, 101).

For the purposes of providing a physicalist response to the knowledge argument, the most important difference between knowledge of things and knowledge of facts is that knowledge of things is a form of awareness that is *non-propositional*. To say what counts as non-propositional, we need to say what counts as propositional. Though philosophers disagree over what propositions are and what functions they serve, there is a somewhat standard way of understanding them that we can adopt for our purposes. On this standard reading, propositions are primarily the *bearers of truth values*. That is to say, propositions are the sorts of things that can be true or false. For instance, the proposition "David Cameron is the Prime Minister of the U.K." is true just in case David Cameron is the Prime Minister of the U.K. The proposition "Barack Obama is the Prime Minister of the U.K." is false just in case Obama is not the Prime Minister.

On the standard reading, true propositions can be seen to represent facts rather than things. For instance, the proposition "David Cameron is the Prime Minister of the U.K." *represents* the fact that Cameron is the Prime Minister of the U.K. The proposition is a true proposition just in case it represents a fact. Since true propositions represent facts, coming to know true propositions is one way to come to know certain facts.

However, it is important to note that propositions do not represent *things*. The noun-phrase "Prime Minister" may *figure in* a sentence that expresses a proposition, but by itself it is not a proposition. This is because the Prime Minister is not a fact but rather a *thing*, in particular, an individual person. Thus, true propositions represent facts, not things. Consequently, we can distinguish between knowledge of facts as propositional and knowledge of things as non-propositional.

Knowledge of things is a form of knowledge that is non-propositional. This means that you can know a thing without knowing some proposition about it. Moreover, even if you know many or all the propositions about some thing, that still does not mean you have thing-knowledge of that thing. Common discourse seems to highlight this distinction. For example, you may not know any facts about the Prime Minister, such as how long he or she has been in office, or which political party they are a member. You may not even know that the United Kingdom is governed by a Prime Minister. Nevertheless, if you met the current Prime Minister, then it would be said that you *know* or are acquainted with the Prime Minister. Even if you didn't know he *is* the Prime Minister, you still know *him*. Thus, you can know some thing without knowing some fact about that thing (or in this case, that person). That is, it is not a *necessary* condition on knowing a thing that you know some fact about it.

Likewise, you may know all the facts about the Prime Minister, and you may be capable of expressing all these facts in the form of sentences that express true propositions. Nevertheless, if you have never met the Prime Minister, then there is a certain sense in which you do not *know* the Prime Minister. You may know all *about* him, but you still do not know him. Knowing him requires meeting him. Thus, no matter how many facts you know about something, knowing facts is not *sufficient* to have thing-knowledge of that thing.

From these observations we can infer that knowing facts or propositions is neither necessary nor sufficient for knowing a thing. Thus, thing-knowledge is not reducible to propositional knowledge. Of course, in actual cases of knowing some thing, you often come to know propositional knowledge too. For instance, in meeting the Prime Minister you might come to know that he is tall or that he has

dark hair. But knowing *him* does not consist in knowing these facts about him. Knowing things is a distinct form of knowledge that is essentially non-propositional.

Just like you can see some object without thereby seeing-that the object is such and such, so too you can know some object without thereby knowing-that the object is such and such. There are types of seeing and knowing that are non-propositional. Moreover, these non-propositional types of seeing and knowing are not reducible to types of seeing or knowing that are propositional. And, since seeing facts and knowing facts requires states of seeing with propositional content and states of knowledge with propositional content, respectively, there are types of seeing and knowing that are not seeing facts or knowing facts. These are the essential features of the analogy between seeing and knowing that Tye draws our attention too. As we shall see, they are the essential ingredients in Tye's acquaintance response to the knowledge argument.

## 2.4 The Nature of Acquaintance

As I said before, Tye's view of acquaintance is informed by Russell's view, but Tye explicitly rejects much of what Russell took to be distinctive of acquaintance. In this section, I will compare and contrast Russell's and Tye's understanding of acquaintance. This is not only of historical interest. Many salient features of Russell's theory are still endorsed by contemporary acquaintance theorists (Fumerton, Richard and Ali Hasan, 2014). Consequently, observing how Tye differs from Russell is one way to highlight Tye's idiosyncratic views on acquaintance. Moreover, many parts of Tye's theory of acquaintance are variations, some large and some small, on Russell's initial notion. Thus, we can't

really understand Tye's theory of acquaintance without at least some knowledge of Russell's theory of acquaintance.

As Russell originally conceived of acquaintance, it was a relation that held between a conscious subject and some object (Russell, 1910-11). This relation is often said to be primitive and direct (Fumerton, Richard and Ali Hasan, 2014). For Tye, on the other hand, acquaintance is not a relation but a representation that has the object as its constituent. To be acquainted with an object *O* is for *O* to be a constituent of the representational content. This is one of the more significant differences between Tye's theory and other philosophers who embrace some notion of acquaintance. We will spend the next two chapters dealing with this aspect of Tye's view. For now, we will have to be content with just flagging it.

On Russell's theory, the acquaintance relation is often thought to be primitive because it cannot be explained in terms of anything else (Fumerton, Richard and Ali Hasan, 2014). But whether Tye endorses the idea that acquaintance is primitive is not clear. He is certainly not explicit about it, and I believe there is evidence both ways. On the one hand, Tye says knowledge by acquaintance cannot be reduced to any other form of knowledge. This seems to indicate that knowledge by acquaintance cannot be explained in terms of any other form of knowledge and therefore is a primitive form of knowledge. On the other hand, Tye argues that Russell's theory can only be made sense of if we have a correct theory of perceptual content. This seems to suggest that acquaintance can be explained in more basic terms, namely in terms of representational content. Much turns on whether or not Tye can make good on his promise to elucidate knowledge by acquaintance in terms of representational content, and the next two chapters are devoted to that discussion. However, I think nothing too significant

seems to turn on whether or not acquaintance is *primitive*, at least with respect to Tye's theory of acquaintance as a response to the knowledge argument.

Directness can be understood in different ways. I will explain these different ways and then say how Russell and Tye are thinking about them.

One way to understand directness is in terms of the distinction between inferential and non-inferential knowledge. In this sense, to know *directly* some item *P* is to know it without knowing any other item *Q* first from which you infer *P*. The most salient cases of non-inferential knowledge are those involving perceptual states. You look at a table and are directly aware that it is brown. You do not need to infer that it is brown from some other truths you know about it, nor do you need to know anything else about the table. Simply by looking, you see the table is brown. You are directly aware of it. By contrast, inferential knowledge requires you to infer from other things you know. For example, I could know that Jane is on campus today because I see her car in the parking lot on campus and because she told me she would be driving her car to school today. From these two pieces of information, (i) seeing Jane's car in the parking lot and (ii) being told that Jane will be driving to campus in her car today, I can infer that (iii) Jane is at school. I have inferential knowledge that Jane is at school today. Of course, I could know Jane is at school today non-inferentially by seeing her on campus.

Another way to spell out the criteria of *directness* for acquaintance is the distinction between direct/indirect perception. This is often associated with sense-data theories of perception, whereby you are indirectly aware of a material object by being directly aware of a sense-data caused by that material object. There is evidence that Russell may have thought of the acquaintance relation as *direct* in this way. Consequently, one way to read Russell is as using the distinction

between direct and indirect perception as a way to defend the view that acquaintance is non-inferential *precisely because* it is a form of indirect perception. Whether that view is defensible will take us too far afield. By contrast, Tye claims that *even if* the distinction between direct/indirect perception can be made sense of outside the sense-data theory of perception (and he seems sceptical it can) it nevertheless seems possible that 'indirect perception' can still be non-inferential in certain cases. He argues that if I think I can only be aware of the table by being aware of one of its facing surfaces, then this might be a form of 'indirect perception'. Nevertheless, that does not require that this form of indirect perception requires one to be aware of the table only by inference. (Tye, 2009, 103).

Tye is sceptical that directness is required for acquaintance because he thinks that there can be indirect non-inferential knowledge. For instance, Tye points out that Russell thought we do not know objects directly but only indirectly by being aware of their facing surface. Tye claims that Russell assumed "indirect awareness involves inference" (2009, 98). Tye thinks this is wrong because we can know non-inferentially about material objects, regardless whether or not it is right to say we can only know them indirectly by being aware of their facing surfaces. Thus, for Tye, the distinction between indirect and direct knowledge is not essential because both can be non-inferential (Tye, 2009, 98).

In sum, Tye departs somewhat from the traditional way of understanding acquaintance. He does not claim it is primitive relation. He also understands the "directness" of acquaintance somewhat differently than Russell, namely as non-inferential. Thus, what is central to Tye's theory of acquaintance is that acquaintance should be non-inferential.

## 2.5 The Objects of Acquaintance

We have said that acquaintance holds between a conscious subject and an object. It requires a conscious subject in the sense that there cannot be acquaintance between two non-conscious objects. A chair cannot be acquainted with another chair, for instance, because both chairs are non-conscious objects and thus there is no conscious subject as one of the acquaintance relation's relata (or if acquaintance is not thought of as a relation, because it requires a conscious subject to represent some object). So far, this seems non-controversial. But what about the objects to which the conscious subject is related/represents? Are there restrictions on the types of things to which the subject can be acquainted?

On most theories of acquaintance, the object can be a variety of different types of things. Russell, for instance, held that a conscious subject can be acquainted with particulars, universals, abstract logical facts, relations, and the self (1910-11, 1912, 1992)<sup>5</sup>. Unlike Russell however, Michael Tye is not very explicit as to what types of objects can fill the object role. Nevertheless, I believe there is evidence he takes both particulars and universals to be the objects of acquaintance. The type of objects Tye thinks we can be acquainted with is important because different types of objects interact differently with Tye's theory of perceptual content, which we spell out in the next chapter. This interaction effects how acquaintance obtains, which in turns effects how Mary becomes acquainted with red.

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<sup>5</sup> Russell changed his mind on what types of objects could fill the place of the object in the relation. For instance, in Russell (1912) he argues subjects can be acquainted with the self, but in the third chapter of Russell (1992) he explicitly rejects this.

That Tye thinks the acquaintance relation can hold between a conscious subject and a *particular* is obvious throughout the text. For instance, he argues we can be acquainted both with garden variety concrete physical objects like tables and chairs (2009, 98), and also with less corporeal things like events (2009, 135). With regards to *universals* the matter is less obvious, but I think a case can be made for the fact that Tye is committed to the claim that subjects can be acquainted with universals. My reason for this is that Tye explicitly claims that we can be acquainted with un-instantiated properties (2009, 82). For instance, Tye argues that when we see colours we are acquainted with the phenomenal character of that colour. So when Mary first leaves her room she is acquainted with the phenomenal character of redness. Furthermore, Tye claims that the phenomenal character is a *thing*, but not a concrete thing; it is a complex property of material objects, and it is public in the sense that you can know it just as much as I can know it (2009, 117). Moreover, he thinks that un-instantiated properties like redness can be known in cases of hallucination (2009, 82). So, if knowing colours requires acquaintance with colours, and if we can know colours in hallucination, then we must be acquainted with colours in hallucination. Since un-instantiated properties are not particulars, but universals, then we must be able to be acquainted with universals. Thus, I conclude that Tye thinks we are acquainted not only with particulars but with universals, and he takes colours to be universals.

Tye does not present any evidence that we are acquainted with relations. Indeed, I think there is some evidence *against* such a view. He does not think, for instance, that we can be acquainted with facts. If we take facts to be complexes in the world, then facts necessarily contain relations. The fact 'the books are on the table', for instance, is made up of the objects *the table*, and *the books*, as well as the relation *on top of*. This evidence is not conclusive that Tye thinks we cannot be

acquainted with relations, but the text is devoid of any indication where he seems to suggest we are acquainted with relations. I point this out only for the sake of completion and do not think it affects my argument. For the purposes of the knowledge argument, the important factors are that (1) *we can* be acquainted with (different kinds of) particulars and also with universals, especially properties, and (2) *we cannot* be acquainted with facts. Whether we can be acquainted with other types of relations is not clear, but nor is it pressing.

## 2.6 Experience Needed

In order to be acquainted with a thing, Tye claims that the thing known must be experienced. Knowledge by acquaintance requires that one must have a conscious experience of that thing. As Tye says, “where I have not encountered a thing in experience...I am not acquainted with it in the relevant sense” (2009, 101). Moreover, not *any* experience will count. For instance, if the lighting is extremely poor or there are distorting barriers like thick glass, then the experience may be insufficient for acquaintance.

Genuine acquaintance in the visual case requires an encounter in experience of a sort that allows for a good look at the thing. Corresponding requirements seem appropriate for non-visual cases of acquaintance (Tye, 2009, 101).

What counts as a “good look” at a thing may vary from context to context. What is central is that the subject be able to place the thing in the subject role of a thought, such as wondering ‘what is that?’, even if they do not actually do this. This is important because it means that the objects Tye thinks we can be acquainted with

must be capable of playing the subject role in a subject-predicate proposition.<sup>6</sup> In order to wonder ‘what is that?’, *that* has to be capable of being the subject of the thought. This is important because it effects how and when the acquaintance relation obtains/representation occurs, and with respect to what types of objects. For instance, Tye thinks we can be acquainted with properties. This means that properties can play the subject role in a subject-predicate structured proposition. For instance, red can be predicated of objects in propositions such as “that strawberry is red”, but it can also figure into the subject role in propositions such as “that red is brighter than that blue” when looking, say, at a particular strawberry and a particular blueberry. Moreover, the propositional content of an experience might be capable of being analysed into different propositions. For instance, in an experience of seeing red strawberries one might form the thought, “those strawberries are very red”, or one might form the thought “the red of those strawberries is brighter than the blue of those blueberries”. In the first expression, “strawberries” is the subject and “red” is the predicate which is predicated of the object. In the second expression, “red” is the subject and “bright” is the predicate, signalling that the property of *brightness* is being predicated of the object red. Thus an experience may give rise to different analyses with different propositional content. I think that, on Tye’s view, which analysis *is actually* taken does not matter so much as which analyses are *possible* to be taken. If an item is such that it cannot play the subject role in a structured proposition, then a subject *cannot* be acquainted with it. I am not arguing that, on Tye’s view, in order to be acquainted

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<sup>6</sup> We will later see why this is important when we discuss Tye’s theory of perceptual content, as he thinks perception yields a singular proposition. What *thing* is capable of being the object in that proposition will matter to determining what *thing* we can be acquainted with.

with a thing you *must* put it in the subject part of a proposition. But I am arguing that Tye's criteria of epistemic enabling requires that you be *capable* of it.

Why should we think such a minimal requirement of experience provides you knowledge of things? The main reason, for Tye, that conscious experience gives you knowledge of things is that it is incoherent to claim that you are genuinely conscious of something and yet do not know it at all (2009, 98). Intuitively, just by experiencing redness, you thereby know redness.

To see a thing, it suffices that the thing look some way to the perceiver; and something can look some way without the perceiver's noticing that it is that way and thus without the perceiver seeing that it is that way (Tye, 2009, 95).

I can see a computer by looking at it, but I need not *see that* it is a computer. Perhaps I lack the concept *computer* and so cannot see the computer *as* a computer. Nevertheless, I still see the computer. The upshot of this is that it respects the intuitive idea that creatures without our conceptual capacities are capable of seeing things we see. A baby or animal can surely see a computer without seeing it *as a computer*, for they lack the concept *computer*.

Tye's claim about seeing is stronger than this though, for it is not just that perceivers who do not share our conceptual capacities can see the objects we see. Rather, it is that, even if we have the requisite concepts, *we* nevertheless can see the object without deploying that concept at all. Thus I can see a thing without *seeing that* it is a certain way, even if I am capable of such seeing. This point does not just apply to objects, but to the properties of objects as well. For instance, I can see an instance of redness without thereby *seeing that* it is red. This may be because I am a creature who lacks the concept *redness*, or it may be because even though I

do have the concept *redness*, I do not deploy that concept. I do not see *that* it is red. Nevertheless, I still see red.

## 2.7 Solving the Puzzle

It is now time to apply Tye's views about knowledge and perception that we have been discussing in this chapter to the Mary case. As stated earlier, Tye thinks there is an implicit assumption in the knowledge argument: coming to know something new requires discovering a new fact.

Mary in her room knows all the physical facts *about* the subjective character of the experience of red. But there is a perfectly ordinary sense of 'know' under which she does not know the thing that is the subjective character of the experience of red. She is not acquainted with that thing. When she leaves the room and becomes acquainted with the phenomenal or subjective character of the experience of red, thereby she knows it. This is genuinely new knowledge, logically distinct from her earlier factual knowledge (Tye, 2009, 131-132).

What Mary comes to know when she sees red for the first time is the phenomenal character of redness. On Tye's view, phenomenal character is a property of objects in the world, not of experiences. It is a property of strawberries, fire engines, and other red things. The phenomenal character of an experience is a property of material objects that are independent of human minds. The phenomenal character of redness, on Tye's view, exists even if someone does not actually experience it. What Mary learns is the phenomenal character of redness. She learns this by being acquainted with redness. This knowledge is non-propositional. It is not knowledge of the fact that this is red. It is knowledge of the property red. This is not some old fact she comes to know in a new way. She did not know the phenomenal character of redness before she saw redness. Moreover, she *could not* know the phenomenal character of redness until she saw redness. Seeing redness

makes her acquainted with the phenomenal character of redness and gives her knowledge of this thing.

Some might object that this knowledge is knowledge of what an experience is like and therefore something Mary could have known simply by looking at brain scans through a “cerebroscope” in her black-and-white room. The “cerebroscope” is a fictional instrument, somewhat like a microscope, that allows Mary to look within the skulls of test subjects and observe their brain functions. The objection is that “Mary in her room can know the experience of red itself, since she can be acquainted with the physical state that is the experience of red in other people via the cerebroscope” (Tye, 2009, 135). In other words, if Mary can see the brain function of a subject when that subject is looking at a red object, then she will see the brain function that occurs when a subject sees red, and since experiences are realized in the brain, she will be looking directly at the experience of red as it happens in the brain. By looking at the brain function, she is acquainted with the experience of red. Thus, she is acquainted with the brain state redness and thus with the experience, since colour experiences are brain states.

According to Tye, this objection fails because it is not possible for Mary, even with her cerebroscope, to be non-inferentially conscious of a brain state that realizes colour experiences. Acquaintance, remember, is a non-inferential mode of awareness of things and their properties. By seeing a physical brain state that registers redness she is not non-inferentially aware of redness. She can be aware of a token brain state. But she cannot be aware of the ‘neurological type that the token instantiates’. Accordingly, Tye notes,

The point I want to emphasize is that when Mary sees something red for the first time, she comes to be acquainted with *red*, and thus with the

phenomenal character of the experience of red. She does not come to be acquainted with *the experience of red*. Thus, what she knows when she sees something red is not a brain state, even if the experience of red *is* a brain state. So there is no threat here to my claim that, on my proposal, in seeing red things Mary genuinely makes a significant discovery (Tye, 2009, 135).

Thus, Tye rejects the objection. Mary is not acquainted with red by seeing a brain state. Consequently, Mary cannot be acquainted with red until she actually sees red herself. So the acquaintance hypothesis is not undermined by the cerebroscope objection.

## 2.8 The Variant

There is a variant of the Mary case that Michael Tye discusses as a possible objection to his view, but then summarily dismisses the objection. It is important for us to look at this variant case because it presents a deeper understanding of Tye's view.

Tye proposes that if what Mary learns is knowledge of the phenomenal character of redness, and if phenomenal character is taken to be what it is like to undergo an experience, then the following variant seems potentially problematic: Suppose Mary is still in her black and white room and still has not seen any colours. One day, while she's still in her room, we decide to show her a patch of red, but we don't tell her it is red, nor do we show her any object that is canonically red, such as a tomato or strawberries. We do this because if she knew strawberries were red, this would not help her because the red patch is being shown completely independently of any object that she knows to be red. Again, we do not tell her this is red either. Now she has experienced red, and therefore, she has experienced something new in the world. The next day, we let her outside and she sees some

strawberries and tomatoes sitting on a kitchen table. In such a situation as this, it seems plausible to say that Mary learns what redness is like. For instance, we could imagine her thinking to herself 'aha! so this is what redness is like. That patch they showed me yesterday was red. This is what the experience of red must be like'.

This variant of the Mary case might seem to cause problems for Tye's theory because since the phenomenal character of experiencing red just is redness, then she knew what redness was like in her black-and-white room the day before. But it seems plausible to say she *did* learn something new when we let her out in this case. Tye calls this new version of Mary "Experienced Mary" because she has experienced redness in her black-and-white room. So, given Tye's theory, what could she have possibly learned when she leaves her black-and-white room? According to Tye, upon leaving her room:

She comes to know what it is like to experience red. In her room, she does not know what it is like to experience red, since her factual knowledge that this is what it is like to experience red is not *based* on her knowledge by acquaintance of the phenomenal character...Once 'Experienced Mary' steps outside and makes the connection between the phenomenal character of her experience and the colour red, she knows what it is like to experience red. Thereby she learns something new (2009, 134).

In her black-and-white room, she has knowledge by acquaintance of the phenomenal character of redness. This is knowledge by acquaintance is "thing-knowledge". In contrast, *what it is like* to experience some property is factual knowledge. It involves bringing the phenomenal character of an experience under a concept and coming to know *that* this is what it is like to have such an experience. But in her black-and-white room, Mary knows no facts about this object because she does not know it is the colour red, even though she is acquainted with it. That is, she doesn't know *what it is like* to experience red because she knows *no facts*

about red until she steps out of her room and sees red objects, such as the strawberries and tomatoes, and brings those red objects under the concept *red*. So she knows the phenomenal character of red, but doesn't know the fact that *this is* the phenomenal character of red until she steps outside and can link her "thing-knowledge" with factual knowledge.

Ultimately, Tye rejects the knowledge argument against physicalism because Jackson equivocates between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge of facts. According to Tye, there is knowledge of things and knowledge of facts. Knowledge of things, also known as knowledge by acquaintance, is not reducible to knowledge of facts. Knowledge by acquaintance requires experience. Before her release, Mary knows all the facts about redness, but she has never experienced red. Since she has never experienced red she lacks knowledge by acquaintance of red. What she acquires when she sees red for the first time is knowledge by acquaintance of red. Red is a property of mind-independent *physical* objects like tomatoes and strawberries. By being acquainted with this property in her experience she comes to have new knowledge about the world, namely knowledge by acquaintance of that property. So Mary does acquire new knowledge of a physical property, and that new knowledge is no threat to physicalism. Thus, Tye rejects Jackson's view because Tye thinks there are two types of knowledge and Jackson's view doesn't account for these two types of knowledge.

One way that Tye's account respects Jackson's view is that he accepts the new knowledge Mary acquires is knowledge of a new property. The difference is that for Jackson, this property is a non-physical mental property, a quale, that could only be known by being in a mental state that has that property, and thus, for Jackson, Mary learned a new fact by having a new property. By contrast, for

Tye, this property is a physical property of mind-independent objects and Mary acquires new knowledge of this property by being acquainted with it. Thus, in Tye's view, Mary's new knowledge is not factual knowledge because it is not propositional knowledge.

As I said earlier in this chapter, Tye departs from other acquaintance theorists by conceiving of acquaintance as a representation instead of a relation. If Tye's acquaintance response to the knowledge argument is going to hold water, we must examine how such a theory of representational content fleshes out the nature of acquaintance. It is to that question we now turn.

## Chapter 3: The Need for Perceptual Contact

### 3.1 Introduction

As we saw in the last chapter, Michael Tye claims that to be acquainted with something one must experience it. This invites inquiry into Tye's views on perceptual experience. In particular, we may ask, are his commitments about perceptual experience compatible with the acquaintance hypothesis? In this chapter, we will attempt to answer this question by spelling out in detail Tye's commitments with respect to perceptual experience. Our focus will be on two aspects, his theory of perceptual content, and his views on phenomenal character. After laying out each of these aspects, I will raise some challenges to the viability of combining these aspects with Tye's theory of acquaintance that we spelled out in the last chapter. I will suggest that it is not obvious that Tye's views on perception are compatible with his acquaintance hypothesis. In the chapter four, I will suggest an alternative and argue that the motivations Tye cites for adopting the positions he does are actually motivations for embracing a relationist alternative. Before that though, we need to set out Tye's main views of perception and also the motivations he cites for those views.

### 3.2 The Content of Experience

Michael Tye develops a theory of perceptual content called the Singular When Filled thesis (hereon SWF). According to Tye, all perceptual experiences have a representational content. That means that all experiences represent the world as being some way. A veridical experience, for instance, is veridical just in case the world is the way experience represents it to be.

The SWF thesis includes the further claim that the objects are literally constituents of the content, at least in case of veridical and illusory experience. The content does not merely represent that, for instance, there is *a* glass of milk on the desk in front of me, but that *that* particular glass of milk is on my desk. In cases of veridical experience (and in cases of illusory experience), the actual singular object—that is, the particular glass of milk— is a constituent of the content.

Tye contrasts this with forms of representational theories of perceptual content such as Martin Davies theory (Tye, 2009, 81). On views such as Davies, the content is not singular, but existentially quantified (Davies 1992). That is, the experience represents a state of affairs that does not make reference to the particular objects. Rather, it represents the world as containing some object with such and such properties. For instance, according to philosophers like Davies who think the content of experience is existentially quantified, an experience of a glass of milk on my desk represents that there is a glass of milk on my desk. It does not refer to *that particular* glass of milk that is on my desk.

Tye claims that this existential approach to representational content will not work because it does not account for what he calls the particularity of our experience. By this he means that the contents of experience contain particular objects. He makes prominent use of cases of perceptual illusion to highlight this point. Recall the case of the illusory cube that we discussed in the last chapter. In that case, it looks to you as if there is a red cube in front of you. Unbeknownst to you, there is a mirror right in front of you that is reflecting the cube, so the cube is actually behind and to the right of you. Furthermore, the cube is actually white but there is a red light behind you being shone on the cube, making it appear red. The result is that you misperceive what is actually a white cube located behind

you for a red cube located in front of you. On the existential thesis, according to Tye, this situation is accounted for by the fact that the content of your experience is inaccurate because it represents a red cube in front of you, and there is really no such situation. However, Tye points out, this leaves out a crucial point about this situation. It is not just that your experience represents the world inaccurately, it is that it misrepresents *that* cube. The reason your experience is inaccurate, Tye argues, is not because it misrepresents some state of affairs, although that is true too. Rather, it is because it misrepresents a particular object in the world. It misrepresents that particular cube's location and colour. Let us call this the particularity of experience. By that I mean that experience has particularity to it in that it represents particular objects in the world, not just general states of affairs. Tye thinks that the existential thesis of representationalism cannot account for this particularity, no matter how sophisticated you make the existential content (2009, 80). Tye argues that the only way to account for the particularity of experience is to allow that particular objects literally enter into the contents of the experience.

Tye's SWF theory aims to redress this shortcoming of the existential thesis. It does so by having veridical perceptions result in a singular proposition which has a particular object as its constituent. As Tye puts it,

Visual experiences have a singular content or at least putatively singular content. They simply do not present the world to us in the way that the existential thesis requires. There is a particularity in our experience which the existential thesis fails to capture fully (94).

What does it mean then, to say that the content of perception is singular *when filled*? It means that the perceptual content of an experience is a singular proposition only when a particular object enters into, and thereby *fills* the slot in the content of the experience. Under Tye's SWF thesis, a particular object enters

into the content both in cases of veridical and illusory experience. For instance, in the case of the misperceived cube, the content of that experience was illusory because it falsely represented that cube as being red and in front of you. Nevertheless, that particular object—the cube—entered into the content of that experience, even though the properties ascribed to it were incorrect.

On the SWF thesis, hallucinatory experiences are different than veridical and illusory experiences in that hallucinatory experiences do not have singular content. Consider the following case given by Tye: imagine you are reading a book in the garden and you see a particular china frog. You think to yourself, ‘that china frog is very ugly’, and then look back at your book and continue reading. A few moments later, you look up again, see the china frog, and again think to yourself ‘that china frog is very ugly’. Unbeknownst to you however, a demon has played a trick on you. The demon has removed the china frog from the garden, and yet affected your nervous system such that it still looks like there is that same china frog to you. How can perceptual experience have singular contents if in one case there is an object and in another there is no object but there seems to be? Tye says that the second content, where there is no object, is “gappy”.

The content [of the second experience] is just like the first except that where the first has a concrete object in it, the second has a gap. The two contents, thus, have a common structure. This structure may be conceived of as having a slot in it for an object. In the case of the first content, the slot is filled by the china frog. In the case of the second content, the slot is empty. I shall call such structures content schemas (Tye, 2009, 81).

Tye’s content schemas are structurally identical to Russell’s propositional functions. Russell first introduced the term ‘propositional function’ in something like its contemporary sense (Mares 2014). According to Russell, a propositional function is “an expression whose containing one or more undetermined

constituents, such that, when values are assigned to these constituents, the expression becomes a proposition" (1919a, 156). This is to say that when a propositional function takes an object a proposition results, but until such an argument is given for the undetermined constituent it is neither true nor false. It is only once an object is given that a proposition results and it becomes evaluable as true or false. Examples of propositional functions are expressions like 'x is a human'. The expression is not truth-evaluable until some object replaces the variable. If we replaced x with 'Socrates', then the proposition 'Socrates is a human' would result.

Thus, as Russell says, "a propositional function standing all alone may be taken to be a mere schema, a mere shell, an empty receptacle for meaning, not something already significant" (1919a, 157). Tye's content schemas provide for a gap, that is an empty slot. Thus, we can see that Russell's notion of propositional function is formally identical to Tye's content schemas.

In perceptual experiences then, according to Tye, the content schemas are shared across cases of veridical, illusory and hallucinatory experiences. That is, the contents of these experiences share a structure, though they differ in what their contents are. When an object fills the gap, a singular proposition results. When it doesn't, as in the case of hallucination, a singular proposition does not result:

One natural way to conceive of the relevant SWF schemas is on the model of Russellian singular propositions having slots in place of objects. When the slot is filled by a seen object, a Russellian singular proposition results (Tye, 2009, 82).

Hence the name Singular *When Filled* thesis of perceptual content<sup>7</sup>. Although they share a content structure, cases of veridical and hallucinatory experiences do not have the same content. One has particular objects as part of it, and the other does not:

[SWF] is a form of disjunctivism in that it concedes that the content of visual experience in the hallucinatory case is different from the content of visual experience in the veridical case. At the level of content itself, there is indeed no common factor. For each experience, there is but a single admissible content, but this content is different in veridical and in hallucinatory cases (Tye, 2009, 94).

Thus, Tye argues that he is able to hold onto the particularity of experience by using his SWF thesis.

Tye is offering his SWF thesis as a way to hold onto the particularity of experience because in cases of veridical and illusory experience, we are in “perceptual contact” with particular objects in our environment in that the objects are constituents of the content. Thus, though veridical and illusory experiences differ in that the former represents accurately a certain particular object having properties while the latter represents a certain particular object having properties it doesn't have, they nevertheless are similar in that they have particular objects among their constituents. Thus, they both differ from cases of hallucination where there is no particular object in the content of experience.

Tye's SWF thesis is a “disjunctivist” approach to perceptual content that is meant to hold onto the idea that perception puts us in “contact” with mind-

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that, though Tye thinks the contents of perception should be analyzed in terms of Russellian singular propositions, Tye does not think it is plausible that *thoughts* should be too. According to Tye, there is a fineness of grain to thoughts that Russellian singular propositions cannot explain. (2009, 208). Thus, according to Tye, while the contents of perception may be singular propositions, the contents of thoughts are not necessarily.

independent objects. Later, I will present some worries that the SWF thesis of content does not in fact do justice to the particularity of experience. Before coming to those worries though, we need to look at a worry Tye himself think puts pressure on his view. This is the problem of veridical hallucination.

### 3.3. The Problem of Veridical Hallucination

Tye admits that a major worry for his SWF thesis as it stands is that it seems unable to cope with cases of veridical hallucinations. Veridical hallucinations are cases where a hallucination represents the world correctly. For example, imagine the following case: in front of you there is a red bouncy ball resting on the floor. You are looking right at the ball and thus see the ball and that it is red, bouncy, at rest, and so on. Furthermore, imagine that, as you are looking at the ball, an evil demon begins to affect your brain. The demon affects your brain in such a way that you no longer can see the ball (e.g. the light reflected from the ball and onto your retina is somehow stopped at the retina or not processed by your brain in some way). At the same time however, the demon causes your brain to function in such a way that it *seems to you* as if you are still seeing the ball (that is, he excites the synapses usually active during cases of seeing red balls). Thus, from your point of view, you notice no difference. One moment you are looking at a red ball, the next minute you a hallucinating a red ball, but the transition is seamless—you are not aware that any change has taken place.

In such a case as this, the hallucination is veridical because it represents that there is a red bouncy ball in front you, and *there is in fact* a red bouncy ball in front of you. But it is a hallucination because you are not actually seeing *that* ball, because the demon is preventing that from occurring. This is because, on the SWF thesis, if the object is not a constituent part of the content of experience, then one

does not experience the object. Thus you are not having a visual experience of *that* ball and thus you are not *perceiving* that ball. Nevertheless, the content of the experience is, at least *prima facie*, accurate in the sense that it represents the world being some way, and the world is that way. Therefore, the hallucination is veridical.

Michael Tye's SWF theory seems to struggle to respect the intuition that the hallucination experienced is veridical. Veridical hallucination puts pressure on the SWF thesis because in order for the hallucination to be veridical, it must accurately represent the way the world is, but if hallucinations do not have particular objects as their constituents, then, according to Tye, the content of a veridical hallucination cannot be singular, but rather, must be general. So if we agree that there can be cases of veridical hallucination, then this is problematic for the SWF thesis because there cannot be *only* content that is singular when filled. Consequently, one might then conclude that, even if we grant that the content of experience is singular in cases of perception, there must be another level of content that is general or existential in order to account for veridical hallucinations.

Tye recognizes and addresses this problem of veridical hallucinations. He argues that we should not be persuaded to adopt another layer of existential content on top of singular content. Instead, a proper understanding of "gappy" content can account for veridical hallucination. Here is how he phrases it:

My visual experience has gappy content—a content with a gap in it where a seen object should go along with such properties as blueness, roundness, and bounciness. But this gappy content disposes me to believe that there is something blue, round, and bouncing. Cases of veridical hallucination are veridical, then, only to the extent that the visual experiences they involve dispose their subjects to form true beliefs. The experiences

themselves, however, are falsidical, or at best neither true nor false (2009, 92).

Tye notes there are two brief caveats to this claim. First, it does not entail that if something appears *P* to me, then I do believe that *P*. The second caveat is that Tye refuses to offer an analysis of how to cash out the disposition. The reason for the first caveat is that otherwise the proposal is too strong. Evidence Tye cites for this is the Muller-Lyer Illusion where something appears *P* but we don't believe that *P*. But if we went on the content of the experience alone, we might have believed that *P*. As for the second caveat, Tye argues that explaining dispositions can be done, but he does not offer a particular way to do it.

According to Tye, the upshot of his SWF view of veridical hallucinations is it makes sense of the intuitive idea that things can visually appear to me to be a certain way in the sense that it disposes me to believe things are that way without that way being part of the content. For example, in looking around my living room, my experience may represent various objects such as a sofa, a bookcase, and a coffee-table. This content can dispose me to believe that there are fewer objects than 100, even though I do not have a thought with a numerical content. Nor does that content have to attach to my visual experience itself as visual contents, according to Tye. Tye claims “the relevant contents are *potential* cognitive contents and not actual visual contents of my experience” (Tye, 2009, 92). The proposal Tye is making is that there can be contents of thoughts and beliefs that are not part of the content of a perceptual experience, but are nevertheless dependent in some way on the visual experience.

We can perhaps gloss this dependence either as causal or justificatory. This epistemic gloss is going beyond what Tye himself claims, but it is perhaps a

natural way to spell out his view. We can then say, Tye may have meant that certain experiences, in certain circumstances, may cause me to believe certain things; or, certain experiences, in certain circumstances, may provide justification for certain beliefs. The gappy content does not actually have the same content that the belief has, but nevertheless the belief content in some way depends on the content or the perceptual experience.

The general shape of Tye's response seems on the right track. For in cases of hallucination, something *seeming* some way is an epistemic notion. *Seeming* is not necessarily a notion tied to perceptual appearance. So, though the ways things *seem* does not match the representational content of the experience, things can nevertheless *seem* to be a certain way.

Are there other issues with this approach to veridical hallucinations? One worry you might have is that if hallucinations are understood as propositional functions (that is, "content-schemas"), then they are not the sorts of things that are truth-evaluable. For, if there is no object in the case of hallucination, then a proposition does not result. Consequently, the propositional function cannot map an object to a truth value because there is no object. If the propositional function cannot map the object to a truth value, then there is no proposition that results to be truth-evaluable. If there is no truth-evaluable proposition in the experience, then the experience cannot be evaluated as either true or false. If the experience cannot be evaluated as true or false, how does it have the potential to cause or justify truth-evaluable thought contents?

The problem with this objection is that Tye could argue that the subject of the veridical hallucination has internalist grounds for being justified in having the beliefs he does. That is, the justification need not come from the external mind-

independent objects. As I mentioned above, the *seemings* of hallucination can be given an epistemic gloss. And if that is right, then the beliefs a subject has from a hallucination need not be justified or caused by the contents of experience. This fits well with Tye's claim that hallucinations can be understood as "at best, neither true nor false" (2009, 92). Thus, as Tye claims,

It may be replied that what I am calling "gappy propositions" or "gappy contents" for cases of hallucination are not really contents at all, on the grounds that they are not truth-evaluable or accuracy-evaluable. But this would be too hasty. As I noted earlier, the thought that this is a china frog is plausibly classified as false in the case that there is no china frog even though it has a gappy content. Why not take the same view for hallucinatory experiences (and for essentially the same reasons)? This also fits with the intuitive idea that hallucinatory experiences are inaccurate: the world is not as it seems to the person who is hallucinating (2009, 82).

Of course, in cases of veridical hallucination the hallucination is accurate. Nevertheless, Tye's point is that his notion of gappy content respects the plausible intuition that hallucinations are accurate/inaccurate. According to Tye, we don't need to posit something like another layer of existential content on top of singular content to explain the intuition that hallucinations are accurate/inaccurate. The gappy content disposes me to have certain beliefs about the world. It is because the content is gappy that it is a hallucination, and it is because this gappy content disposes me to have true beliefs that it is a veridical hallucination. The SWF theory then, can account for veridical hallucinations.

This detour into veridical hallucination may seem unrelated to the acquaintance hypothesis that Tye suggests helps us solve the Mary puzzle, but as will be shown below, gappy contents seem to conflict with knowledge by acquaintance. Moreover, the motivations Tye cites for gappy contents, namely holding onto the particularity of experience, is better motivation, or so I will argue,

for a relationist approach to perception. While it may seem that this examination of why Tye posits both the SWF thesis and gappy contents is unrelated to the knowledge argument, I will show below that it has consequences that for the acquaintance hypothesis to the knowledge argument.

### 3.4 The Phenomenal Character of Experience

According to Tye, what Mary is acquainted with when she sees red for the first time is the phenomenal character of red. What is phenomenal character? Originally, Tye (1995) held the view that the phenomenal character is *identical* to the representational content of experience. Recently, Tye (2009) has rejected this identity claim and thus his old position of “representationalism” (Tye 2009). The argument he gives for rejecting it has important consequences for the acquaintance hypothesis. So we will look at the argument briefly.

Tye formulates his argument against representationalism as follows:

[Premise One:] No veridical and (non-veridical, non *de re*) hallucinatory experience share the same representational content.

[Premise Two:] Some veridical and (non-veridical, non *de re*) hallucinatory experiences have the same phenomenal character.

Therefore,

[Conclusion:] Phenomenal character is not the same as representational content

(Tye, 2009, 112).

Tye argues that, what I have labelled “Premise One”, follows from the SWF theory of perception laid out above. A non-veridical and non *de re* hallucination would be something such as visually experiencing that there is a glass of milk before me on

the desk, when in reality there is no such glass on my desk. This is different than a case of seeing a glass of milk on my desk where there is actually a glass of milk on my desk.<sup>8</sup> In this latter case, the experience is veridical because the glass of milk exists as my experience represents it to be, and it is *de re* because that particular glass of milk enters into the contents of my experience. Thus, these two experiences have different representational contents because in the case of hallucination what is represented has no glass of milk as a constituent, whereas in the case of seeing the milk one does have a glass of milk as its constituent.

Premise Two, Tye argues, is the best way to account for phenomenal indistinguishability. By phenomenal indistinguishability I mean that, while it may be true that what the experience represents in cases of hallucination differs from what is represented in veridical experience, the two types of experience nevertheless seem the same from the subject's point of view. That is, from introspection alone, the way things appear in each case cannot be distinguished.

It is worth noting now, that as it stands, this view seems problematic because it has the consequence that being acquainted with an object does not affect the phenomenal character of the experience. This means that what is it like to see a particular red strawberry is not effected by acquaintance with that object—with *that* strawberry. This is because the object is part of the experience *only* at the level of content. But the phenomenal character can be the same across cases of veridical and hallucinatory experience, that is, when there both is and is not an object as part of the content, respectively. If the phenomenal character can be the same both when there is an object as part of the experience and when there is not an object as

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<sup>8</sup> I use the term "seeing" factively. That is, when a subject "sees" some object *O*, that object is taken to exist and the experience veridical. "Experience", is used broadly to cover veridical cases of "seeing", along with illusions and hallucinations.

part of the experience, then the object plays no role in determining the phenomenal character. I will explore this objection more below. For now, we need to continue spelling out the details of Tye's view of phenomenal character.

As discussed above, Tye rejects his old view of phenomenal character, but what does Tye now think phenomenal character is and how does he think we come to be acquainted with it? According to Tye's new view, phenomenal character is a complex property of objects in the world:

The phenomenal character of the experience of red is a thing (although not a concrete thing). Phenomenal characters can be compared. Some are more similar to one another than they are to others. In talking of my knowing the phenomenal character of a given experience, I am talking of knowing a certain thing—something you too can know. (Tye, 2009, 117).

Tye further explains what he means when he argues that phenomenal character is a *thing*. More specifically, he says,

the phenomenal character of experience is out there in the world. It is not a property of the experience at all. It is a complex of properties represented by the experience. In being aware of the external qualities, we are aware of phenomenal character. We are confronted by it (Tye, 2009, 119).

Thus, according to Tye, phenomenal character is a complex of properties of a mind-independent material object. For those familiar with Tye's arguments for representationalism, this might seem counter-intuitive. Phenomenal character is standardly taken to be 'what it is like' for a subject to undergo an experience. In being conscious, so the standard theory goes, the subject instantiates certain properties, namely 'what it is like' to be the conscious subject. These are often termed 'phenomenal properties'. Furthermore, experiences are usually taken to be

events which the subject undergoes. From these claims, the standard argument is that:

Phenomenal properties of the subject of that experience are fixed by the properties of those events. 'Phenomenal character' is then introduced as a term for that property of an experience which determines the phenomenal properties of the subject of that experience—which determines, that is, what it's like for the subject of the experience (Speaks, 2013, 468).

Speaks makes these claims in a discussion of Tye's (2009) view of phenomenal character. Speaks takes this to be the general picture to which representational accounts of perception are committed, and accuses Tye of departing significantly from it. But whatever theory of perception one adopts, Speaks is right that the term 'phenomenal character' has most usually been applied to subjects, not objects, both by representationalists and their dissenters. Moreover, since the meaning of "phenomenal" is to appear, and if there is no subject for this to appear to, then one might wonder what is the point of talking about phenomenal properties at all? This seems to be Speaks (2013) frustration and it is not without warrant. At a minimum, Tye needs to offer plausible reasons for using a well-worn term like "phenomenal character" in a new and very different way.

So why does Tye think phenomenal character is 'out there in the world'? His main motivation for this, he says, is his commitment to the transparency of experience.

[Transparency] tells us that in the case of perceptual experiences, the only qualities of which we are introspectively aware are qualities of external things if they are qualities of anything at all. But intuitively, we are aware of phenomenal character when we introspect. The conclusion to draw is that the phenomenal character of a perceptual experience consists in, and is no more than, the complex of qualities the experience represents. Thus, the phenomenal character of the experience of red just is red. In being

aware of red, I am aware of what it is like to experience red, since what it is like to experience red is simply red (Tye, 2009, 119).

What Tye is denying in this passage is the idea that when we introspect our experiences we can come to be aware of properties of those experiences themselves. Suppose, for instance, you are looking at a giant Christmas tree at Rockefeller Centre in New York City. You are amazed and speechless at how beautiful and large the tree is. What it is like for you to undergo that experience is truly remarkable for you. Now, if someone asked you, why do you feel that your experience is so remarkable? What is it about that experience that makes it remarkable? A natural way to respond is to introspect your experience in order to say what is so amazing. But to introspect your experience you must attend to the objects and the properties your experience is of. Perhaps after a few moments of introspection, you reply 'it is the perfect combination of the colours of the Christmas lights, coupled with the magnificence of the size of the tree, that makes this experience so amazing'. But in so doing, all that you are reporting is properties of the objects themselves, and presumably this is because all that you can do to know what your experience is like via introspection is to attend to the external objects and properties your experience is of. Your experience is transparent to the objects you are experiencing.

Now, If the phenomenal character of an experience is 'out there in the world', and if veridical experiences are singular propositions, then the phenomenal character seems to be playing the predicate role of the schematic portion of a singular proposition. For instance, in seeing a red strawberry, the propositional content is 'this strawberry is red'. In giving the logical form of this proposition, the particular strawberry would be the subject—that is, the singular object onto which the property of redness is attributed. By contrast, the redness is

what is represented by the propositional function 'is red'. But if this is right, if the phenomenal character is represented by the propositional function, and if what we are acquainted with are objects which play the subject role in the proposition, then the question arises, how can we be acquainted with a property that is attributed to the object, since it is the *object* that Tye's theory of acquaintance tells us we have *thing-knowledge* of?

One suggestion might be that a single experience may be analysable into propositions with different logical form. In seeing a red strawberry, the experience could be represented by a singular proposition where the object we are acquainted with is the material object (that is, the strawberry). But the experience could also be represented by a proposition where the object of the singular proposition is the property itself. In this case, it would be the redness of the strawberry that is the subject of the proposition.

One reason Tye might think this is that he argues an experience must be epistemically enabling with respect to the item in question in order to have acquaintance with that item. That is to say, so long as one can wonder, 'what is that?' with respect to an item, one can have knowledge of that thing and therefore one is acquainted with that thing. Thus, if a given experience is such that either the material object, like the strawberry, or the property of the object, like the redness, are epistemically enabling, then the subject has acquaintance with that item.

If this is right, then Tye seems able to avoid the worry as to how we can be acquainted with properties that are represented in the predicate position of the singular proposition. Thus, in having properties capable of being represented both in the subject and the predicate portion of a singular proposition, Tye has a

straightforward answer to our ability to be acquainted with the phenomenal character of colours.

In sum, Tye's view is that phenomenal character is a property of things. In seeing things in the world you are acquainted with particular things and their properties. By experiencing a particular thing, you are in direct contact with it. This applies as much to particular instances of phenomenal characters as it does to particular objects like tomatoes because phenomenal characters are properties of objects. Those particulars enter into the content of your experience such that you can form *de re* thoughts about them. Thus you can be acquainted with both particular objects as well as properties like phenomenal character.

### 3.5 Challenges to Tye's view:

I have two challenges to Tye's view of the SWF thesis and its coherence with *knowledge by acquaintance*. Each of these challenges is posed as a question that shows how Tye's view, as it stands, is insufficient because his view does not have the resources to give an answer to the question posed.

*First Challenge:* Is there a tension between the fact that knowledge by acquaintance is non-propositional, and the fact that the content of veridical perception is a singular proposition? *Prima facie*, if acquaintance requires experience, and experience has a structured content that is a singular proposition, then how can the knowledge acquired by perception be non-propositional?

Tye claims that the purpose of his SWF thesis is to put us in "direct contact" with the objects of perception. However, that the perception has a singular proposition as its content does not seem adequate to capture the idea that

perception puts us in contact with mind-independent objects. Of course, the proposition or its determination must say how the object gets picked out, and a singular proposition might always pick out the correct object—it might always represent *that* particular object. But picking out the right object is not the same as being in perceptual contact with that object. Compare this with the idea that names always pick out the same person. In a proposition such as ‘David Cameron is Prime Minister’, the proposition is singular and has that particular person as its constituent. In the proposition, the name represents the particular object. But that is not obviously the same as the way perception makes us aware of particulars. The objects of a thought or assertion like ‘David Cameron is the Prime Minister’ has that proposition as its object. The proposition is the thing we believe or assert. And that proposition represents David Cameron. But when I am looking at David Cameron, when I see him, the object of my seeing is not a proposition, but a person. Propositions are abstract entities that are invisible. So it can’t be that the propositions are the objects of perception. Moreover, knowledge by acquaintance is a state that constitutes this awareness of this object. That’s what Tye mean by direct contact. But the issue then becomes how does this constitute object awareness? The awareness isn't the propositional content, only an aspect of the content, so there must be some refinement on how we get awareness of an aspect of the content. But how does it do this? By setting things up like this, Tye is assuming an explanatory commitment for his view, but he never discharges that assumption.

*Second Challenge:* How is the phenomenal character fixed? It seems unspecified by Tye how the phenomenal character gets fixed.

Recall that Tye's view is that when we perceive an object and its attributes, we are acquainted with the object. This object, for instance the tomato in front of me, is in the subject role of the singular proposition. Its attributes—its shade of red, its circular shape, and so on—are specified by the predicates. We can be acquainted with the object without knowing or seeing any of its attributes. Does this mean we can be acquainted with the object without being acquainted with any of the attributes? Presumably this is so. Can we also be acquainted with the object and its attributes at the same time? It seems like Tye has to agree to this too because he says we are acquainted with the phenomenal character, and the phenomenal character is a property. But if that is the case, then the object is playing no role in fixing the phenomenal character.

But if this is right, then what are we to make of the case of "Experienced Mary"? "Experienced Mary", recall, is where she is still locked in her black-and-white room and has not seen colours yet. We show her a red patch but don't tell her it is red and so she doesn't know it is red. Nevertheless, she is acquainted with the phenomenal character of red (according to Tye). In this case, what is the object and what is the attribute? There is just, it seems, the colour patch. But he says she is acquainted with the phenomenal character of red in this case. If the object plays no role in fixing the phenomenal character, then the phenomenal character of red can't be the object, it has to be the attribute. This seems strange because it seems like in being shown a patch of red, Mary would plausibly wonder 'what is that?' (Tye's 'epistemically enabling' criteria). But if she is wondering 'what is that?' with respect to this red patch, it seems like the red patch is the subject in that thought. But the object that is in the subject role, we said, plays no role in fixing the phenomenal character. So the red patch can't be in the subject role of that thought. So then what is in the subject role and what are we acquainted with? So should we

say we are acquainted with the attribute? but of what object? of a patch? Is that the object we are acquainted with?

These are the two challenges that I think Tye's view faces. To recap, I asked (i) how can you be acquainted with objects and have non-propositional knowledge of them if perception is propositional and (ii) how is the phenomenal character determined? They are problematic in that they show that Tye's views on perception are in tension with his view on knowledge by acquaintance. However, I don't think these challenges are necessarily devastating. There are perhaps non-problematic things Tye could say in response. But, as it stands, Tye's view seems too vague to withstand evaluation. We need to know more about how the phenomenal character is and is not fixed in these cases. If he wants to defend an acquaintance response to the knowledge argument, then he has to answer these challenges. Until then, one cannot fairly evaluate the plausibility of Tye's views. In the next chapter, we will consider an alternative way of handling these challenges by looking at naive realist theories of perception.

## Chapter 4: A Relationist Alternative

### 4.1 Introduction

We ended the last chapter by noting some challenges Tye's theory of perceptual content faces if it is to be compatible with his theory of knowledge by acquaintance. In particular, we questioned if Tye could adequately explain (i) how we have non-propositional knowledge and (ii) how the phenomenal character is fixed. Both of these worries stemmed from Tye's theory of perceptual content. We noted furthermore that the motivation Tye cites for developing his SWF thesis of perceptual content was that it seemed to explain the way perception puts us in "direct contact" with mind-independent objects. In this chapter, I am going to argue that (i) the relationist theory of perception offers a better way to accommodate the idea that perception puts us in "direct contact" with the world, (ii) that the relationist can give a straightforward account of how we can have non-propositional knowledge, and (iii) the relationist account gives an explanation of how we can account for our acquaintance with the phenomenal character of the world. I will also suggest that (iv) the relationist better respects the intuitions guiding Jackson's knowledge argument for qualia. My main goal is to demonstrate that, if we want to be acquaintance theorists, then we should embrace a relationist theory of perception. Moreover, the relationist respects the central insights of Jackson's knowledge argument in a way that Tye's SWF thesis does not.

## 4.2 Relationism

In this section, I define the relationist view of perception and highlight how it is similar to early acquaintance theorists, like Russell, view on perception. I also briefly mention how it differs from Tye's views on perception.

To begin, let us get a clear working definition of the relationist theory of perception. A recent definition is as follows:

When one genuinely perceives one's environment, the phenomenal, conscious character of one's experience is constituted, at least in part, by the mind-independent aspects of one's environment that one perceives: the concrete mind-independent individuals, their properties, and the events they partake in. In this view, the conscious perceptual experience you have when you perceive the world is relational. The mind-independent entities you perceive are constituents of that relation, and hence constituents of your experience (Soteriou, 2016, 65).

And with respect to the phenomenal character of experience, another prominent relationist defines it thus:

On a relational view, the qualitative character of the experience is constituted by the qualitative character of the scene perceived...[on this view] experience of an object is a simple relation holding between the perceiver and the object (Campbell, 2002, 114-115).

From these passages we can see that, according to the relationist, perception is a relation holding between the perceiver and the mind-independent entities.<sup>9</sup> On the

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<sup>9</sup> One final note on terminology. It is important to note that I will be switching between the terms mind-independent "objects" and mind-independent "entities" throughout this chapter. I use the word "entities" as ontologically neutral and broadly to cover (at least) objects, properties, events, while I use "objects" for mind-independent particular concrete objects. This distinction is important because relationists hold that not only objects but in general entities can be what we bear

relationist view, perception *presents* mind-independent objects, it does not *re-present* them.

The relationist view of perception is similar to the original theory of knowledge by acquaintance, first proposed by Russell, in that both take perception to be a *presentational relation*. As I outlined in chapter two, according to Russell acquaintance is a direct relation between the subject and its object. He held that acquaintance is the *converse* of presentation (Russell, 1914). On Russell's view, when an object is *presented* to the subject, a subject is acquainted with that object:

Since we have decided that experience is constituted by a relation, it will be better to employ a less neutral word; we shall employ synonymously the two words "acquaintance" and "awareness", generally the former. Thus when *A* experiences an object *O*, we shall say that *A* is acquainted with *O* (Russell, 1913, 35).

Thus, on both the relationist's view and on Russell's original theory of acquaintance, experience is a relation where entities are presented to the subject. Moreover, those entities are constituents of your experience because you bear a relation to them.

This is in contrast with Tye, who holds that the objects of perception are constituents of your experience *because* they are constituents of the representational content. But according to the relationist, the mind-independent objects that a subject perceives are not constituents of the experience *because* they are part of the representational content, because perception is not a *representation*

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a relation to in experience. By contrast, on Tye's SWF thesis, it is *objects* that fill the "gap" in the content of perception, and therefore are what we are, according to Tye, in "contact" with.

of mind-independent objects. Rather, according to the relationist, the mind-independent objects that one perceives are constituents of that experience *because* they are constituents of the *relation*. Thus, according to the relationist, it is in being so related that a subject perceives mind-independent objects.

This also differs from Tye's view in that, for the relationist, the object of the relation *constitutes* the phenomenal character. That means that unless one bears a certain relation to the mind-independent entities, one cannot have the same phenomenal character. More specifically, on the relationist account, experience is a three place relation holding between, a subject, a point of view, and an object. This is important because obviously the same object can look a different way to the same subject just so long as his view point has changed. Thus, one can think of the viewpoint as *the mode* under which the object is presented. For instance, a particular building *B* may look, to subject *S*, to be a particular shade of white *W*, from a view of 10 meters away,  $V_{10}$ . From a viewpoint that is 50 meters away,  $V_{50}$ , the same building *B* may look to subject *S* to have a different shade of white or perhaps even a different hue. This different hue affects the phenomenal character of the experience. So, the determining of the phenomenal character depends on a three place relation that holds between the subject, the object, and the point of view to which the experience is relativized.

The upshot of the relationist view is that when I perceive entities in the world, the phenomenal character of that experience is constituted by the entities themselves and the relation which I stand to them. For instance, when I perceive a red strawberry, the phenomenal character of experience is constituted by the *relation* I bear to *those entities*, namely, by the relation I bear to the concrete object of the strawberry and to its property of redness. On the relationist view, it is

precisely because I bear a *relation* to an *instance of redness* that the experience has the particular phenomenal character it does have. This is important because, unlike on Tye's view where the phenomenal character can be the same across cases of hallucination and veridical experience, the phenomenal character for the relationist is affected by the *particular* mind-independent entities one bears a relation to. The phenomenal character of my experience is determined by the entities and the relation I bear to them. This explains why Mary could not know what the phenomenal character of red was like until she stood in the relation of visual experiencing red. I will elaborate more on this over the next few sections.

### 4.3 Relationism and Tye's SWF Thesis

In this section, I show why the relationist does not face the challenges Tye's SWF thesis does. In particular, I show how the relationist can explain how perception puts subjects in "direct contact" with mind-independent objects, and how the relationist view of perception is not in conflict with knowledge by acquaintance.

In previous chapters, we discussed Tye's motivation to develop the SWF thesis. According to Tye, perception puts us in direct contact with objects in a way that hallucination does not. He claims that the best way to explain this is in terms of singular content. In the veridical perception, the objects of perception are constituent parts of their contents, while in hallucinations they are not. Thus, Tye glosses the issue of direct contact as an issue about singular perceptual content:

Once it is acknowledged that the content of visual experience is singular in veridical cases, it must also be acknowledged that in cases of hallucination the content (if there is one) is not singular, for in these cases

there is no object with which the subject is in perceptual contact (Tye, 2009, 78).

As we saw in the last chapter, it is not clear that thinking of the contents of perception in terms of singular propositions adequately respects the idea that we are in direct contact with objects. Of course, as Tye argues, using the SWF thesis, the particular objects are literally part of those representations, at least in veridical perception, and that puts us in contact with those objects. But that is not the same as saying that the subject is in *direct* contact with the object. For instance, consider reading a newspaper report with a singular proposition about David Cameron, such as “David Cameron steps down as Prime Minister”. The newspaper has this singular proposition and the content of that proposition represents a *particular* person. But that is not the same as *perceiving* David Cameron step down. To see him is to be in direct contact with him in a way that reading a newspaper is not.

With the relationist account, direct contact can be explained in a more straightforward manner. As the quote from Campbell above highlights, for the relationist the experience just *is* the simple relation that puts us in contact with the mind-independent objects. Consequently, objects are *presented*, not *re-presented* in experience. In seeing David Cameron, I bear a relation to that particular object and its properties. I am in direct perceptual contact with these mind-independent entities because they are the objects that I am directly related to by the simple relation of perception. They are *presented* to me in experience. Thus, to explain how we bear direct contact with mind independent objects, we do not need to give an elaborate theory of representational content that is singular with objects as constituents. By conceiving of experience as a simple relation, we avoid the problem of how a representation can be the type of thing that puts us in contact with the objects. On top of avoiding the problems a theory of singular content

faces, the relationist theory also has the virtue of the simplicity of the theory and the straightforward nature of the explanation. If we can explain direct contact in a simple and straightforward manner, then we should. With the relationist theory of perception we can. So, I argue, we should.

Similar reasoning applies to the issue of non-propositional knowledge. In developing his theory of knowledge by acquaintance, Tye argued that knowledge by acquaintance is a form of non-propositional and non-conceptual knowledge. It is knowledge of things, not of facts. The challenge of this approach for Tye was explaining how a subject could have such knowledge when the perceptual state that was supposed to enable that knowledge was itself propositional.

On the relationist view, experience is not constituted by having a representational content that represents things. Rather, experience is a simple and direct relation to mind-independent objects. We have knowledge of things by being related to them in perception. There is no special worry about how such non-propositional knowledge is gained in perception because relationist does not think perception is fundamentally a representational state. As such, the relationist account does not face the problem of giving an account of non-propositional representational content because perceptual states are not representational states. Since they are not representational states, there is no question of whether they are propositional representations or non-propositional representations, conceptual or non-conceptual representations.

In sum, Tye has difficulty explaining how perception puts us in direct contact with mind-independent objects and how we can have non-propositional knowledge if perceptual content is a singular proposition. Both of these problems stem from his SWF thesis. By rejecting that perception is fundamentally a

representational state, the relationist avoids these problems. Furthermore, by conceiving of the experience as a relation of presentation, the relationist has a straightforward answer to how perception puts us in direct contact with mind-independent objects, and to how we can have knowledge by acquaintance.

#### 4.4 Relationism and the Acquaintance Relation

Relationists preserve a central insight of early acquaintance theorists like Russell, namely that perception is a *presentational* relation. But Russell was also a sense-data theorist, and his sense-data theory went hand-in-hand with his theory of acquaintance. Sense-data theory is often thought to face insuperable challenges (Tye, 2009). However, the relationist does not face the same challenges of the sense-data theorist. By accepting that experience is a relation of acquaintance, the relationist is not thereby committed to sense-data. Moreover, the differences between sense-data theorists and relationists make it possible for relationists to better explain the phenomenal character of experience, as I will explain in the next section.

As we've said, acquaintance was first introduced by Russell as a *relation*, and nearly all philosophers defending some form of acquaintance have endorsed the relational nature of acquaintance, except of course, for Tye (2009) (Russell, 1910-11; Fumerton and Hasan, 2014). Acquaintance, as it was originally understood, is a relation that obtains between a subject and an entity when that subject *experiences* that entity (Russell, 1910-11).<sup>10</sup> This experience does not *represent* the entity, but *presents* it. Experience itself is the relation (Russell, 1913). Thus, knowledge by acquaintance is acquired by a subject having certain entities

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<sup>10</sup> I use "entity" as an ontologically neutral term that covers objects, properties, and relations.

presented to them via experience. In such a situation, the subject bears a relation to the object.

I argued that it seems hard (though perhaps not impossible) to rephrase this situation in terms of representation without some loss of explanatory power. For instance, by making acquaintance representational in Tye's sense, we face the unappealing consequence that we can be acquainted with an entity even if we have never actually encountered the entity in our environment. This is because, on Tye's view, so long as the entity is *represented* in our experience, then we are acquainted with it, regardless of whether or not the entity is in our environment. This not only seems very implausible to me, but a distortion of the concept of acquaintance. The question to ask is, how can you be acquainted with something that you have never encountered in your environment? There is perhaps an explanation we could craft as to how, but in doing so we fail to respect the appeal to acquaintance in the first place.

So it seems that if we want to defend an acquaintance hypothesis to the knowledge argument, then a relationist approach to experience is the best way. On the relationist view, knowledge by acquaintance is acquired by bearing the acquaintance relation—by *experiencing*—the mind-independent entity itself. Thus, when Mary sees red for the first time, she experiences the property red and thereby has knowledge by acquaintance of red. It is knowledge she could not have had in her black-and-white room because she had not bore the right relation to colours—she had not experienced red. The knowledge she acquires is not propositional knowledge but knowledge of a thing, namely a sensible quality of the object. The relationist does not need to posit non-propositional content to explain knowledge by acquaintance precisely because experience is not fundamentally a matter of

representational content. Instead, it is a simple and direct relation to the things known. Thus, relationist theory of perception fits more naturally with the acquaintance hypothesis to the knowledge argument and with how early acquaintance theorist conceived of the nature of acquaintance.

But though the relationist view of perception preserves a central insight of early 20th century acquaintance theorists, this is not to say that relationists and early 20th century acquaintance theorists like Russell do not have differences. One major difference is that early acquaintance theorists like Russell argued we are acquainted with sense-data (among other things), while contemporary relationists reject sense-data. Sense-data theorists can be seen to face insuperable problems. Does the relationist, by embracing the idea that experience is a relation of acquaintance, face any of the same problems? I argue no, relationists do not face the same insuperable problems of sense-data theorists.

For Russell, it is sense-data that we bear a direct relation of acquaintance to, and it is these items that are constituents of our experiences. For instance, in seeing a brown table, one is not directly acquainted with the table itself, but rather by the sense-data that are *caused by* that table (Russell, 1912). As such, you can only know that table by making inferences based on the sense-data for which you are directly acquainted with.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> While it is true relationists do not endorse the ontology of sense-data, the history of sense-data is complex with sense-data theorists changing their minds about what they took the exact ontological nature of sense-data to be, so we have to be careful in spelling out the exact differences between sense-data theorists and relationists. For instance, early in the career of Russell sense-data were not considered mind-dependent data, though towards the end of his career he *had* come to think of them as mind-dependent. Likewise, early in the career of Moore *sense-data* was somewhat of a place holder for ‘whatever it is that we are acquainted with when we have experiences’, though later he moved to a view closer in line with the later views of Russell. So if we are talking about sense-data in the way early Moore and early Russell did, namely as whatever object we are acquainted with in perception (and not necessarily as mind-dependent), then it’s not clear the relationist will dissent too much from these views. See Kalderon (2012) and Martin (2015) for discussion of contemporary relationists and early sense-data theorists.

Sense-data theorists aimed to give a theory of the sense-data of acquaintance that covered *all* forms of experience, not just perception. Sense data theorists argued that the sense-data of which we are aware in cases of perception, illusion, and hallucination, are all of *the same nature*. The type of thing we are aware of in hallucination is the same type, ontologically speaking, of thing we are aware of in perception.

By contrast, relationists are committed to *experiential pluralism*, which is just the denial of experiential monism (Kalderon 2012). According to those committed to experiential pluralism, such as the relationist, while *perception* may be a sensory mode of awareness, this is not part of *the nature* of *all* sense experience. Thus, relationists differ from sense-data theorists primarily in that relationists reject the experiential monism that many sense-data theorists held.<sup>12</sup>

The upshot of the relationists rejection of experiential monism is that it avoids commitment to some form of phenomenalism that sense-data theories eventually morphed into (Kalderon 2012). Thus, rather than being related to some red sense-data that is the object with which you are acquainted—an object which is the same thing you can be related to in a case of hallucination—it is the mind-independent objects, properties, and events, that a subject bears a relation to, according to the relationist. In seeing a brown table, one is aware of a property of that particular table, namely its brownness. This instance of brownness is a property of the table, that is, of a mind-independent material object. Subjects bear a relation to *that* property, not a sense-data *caused by* the brown table. Thus, the

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<sup>12</sup> See Kalderon (2012) for more on the distinction between experiential monism and experiential pluralism.

relationist preserves a central insight of early acquaintance theorists while at the same time rejecting the questionable ontology of sense-data.

#### 4.5 Qualia and Phenomenal Character

In chapter one we discussed how Jackson's knowledge argument was supposed to show not only that physicalism was false, but that qualia exist. We also briefly discussed the differences between Jackson's conception of experience as involving qualia and Nagel's conception of experience as involving a subjective 'what it is like' element. Moreover, in discussing Tye's theory in the last few chapters, we have also explored how conceptions of experience are often framed in a debate about the phenomenal character of experience. Michael Tye argued that what Mary comes to know by acquaintance is the phenomenal character of red.

In this section, I take a closer look at the nature of qualia and phenomenal character in order to show how a relationist can, where a representationalist cannot, explain the central insights of Jackson's initial argument for qualia without thereby committing himself to non-physical mental properties. To show this, I look at the way representationalists have used the argument from transparency against qualia theorists. I then show how relationists can use this argument against representationalists too. I conclude by arguing that even though the relationists reject qualia and accept the argument from transparency, they nevertheless can preserve one of the central epistemic consequences of qualia theory. This, I suggest, makes the relationist view a more attractive position than the representationalist.

After presenting the knowledge argument, Jackson (1982) concludes there are qualia, which are non-physical. While Jackson understood qualia as features of mental states that cannot be known by knowing all the physical information, the definition and nature of qualia has since been contested, even by qualia theorists themselves.<sup>13</sup> One way qualia has been frequently thought of is as the intrinsic, non-representational properties of the subject (Soteriou 2013). Importantly, understanding them this way leaves out whether they are physical or not. Defining qualia this way is a consequence of the debates between qualia theorists and representationalists that have emerged since (but not necessarily because of) Jackson's knowledge argument. In debates between qualia theorists and representationalists, the debate has been about whether or not qualia can be explained and/or reduced to the representational contents of experience. Qualia theorists argue that they cannot, and that any theory of the phenomenal character of experience must acknowledge the contribution of these qualia make to the overall phenomenal character of the experience. By contrast, representationalist theories argue that they can be so reduced or explained.

Before turning to the debate between qualia theorists and representationalists, we need to spell out in a little more detail the view of the qualia theorist. Following Crane and French (2015), we can classify theories of perception on two levels. On the first level, a theory of perception makes a claim about what *the nature or structure* of perception fundamentally is. On the second level, a theory of perception makes a claim about how the nature or structure of perception grounds or explains the phenomenal character. In grouping things this way, we can get different versions of representationalism and qualia theories. For

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<sup>13</sup> See Tye (2015) for an essay cataloguing the different definitions. See Martin (1998) for skepticism that "qualia" picks out any unique target.

instance, a well-known qualia theory is proposed by Ned Block (1990, 2003) where he rejects the claim that the phenomenal character can be explained solely in terms of representational content. This is a claim about the second level and it differentiates his theory from many representationalist theories, such as Tye (1995) and Byrne (2001). Nevertheless, Block's theory does not deny that perception has representational content. For Block, perception is, at bottom, a non-relational representation of the world. Thus, depending on how we organize the debates, certain theories will be classified now one way, then another.

The thesis of transparency has frequently been used by representationalists to argue against qualia theorists (see especially, Harman (1990), Dretske (1995), and Tye (1995, 2002)). When the representationalist appeals to the thesis of transparency, he is doing so to defend a view about the second level of perception, not the first.<sup>14</sup> In his argument, Harman (1990), provides a classic statement of the argument from transparency. Harman claims that we must be very careful to distinguish between properties of what is represented and properties of the representation. He uses an analogy with paintings to make his point. An oil painting of a unicorn, for instance represents a unicorn with four legs. What is represented has the property of having four legs. The representation itself, that is the painting, does not have the property of having four legs. Similarly, the painting has the property of being made by oil, the unicorn does not (Harman 1990, 35). Thus, there is a distinction between the object represented and the vehicle of representation. These two things do not necessarily share the same properties.

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<sup>14</sup> By contrast, as I will urge below, the relationist can use this same appeal to transparency to argue against the representationalist about the first level.

Harman claims that mental states with representational content have a similar distinction, for instance, a visual experience of a tree represents a tree of a certain height, say ten meters. *Your experience* is not ten meters tall. It does not have that property. Nevertheless, the object represented has that property. The tree in your experience is represented as having the property of being ten meters tall.

Harman argues that mental states with representational content are *transparent* in a way that oil paintings are not:

I want to argue that she is not aware of those intrinsic features of her experience by virtue of which it has that content. Indeed, I believe that she has no access at all to the intrinsic features of her mental representation that make it a mental representation of seeing a tree. Things are different with paintings. In the case of a painting, Eloise can be aware of those features of the painting that are responsible for its being a painting of a unicorn. That is, she can turn her attention to the pattern of the paint on the canvas by virtue of which the painting represents a unicorn. 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 non-intentional features (Harman, 1990, 39).

The thesis of transparency says that what you are aware of in experiences are properties of the things *represented*, not properties of the representation. In paintings, one can be aware of the properties of the painting—the type of paint used etc.—that are used to create the representation. A similar claim is made about perception. For instance, in vision, you are not aware of the properties of the representation—the “mental paint”—only of the properties of what is represented. Thus, the thesis of transparency is that experiences are *transparent* in the sense that you ‘look through them’, so to speak, to the things represented. That is, in

experience you are not aware of the intrinsic properties of the representation, only of the properties of the things represented.

The thesis of transparency has been popular among representationalists as a way to argue against qualia theorists, and Tye has been one of the more vocal supporters of this thesis. The argument is that upon introspection you are not aware of any qualia or intrinsic non-representational properties of your experience. Therefore, 'what it is like' for you to have an experience—the phenomenal character of an experience—is explained fully in terms of the representational properties of the experience. Qualia theorists like Ned Block have denied this, arguing that you are in fact aware of “mental paint”.

Representationalists have been insistent that the argument from transparency shows that the phenomenal character of experience can be explained solely in terms of the experience's representational properties. But I think that representationalists have not followed through the argument of transparency to its full conclusion. That is, instead of thinking that the thesis of transparency shows that there are only representational properties of experience, the thesis of transparency shows that all we are aware of are mind-independent objects and their properties themselves. As Soteriou phrased the argument from transparency,

For one finds that one cannot single out introspectively the qualities of experience that one should expect to discover if the qualia theory were correct. *Rather, one instead discerns the quality that one would expect to discover if the naive realist account of the phenomenal character were correct* (Soteriou, 2016, 97, my emphasis).

The point is that introspection on our experience of the colour red not only shows that there are no qualia, but also that all we are aware of are properties of mind-independent objects. It is the colour red, a property of a mind-independent object,

that we are aware of in introspection. We are not aware of a representational content with objects as its constituents. That is a further claim that must be argued for. The representationalist assumes that if transparency showed there was no qualia, then, by default, their view would be correct. This is because both qualia theorists like Block and representationalists like Tye appear to believe that experience is at bottom a non-relational representation. But the relationist denies this. Moreover, the thesis of transparency seems to support the relationists because introspection makes us aware of mind-independent objects and their properties. It does not make us aware of any representational content. Thus, the relationist explains the phenomenology of our experience in a more accurate manner than either the qualia theorist or the representationalist.

The advantage that the relationist has over the representationalist, aside from fitting the phenomenology better, is that they can respect the epistemic role of phenomenal character of experience that the qualia theorist seems committed to. Qualia theorists claim not only that 'what it is like' to have an experience cannot be fully explained in terms of its representational content, but also that there is something distinctive about experience that we could only *know* by having that experience. What it is like to see red, they argue, can only be known by seeing red. This is present both in Jackson's version of qualia as non-physical mental features, but also in qualia theorists like Block who are reluctant to think of qualia as non-physical. Thus, qualia theorists give a certain epistemic role to qualia. The relationist accepts this epistemic role of the phenomenal character of experience, but does not accept qualia. According to the relationist,

The intuition that there is a distinctive form of knowledge that is made available to Mary when she leaves her black and white room and consciously perceives the colour red for the first time, is sound. The

intuition that the phenomenal character of Mary's experience makes available that distinctive form of knowledge is also sound. But, [the relationist] argues, reflection on the phenomenology of experience shows that the qualia theorists attempt to accommodate those intuitions fails (Soteriou, 2016, 97).

According to the relationist, the qualia theorist fails to accommodate the epistemic role of experience because they violate the thesis of transparency. While it is true that the phenomenal character has a special epistemic role, it is not true that this entails there are qualia. This is because introspection does not make us aware of qualia, but only of mind-independent objects and their properties. The relationist can straightforwardly hold on to the intuitions of the qualia theorist that there is an epistemic role for qualia, and they can do this without appealing to qualia. Relationist argue that it is because of the relation that obtains in having the experience that accounts of the epistemic role. In having such an experience, a subject is related to mind-independent objects and their properties. This relation and the objects the subject is related to determines the phenomenal character of the subject's experience. As such, the relationist differs in a significant way from the qualia theorist, because they can respect the intuitions driving the qualia theorist, in particular Jackson's theory of qualia as it relates to the knowledge argument. But they can do this in a way that posits no non-physical entities.

The relationist then, claims both (i) the qualia theorist is right to argue that there is a special epistemic role for the phenomenal character of experience, and that (ii) the representationalist is right to appeal to the thesis of transparency as an argument that there is no such thing as qualia. The result is that the relationist can respect the insights of both theories, while avoiding the problems they face.

## 4.6 Sensation and Cognition: A Final Diagnosis

What seems to be a central underlying issue between all these theories of perception—qualia theorist, representationalist, and relationist—is the differences and similarities between sensation and cognition. For instance, it has been noted that this is at issue between the representationalist and qualia theorist:

One concern to which such accounts [representationalism] give rise is whether they end up making sensory experience too thought-like, and in particular, whether they fail to accommodate the distinctive sensuous character of conscious sensory experience. The debate that is framed in terms of the question of the relation between an experience's representational properties and its phenomenal character can be seen as engaging with these concerns (Soteriou, 2013, 29).

By conceiving of experience as having a representational content, representationalists face the problem of not accounting for the distinctiveness of sensory states.

We already discussed this problem in Tye's account where he had to conceive of the nature of representational content of experience in very different terms than the representational content of thought. He did this by arguing that the representational content of experience is non-propositional and non-conceptual, whereas the content of thought is propositional and conceptual. Thus, one can see the complaint against representationalists as that of failing to respect the difference between the sensory and the cognitive when they attribute a representational content with veridicality conditions to sensory experience.

Representational content with veridicality conditions is a model that was originally aimed at explaining thought and language. By transferring this model to sensory consciousness we fail to do justice to the distinctively sensory nature of

phenomenal consciousness. In particular, if we rely on a model of sense experience which puts representational content at the centre, then we will fail to explain in any satisfying manner the phenomenal character of experience.

A similar worry, I argue, is present in Jackson's knowledge argument. That is, one way to understand what Jackson is highlighting with the case of Mary is that sensory experience is very different from thought. What can be grasped by sensory experience cannot necessarily be grasped by thought. In her black-and-white room, Mary is capable of performing many cognitive tasks with respect to colours. She can, for instance, think about colours, form judgements about colours, test theories about colours, and generally perform many other cognitive tasks with respect to colours.<sup>15</sup> In terms of what Mary can *know* about colours, it seems her capacities are more or less limited to *cognitive* capacities. Thus, one of the things the Mary puzzle highlights is that her psychological capabilities are limited such that they exclude sensory capabilities with respect to coloured objects.

The difficulty of the Mary puzzle is in articulating what exactly it is that Mary lacks before she sees colours. We must ask what is it that the *sensory experience* of red or redness makes available for Mary, and why? And why are these capabilities unavailable to her before she experiences red or redness? Thus, the knowledge argument is a puzzle as much about the similarities and differences between thought and experience, between the cognitive and the sensory, as much as it is a puzzle about physicalism and qualia.

We can see this complaint about the cognitive and the sensory as underpinning Tye's acquaintance hypothesis. We can see this in the way that he

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<sup>15</sup> This is not to imply that she can perform *only* cognitive tasks. For instance, she surely can be in emotional or desirous states with respect to colours.

articulates knowledge by acquaintance as a form of knowledge that is non-conceptual and non-propositional. This differs precisely from the essential structure usually attributed to thought contents, namely propositional and conceptual. Moreover, on Tye's account, this new type of knowledge can only be acquired by being experienced, and this experience gives acquaintance with the phenomenal character of the things experienced. Thus, I suggest we see Tye's theory as working from a similar underlying worry about the differences between the cognitive and the sensory, a worry familiar from qualia theorists' complaint about representationalism about phenomenal character.

With this in mind, we can reformulate our diagnosis of what is wrong with Tye's view. Tye's view is in tension with itself because, on the one hand, he strives to make sensory experience and knowledge by acquaintance distinctive from thought, but, on the other hand, he refuses to give up the notion that all experiences are at bottom representational. The result is an unstable position. The tension could be released in one of two ways. First, by making sense experience more thought like, (e.g. by giving up on either non-conceptual content or non-propositional content or both), but then he might lose his physicalist response to the knowledge argument. Second, by giving up on the claim that experiences have representational content. Given the motivations Tye cites for developing his Singular When Filled thesis, namely that the goal of perception is to put us into contact with the items in our environment, I respectfully suggest he should give up representationalism.

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